

Full Length Research Paper

The use of personalized texts for teaching Turkish as a second language

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This study attempted to identify the advantages of using personalized texts for teaching Turkish grammar rules to foreigners. The sample comprised two homogenous groups, one experimental and one control, who studied at TÖMER (Turkish Language Learning Research and Application Center) at Gazi University. The students in the experimental group were taught grammar classes using personalized texts based on information obtained from a student-completed personal information form (including their age; the names of their parents; their birthday and marital status; the names of their children, if any; and their occupation, country, and address). Similarly, the pre- and post-tests contained questions that were specifically designed for them. On the other hand, the students in the control group were taught grammar classes using the examples included in the grammar textbook. The results showed that those in the experimental group exhibited higher achievement in the grammar classes and were quicker to make progress in using the language.

Key words: Teaching Turkish as a second language, teaching grammar, personalization.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings express their feelings and ideas using the language they acquire first from their family and later from their society. In this ever-changing world, it is now an obligation to learn a second language. The choice of the language to be learned depends on the economic benefits of learning the language as well as its political influence and prevalence. For example, the reason for the great popularity of English is that it is used extensively around the world, shaping politics and economics. It is obvious that the employment prospects for fluent speakers of English are greater than they are for other languages.

With its developing economy, regional power, political stability, and universities, Turkey has been an attractive destination, especially to young people in Middle East, Balkan States, Central Asia, and even in Europe. This, in turn, has influenced teaching Turkish as a second language (TSL) (this sentence is deleted). Currently, there are more than 60 TÖMER (Turkish Language Learning Research and Application Center) in official and Foundation University who is currently teaching Turkish to foreigners in Turkey. This also emphasizes the importance of teaching Turkish to foreigners (Bakır, 2014). Although teaching Turkish to foreigners has been

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Table 1. Basic Turkish level a1 and a2 achievements and content.

| S/N | Achievement | Content |
|-----|--|--|
| A1 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding information related to a person's name, date of birth, nationality, profession, education level, etc. 2. Understanding basic concepts related to family 3. Understanding basic concepts and qualifiers related to social and physical environment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Country, nationality, city, place and date of birth, profession 2. Mother, father, siblings, spouses, children, numbers (year, month, age, telephone number, date of birth) 3. City, country, district, avenue, street, house number, parts of a house, big, small, crowded, high, low |
| A2 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding letters narrating and questions related to basic personal information, situations and feelings 2. Understanding basic texts narrating what is done in a school/work day or holiday 3. Understanding basic texts narrating leisure time activities and hobbies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Profession, surrounding environment, basic and simple physical and psychological descriptions (short, long, fat, skinny, happy, tired, boring, etc.) 2. Summer holiday, weekend, working hours 3. Basic models (I like doing..., I enjoy...); reading book, shopping, football, cinema, theater, internet |

Source: The common European framework of reference for languages (2009).

a centuries-old effort, the Turk Institutes, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, and the Turkish Language Learning Research and Application Centers have been modernizing the way Turkish is taught as a second language.

Programs for teaching Turkish to foreigners, classes and textbooks are generally designed according to basic language skills such as comprehension (reading-listening), writing and speaking. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2009) these skills are classified in 6 levels:

- A1 - A1 (Breakthrough): Beginning or exploratory level
- A2 (Waystage): Middle level or remaining in communication level
- B1 (Threshold): Threshold level
- B2 (Vantage): Advanced level or independent user level
- C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency): Autonomous level
- C2 (Mastery): Mastery level

Turkish grammar skills required for the targeted level for each of these are different. Due to the nature of the Turkish grammar rules are the structures added onto each other. If grammar is not taught accurately at A1 level, it is not possible for the student to move to C1 level. Turkish is different from other languages as it is an agglutinative language, it has various types of affixes and these affixes form new words by assuming different functions. It is necessary to take into account this peculiarity in efforts to teach Turkish to foreigners.

Grasping these structural properties of Turkish language is a must for those who intend to teach it to foreigners. Because of the agglutinative structure mentioned earlier, it is necessary to understand different functions of different affixes that are added to stems. Many new concepts are expressed by same stems that

are combined with different affixes which have different tasks. Writing, comprehension and speaking classes make students sense the functions that have been conferred to the stem by affixes. In grammar classes, agglutinative system of the Turkish language is taught as auxiliary to other subjects. Possessive, plural, case and simple time suffixes are taught at A1 and A2 levels. In this way, the purpose is to enable students to use Turkish language in daily life together with other classes. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2009) defines the achievements and the contents for A1 and A2 level Turkish in Table 1.

Personalized texts are used while providing students with templates of Basic Turkish at A1 and A2 levels: the background for achievements in reading, writing, listening and speaking is established with grammar knowledge. A student who has not yet learned possessive suffixes cannot correctly write or speak about his/her country, family, date and place of birth.

Teaching Turkish as a Second Language (TSL) curriculum, courses, and textbooks are primarily focused on basic language skills: comprehension (reading and listening), writing, and speaking. The core of these skills is grammar, since Turkish is an agglutinative language and has a mathematical structure. The importance of grammar in Turkish is further highlighted by the fact that suffixes have different functions in different sentences and contexts.

Teaching Turkish as a second language (TSL)

The TSL textbooks consist of sections for reading, writing and listening. However, there is a separate course for grammar. According to Öz (2001), grammar is made up of rules that are necessary for a proper and effective use of a language. In other words, grammar supports

Table 2. Turkish grammar order of topics.

| Level of education | Order of grammar topics |
|--------------------|---|
| A1 | 1. Phonetics (abc, vowels consonants, syllables, vowel and consonant harmonies, consonant softening) |
| | 2. Morphology (nouns, singularity and plurality of nouns, possessive affixes, copula, simple present tense, 'there is not...', sentences) |
| | 3. Verb conjugations (present tense, past tense) |
| A2 | 1. Conjugation of nouns (case suffixes and genitive suffixes genitive construction) |
| | 2. What time is it? |
| | 3. Pronouns |
| | 4. Verb conjugations (past tense, future tense, simple present tense) |
| | 5. Can/Could |
| B1 | 1. Moods (Obligation, imperative, operative moods) |
| | 2. Moods of copula (Past tense, if clauses) |
| | 3. Adjectives |
| | 4. Comparison of adjectives |
| | 5. Adverbs |
| B2 | 1. Gerundials |
| | 2. Direct – indirect expression |
| | 3. Combined Modes |
| | 4. Word construction |
| C1 | 1. Prepositions |
| | 2. Conjunctions |
| | 3. Exclamations |
| | 4. Shift of meaning and time in verbs |
| | 5. Meaning of words |
| | 6. Sentences and Elements of Sentence |
| | 7. Types of sentence |
| | 8. Defects in Expression |

Resource: Gazi Tömer (2015), Turkish grammar for foreigners (A1-A2- B) and Turkish grammar for foreigners (B2-C1).

comprehension and expression. Therefore, teaching grammar should involve activities to enable students to fully and properly understand what they are listening to or reading and to express their feelings and ideas in a verbal or written way.

Memorization of rules should not form the basis for language instruction. Instead, the primary focus should be on teaching rules using texts and examples. When students comprehend language rules from speech sounds to meaningful texts, they develop grammatical competence. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2009):

Grammatical competence can be described as the ability to know and use the grammatical materials of a language. The grammar of a language is generally viewed as the principles of constructing a regular and meaningful order

out of sentence components and phrases. Grammatical competence does not mean memorizing sentence patterns and then retrieving them, but is the ability to comprehend and express phrases and sentences that are regularly created. In this respect, the grammar of a language is rather complicated, and no study has ever been able to produce decisive results or to cover all the bases. Order of grammar topics is presented in Table 2.

In teaching TSL, grammar rules are not governed by the learning attainments but by the order in which they are taught. In grammar instruction, making rules functional is just as important as the order of topics. Özbay (1997) defined grammar as an instrument for proper thinking, speaking and writing. Grammar instruction allows students to unearth the possibilities, limitations, and secret power of a language. There is no point in knowing the definitions of the terms *adjective*, *preposition*, or *verb*

by heart. What matters is that students should internalize the ability to use Turkish properly, nicely and effectively.

They should comprehend and perceive ideas and feelings discussed in a text or speech and take pleasure in doing so. There are several problems in teaching grammar. Özbay (2006) identified these problems as following:

1. Today, most of the teachers give grammar lessons in a traditional way as taught to themselves previously or shown in the textbooks unaware of new theorems.
2. Grammar teaching is based on memorization.
3. Not learning the language well enough results in deficiencies in speaking and writing.
4. New approaches developed by linguistics (the science of language) are not reflected to language teaching or Turkish grammar textbooks.

Application of new and contemporary methods to grammar teaching in the light of developments in linguistics could be a remedy. It is necessary to take into accounts these three stages:

1. Making student sense the rule with examples of sentences and texts,
2. Giving information and definition to the student who has already sensed the rule.

It is essential to ensure that students turn this knowledge into skills. (Temizkan, 2010). Teaching grammar rules to foreigners is, needless to say, more difficult than teaching them to Turkish students. Different methods and techniques are needed during instruction as well as in other language teaching for foreigners. Using the information of students for giving examples about topics enables students to join the learning environment. Therefore, this research is an important source to guide the lecturers who teach Turkish to foreigners.

Using personalized texts

Personalized teaching is based on cognitivism as newly learned information is created again, re-organized and a new schema is created with the help of cognitive structure existing in the mind while, it is also based on structuralism as student can become an active part of the process, develop his/her own strategies to understand the information and contribute to the design of an learning environment suitable for himself/herself (Sampson et al., 2002).

Personalization means that students are in the center of the instructional material. Texts and examples are created in accordance with their background and interests. They learn at their own pace; classes are a means of motivation, not information. Significant instructional

components include student-teacher communication, emphasis on the written word, test administration, guidance and social interaction (Keefe, 2007).

The purpose of personalization is not only to enable students to progress at their own pace; the instructional content should make reference to their lives, too. This is, in effect, an attempt to make the instructional content approximate the real world. The key to this is personalized instructional content, in which students encounter information or problems from their own lives. If the instructional content and materials include people, events or information that represent students' lives (in the form of scenarios or simulations), their learning will be permanent (Çakır, 2008).

There are a number of approaches to personalized instructional content. Lopez and Sullivan (1992), Lopez (1989) and Herndon (1988) used both individual and group personalization. In the former, people, events, objects, or interests are picked up from a student's life and embedded in the instructional content. In group personalization, these elements are potentially common for a group of students. Personalized instructional content comprises not only elements from a student's personal life; students can also be allowed to choose their learning content from a set of contents, as was the case in a study by Ross et al. (1985).

Another example of personalized instructional content is the personalization of test questions, which will ideally make it easier for students to comprehend questions and state an opinion about them. Personalization can be used in every aspect of instruction and ensures the permanency of learned information, since the students themselves are involved in it. Language instruction, in particular, requires personalization. When students encounter examples or texts that are related to their lives, they will find it easier to perceive Turkish grammar rules and use them to speak and write.

The purpose of the study

Grammar instruction is significant because it lays the foundation for other language skills. Although grammar is a body of rules, one should not attempt to memorize them. For agglutinative languages such as Turkish, students must be able to perceive, not memorize, the suffixes and all the meanings they add to words and sentences. The most important material for teaching rules-second only to textbooks-consists of example sentences. The purpose of this study is to prove that examples based on students' lives and their physical and psychological characteristics will ensure the success of instruction and the permanency of learning.

As a secondary objective, this study attempted to find an answer to the following question: Is there a significant difference between students who learn Turkish as a

Table 3. Experimental design of the research.

| Group | Pre-test | Process | Post-test |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Experimental group | The Turkish test form (Pre-test) | teaching with a personalized learning environment | The Turkish test form (Post-test) |
| Control group | The Turkish test form (Pre-test) | The ongoing process | The Turkish test form (Post-test) |

Table 4. The distribution of the sample by country.

| Control group | | | Experimental group | | | |
|---------------|----------|----------|--------------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| Country | Language | <i>n</i> | Country | Language | <i>N</i> | - |
| Afghanistan | Afghan | 1 | Albania | Albanian | 1 | - |
| Algeria | Arabic | 1 | China | Chinese | 1 | - |
| China | Chinese | 1 | Palestine | Arabic | 1 | - |
| Ethiopia | Amharic | 1 | Georgia | Georgian | 1 | - |
| Palestine | Arabic | 3 | Iraq | Arabic | 2 | - |
| France | French | 1 | Kosovo | Albanian | 1 | - |
| Iraq | Arabic | 2 | Libya | Arabic | 4 | - |
| Kazakhstan | Kazakh | 1 | Sierra Leone | English | 1 | - |
| Syria | Arabic | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| <i>N</i> | - | 12 | - | - | 12 | $\Sigma = 24$ |

second language in a personalized instructional environment and those who learn it using ordinary instructional methods?

METHODOLOGY

Research model

The study used a pre- and post-test control group, a true experimental design employing a univariate model. Experimental design is used by researchers to explore relationships between variables (Büyüköztürk, 2001). In univariate models, there is one independent variable to test. For instance, only one independent variable (method A) is tested in the experimental and control groups (Karasar, 2005). Research pretest-posttest control group was designed according to the experimental design. Split-plot (2x2) is defined as pre-test and post-test control pattern group design, one repeated measures (pre and post-test), the subjects found in others of different categories (experimental and control groups) showing two factors is described as an experimental design (Table 3).

Sample

The study was carried out in the Turkish Language Learning Research and Application Center, Gazi University, during the spring of the 2014 to 2015 academic year. The sample was composed of 24 students for six weeks. Varying nationalities: 12 in the control group and 12 in the experimental group. The students were randomly selected from among students who studied TSL in different groups but at the same level. Table 4 presents the distribution of the students by country. Experimental research is likely to be patterned to a person of the number of subjects

(Büyüköztürk, 2001). Therefore, the design of the research group is limited to 24 students. In addition, the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 4.

The Turkish taken pre-test scores from the Test form, shows there is no significant difference between the averages. In line with these results between the groups has concluded that there is no significant differences in terms of personalized learning environment with the dependent variable of the study. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to the research carried out by the group in question (Table 4).

Data collection instruments

The student-completed personal information form

First, the literature was reviewed to determine what personal information would be included in the form. Then, a group of specialists were asked to give their opinion. In addition, 45 foreign students were asked what three pieces of personal information they would like to see in a text. In accordance with the theories in the literature and the opinions of the specialists and 45 students, a personal information form was created.

The form contained 19 items calling for personal information, such as name and surname, country, date and place of birth, names of parents, number of siblings marital status, number and gender of the children, level of education (graduate, postgraduate, doctorate etc), the university graduated, profession, height, weight, hair color, skin color, place of residence.

The Turkish test form (pre- and post-test)

Two forms, one for the pretest and the other for the post-test, were

Table 5. Descriptive data on the homogeneity of the scores of the students in the experimental and control groups on the pretest.

| Pretest | N | \bar{x} | SS | T | Sd | P |
|--------------|----|-----------|-------|--------|----|-------|
| Control | 12 | 70.8 | 7.50 | -1.423 | 11 | 0.182 |
| Experimental | 12 | 76.0 | 10.47 | | | |

P=0.01.

developed for the students. Since they would have moved from A1 to A2 by the time of the administration of the post-test, the pretest involved gap-filling, whereas the post-test consisted of both gap-filling and open-ended questions. The pretest and post-test were piloted and contained 25 and 40 questions, respectively. Furthermore, an answer key and rubric were developed for the tests and revised in accordance with the advice of the specialists. The maximum possible score was 100. Some of the questions based on personalized data are provided below:

1. The name of the country was given and asked to write the country's name suffixed.
2. The name of the student's sister/brother was given and asked to write it in a sentence with suffixes according to Turkish grammar rules.
3. The physical appearances were given and asked to write them in correct sentences.
4. The name of the place where he/she lives was given and asked to write it with case suffixes.

Administration

The students in the experimental group were taught using the examples generated on the basis of the information obtained from the Student-Completed Personal Information Form. For six weeks, normal education continued, forms containing personal information were further developed through research and practice and then personalized study forms were created. The pretest, which was administered six weeks later, was prepared in reference to the same information. Primarily, through evaluation and review of 5 stories, the type of information to be used in the stories was determined. Then, two area experts were consulted about the adequacy of personal information obtained and the personal information form was given its final shape. However, no personalized examples were used for the control group. Their pretest was based on unreal information. Four weeks later, the groups took their post-tests. The one for the experimental group consisted of personalized questions, whereas the one for the control group contained questions based on unreal information. As the grammar topics became more advanced and the students made progress in Turkish, more about the students' lives also became known. Therefore, their weekend activities, tastes, habits, future plans, countries, and families were treated as personalized data and inserted into the examples.

Data analysis

As the benefit of using personalized samples in language teaching was theoretically mentioned, a research was designed accordingly. The data were analyzed using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) 18. The analysis involved frequencies (f), arithmetic means (\bar{x}), and standard deviations (sd). In addition, a t -

test was performed for single-factor repeated measures and for the analysis of the differences between two paired samples. The level of significance was 0.01.

FINDINGS

The findings including the results of exams prepared with personalized data applied to experimental and test groups are as presented in Table 6. The students arriving to TOMER for learning Turkish take a general test and they are classified into subgroups in accordance with their level. Students in the classes under experimental and control groups, which the researcher teaches, were subjected to a grammar exam containing personalized questions developed by the researcher. No difference was found out between students belonging to experimental and control groups before any application was made [$t(24) = -1.423, p > 0.01$]. That is to say, it was concluded that attending students (both in control and experimental groups) were distributed homogeneously. The fact that both groups were homogeneous and they did not have any prior knowledge of Turkish contributed to the healthy progress of the experimentation. The test applied to students without any prior knowledge of Turkish was prepared in English and Arabic (Table 7).

Both the experimental group for which personalized teaching was applied and the control group for which no personalized information was given in none of the examples in class, took an exam in which no personal information was used. In control group average academic success level was 74.5 while it was 89.3 in experimental group for which the same grammar topics were taught. According to these results, there exists a statistically meaningful difference between experimental group, for which personalization was used in classroom and in the exams, and control group for which personalization is not used [$t(24) = -4.465, p < 0.01$]. Strictly speaking, it was found out that in control group where personalized teaching was not applied, students did not learn Turkish grammar rules sufficiently. Although these students learned the Turkish grammar topics to an extent, their success level were not as high as those of students in experimental group (Table 7).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Personalized education is a method by which students' special qualities, interests and necessities are taken into account and the education environment is designed accordingly. From this perspective, a good example is personalization of content, that is, personalization of instruction, exams and questions (Sezer, 2015). Personalized education is tempting because it is a sign of departure from the education system preparing students with standard knowledge and similar talents. It is obvious

Table 6. A comparison of the scores of the experimental group on the pretest and post-test.

| Pretest/Post-test | N | \bar{x} | SS | T | sd | p |
|------------------------|----|-----------|-------|---------|----|-------|
| Experimental pretest | 12 | 76.0 | 10.48 | -13.442 | 11 | 0.000 |
| Experimental post-test | 12 | 89.3 | 9.25 | | | |

P=0.01.

Table 7. A comparison of the scores of the students in the experimental and control groups on the Post-test.

| Post-test | N | \bar{x} | SS | T | Sd | p |
|--------------|----|-----------|-------|--------|----|-------|
| Control | 12 | 74.5 | 7.50 | -4.465 | 11 | 0.001 |
| Experimental | 12 | 89.3 | 10.47 | | | |

P=0.01.

that in this approach differences among students are respected and dealt with.

When the literature is reviewed, it is observed that most of the applications are developed as web-based. It is seen that in some of the applications, data bases and ontologies are used to store demographic information, contents to be used in teaching processes and information on adaptation methods. Information related to students entering the system are collected through a survey, and then this information is analyzed and directed towards content and subjects related to students.

A great deal of content and material appropriate to students' learning styles and individual characteristics has been developed in practice. Among these, graphic animations, videos, presentations, graphics, drawings and texts, can be cited as examples. In some of the applications developed, students can share their problems and questions, thus, peer learning takes place. Moreover, these applications do not have a hierarchical structure. It is witnessed that work related to personalized learning environments generally takes place in secondary and higher education. It is suggested that these applications should be used in earlier levels as well (Şahin and Kışla, 2013).

While a personalized education environment attracts students with use of students' own personal information, it provides students with a capacity to relate information to their own life; to make analysis and synthesis. Although majority of the existing work is related to mathematics and computer based education, results of this study suggest its positive contribution to language education as well.

According to study, meaningful difference between experimental and control groups in terms of their pre- and post-test success has been recorded. Thus, it can be

stated that personalized education could be successful in teaching Turkish to foreigners. Teachers should know their students very well and construct the teaching upon students' knowledge. For this purpose, a data base containing all information related to students, such as student's age, country, physical properties, his likes and dislikes etc., can be established.

The essence of language teaching is to make best use of students' efforts. Understanding the language rules, writing and speaking according to these rules depend on placement of these rules in their world of language. While teaching language to foreigners, especially grammar teachers should know that rules of a language can be taught as a result of students' own efforts under teacher's supervision. Teaching grammar with texts containing information related students' own lives can lead to success.

Preparing individualized texts or exams brings an additional work load to teachers. That's why, it may not be preferred by teachers. However, results of the study show that preparing individualized texts and exams in small classes leads to success in teaching of grammar.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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