Online processing of subject-verb agreement in Turkish

Previous studies showed that the native-speakers of various European languages incrementally facilitate the subject-verb agreement in online sentence processing (Nicol et al. 1997, Pearlmutter et al. 1999). In Asian languages, previous studies could not pay much attention to this issue because languages like, Japanese and Korean do not have rich subject-verb agreement system. Unlike these languages, Turkish has a very rich subject-verb agreement system, which enables us to examine how subject-verb agreement affects the sentence processing in Asian languages. In this study, to explore the nature of processing of subject-verb agreement in Asian languages, we conducted a self-paced reading experiment in Turkish. Thirty-five participants read the sentences like, (a) komutan geç kalktı diye askerler kızdı, (b) komutan geç kalktı diye askerlere kızdı, (c) komutan geç kalktılar diye askerlere kızdı. The results showed that the embedded-verb in (c) was read slower than in (a) and (b). On the other hand, the matrix-verb in (b) was read slower than in (a) and (c). This shows that Turkish native-speakers are very sensitive to the subject-verb agreement and this facilitates the processing of later parts of sentences. Overall, this study suggests that the speakers of Asian languages also use very effectively the subject-verb (dis)agreement information to build argument structure incrementally, as in European languages.

References: