

Notes on the Use of the Turkish Phoneme /r/ by French-Speaking Learners

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抄録

日本人学習者 8 名に対するトルコ語/r/音の使用に関する先行研究 川口 (2019)と比較すると、本研究で調査した 6 名のフランス人学習者の/r/音では、全ての学習者が語末で標準トルコ語の変種を発音した。他方、ほとんどの回答者において、母音間の位置では、時折、有声震え音(trill)の変種が観察され、半数の学習者はとくに頻繁に震え音を用いた。このほか 1 名の話者において、他の話者には見られない特異な実現形が観察された。

Summary

In comparison to a previous investigation of the use of the /r/ phoneme in Turkish by eight Japanese learners, see Kawaguchi (2019), the word-final /r/ sounds like standard Turkish when used by six French learners investigated in this study. Most of our respondents occasionally demonstrated a voiced trill variant in the intervocalic position, with half of them demonstrating it especially frequently. However, one speaker did display idiosyncratic pronunciations as well.

Keywords:

phoneme /r/, Turkish, French-speaking learners



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1. Previous studies

Studies on the production of Turkish sounds by non-Turkish speaking learners, conducted from the viewpoint of second-language acquisition are relatively few. In contrast, several studies have been conducted on the acquisition of English sounds by Turkish learners, especially on the interdental fricatives or diphthongs in English, see Bayraktaroğlu (2008), Bekleyen (2011), Geylanioglu and Dikilitaş (2012), etc. In Japan, quite a few articles have been written on Turkish phonology. Analyses have been conducted by Fukumori (2004) on vowel harmony, Kawaguchi (2009) on *r*-dropping, and Kawaguchi, Yılmaz, and Yılmaz (2006), and Sato (2013), on Turkish prosody.

As far as the realizations of Turkish phonemes are concerned, /r/ is well-known for its relatively large variation. Demircan (2001) observes two allophones of /r/ — the alveolar tap in both word-initial and word-medial positions, and the voiceless fricative in the word-final position¹. However, our view is closer to Selen’s (1979) and Özsoy’s (2004), who proposed three allophones².

First, the /r/ phoneme is realized as a single alveolar flap [ɾ], with the tip of the tongue thrown against the alveolar ridge. This allophone appears in both word-initial and intervocalic positions for *rahat* [rahat] (ease), and *kara* [kara] (black).

Second, the allophone of /r/ is realized as a retroflexed liquid or glide, in a pre-consonantal position. The words *art* (increase) and *dört* (4), sound like [aɾt] and [dœɾt], respectively. However, one would find an alveolar flap instead of a retroflex in *arkadaş* [arkadaʃ] (friend) and *kırk* [kırk] (forty).

Third, there is a voiceless alveolar trill or fricative, such as in *kar* [kaɾ] ³ (snow) and *var* [vaɾ] (have/there is), in the word-final position, when /r/ is not re-syllabified with the following word-initial vowel. Similar interpretations of these allophones of /r/, but by using different notations, are found in Yavuz and Balçı (2010: 25).

In addition, Zeyrek et al. (2008) remarked on the variations of /r/ in different regional varieties. Turkish-speaking students from the Trakya region pronounce a longer /r/, than those from the Konya region. If we suppose that a longer /r/ represents a trill, and not a flap, one can say that Trakyan Turks have a tendency to use trill /r/ not only in the word-final position, but also in the word-initial position.

Finally, we find the most recent review of different interpretations of the /r/ phoneme in Tıraş’s masters’ thesis (2021: 8-12). Her recapitulative table 4.1. eloquently testifies for the presence of phonetic variations of /r/, which are otherwise yet to be studied through a descriptive survey.

¹ “/r/ sesbiriminin iki genel üyesi vardır. (There are two general members of the /r/ sound),” Demircan (2001: 53).

² “/r/ sesbiriminin sözcük içindeki yerine göre üç sesbirimciği vardır. (There are three variants of the /r/ sound according to its position in a word),” Özsoy (2004: 30). See also Selen (1979: 93-94).

³ Here [ɾ] indicates both voiceless trill or a voiceless fricative like unvoiced ř of Czech.

2. IPCF and IPCT Projects

The ongoing project of *InterPhonology of Contemporary French* (IPCF) was launched in 2008. It started from a collaboration between the international project *Phonologie du français contemporain* (PFC), and the global center of excellence program *Corpus-based Linguistics and Language Education* (CbLLE). The IPCF was founded as a PFC sub-project by three phonologists: Sylvain Detey (Waseda University), Isabelle Racine (University of Geneva), and Yuji Kawaguchi (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)⁴. It aimed to create a large corpus of speech samples from diverse learners of the French language.

The initial interest in studying the interlanguage of L2 learners was to test different psycho-linguistic models of learning, and develop tools for facilitating L2 learning. This research mostly focused on the interactional dimension at the discourse, morphosyntactic, and lexical levels. A delay was often noted in the phonetic and phonological domains, see Gut (2009) and Isabelle et al. (2012). Consequently, most existing learner corpora of French have been constructed for morphosyntactic analyses; very few have been designed for phonetic and phonological surveys. The IPCF is concerned with a learning process that can be observed through phonetic and phonological descriptions of the interlanguage systems of L2 learners of French.

The *InterPhonology of Contemporary Turkish* (IPCT) was launched in 2016, as a project for applying the IPCF to the Turkish language⁵. The IPCT performs seven tasks, based on the IPCF protocols:

- 1) Repetition task. Each target word of the word-list 1 is repeated, after listening to its recorded pronunciation. This word-list 1 is composed of 70 words, designed to analyze the phonetic variation in Turkish.
- 2) Reading task of the word-list 2. This word-list 2 is constituted of 50 words that are supposed to represent Turkish sounds that are difficult for foreign learners.
- 3) Reading task of the word-list 1.
- 4) Text reading task. A target written text is read aloud.
- 5) Interview task. Several questions from Turkish natives are answered.
- 6) Free conversation task. Two learners have to engage in a conversation in Turkish, for 15-20 minutes.
- 7) Composition task. A brief composition has to be written in Turkish.

For the /r/ phoneme in the two word-lists, see Appendix.

⁴ For more detail, see Kawaguchi et al. (2012).

⁵ The project is supported by JSPS Kakenhi 16H03442 and 20H01279.

3. Pronunciation of /r/ by Japanese Learners

The concerned inquiry was carried out on July 10, 2018, with eight Japanese students at the Turkish department of a Japanese national university. The students were aged 21-23 years, and belonged to the third or fourth grade. The survey examined only three tasks: 1) repetition task, 2) reading task of word-list 1, and 3) reading task of word-list 2. The consultants comprised of two male and six female students. Group 1 comprised of five experienced learners (L1, L2, L6, L7, and L8) who had learned Turkish for four years, including a one-year stay in Turkey. Two advanced students from this group had already attained the CEFR C1 level.⁶ On the contrary, group 2 (L3, L4, and L5) comprised of elementary- or intermediate-level students, who had stayed in Turkey only for a short period.

Most manuals on Turkish phonetics and phonology explain the *r*-dropping phenomenon. Using a corpus of spoken Turkish, we investigated whether certain sociolinguistic factors such as sex, age, or birthplace were relevant to *r*-dropping, and found them to be statistically insignificant. Only speed was found to be statistically significant in the case of *bir*. This corpus-driven analysis demonstrated that *r*-dropping is not sensitive to sociolinguistic factors, but rather, is individually motivated⁷. Although *r*-dropping was limited to spoken Turkish, which is distant from the context of reading and repetition tasks, the word *bir* was excluded from our consideration.

As part of our survey on the pronunciation of /r/ by Japanese learners, we conducted a perception test with the help of three Turkish linguists. We asked them to evaluate the /r/ sound, and score the pronunciations on a three-point scale—[3] Good, [2] Not bad, and [1] Bad—without considering the other phonemes in the word. Thus, the evaluation was focused on the accuracy of /r/.

The result of our analysis reveals that the /r/ phoneme is not difficult to pronounce for Japanese learners, both in the pre-consonantal (VrC, VrC\$)⁸ and intervocalic positions (VrV), see Figure 1. Nevertheless, the word-final /r/ (Vr\$) is an exception, and represents a weak point, at least in the early stages of learning Turkish. Moreover, the Japanese learners' performances seemed to be unrelated to either their history of learning Turkish, or their long stay in Turkey.

⁶ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

⁷ For more detail, see Kawaguchi (2009).

⁸ V = vowel, C = consonant, \$ = word boundary

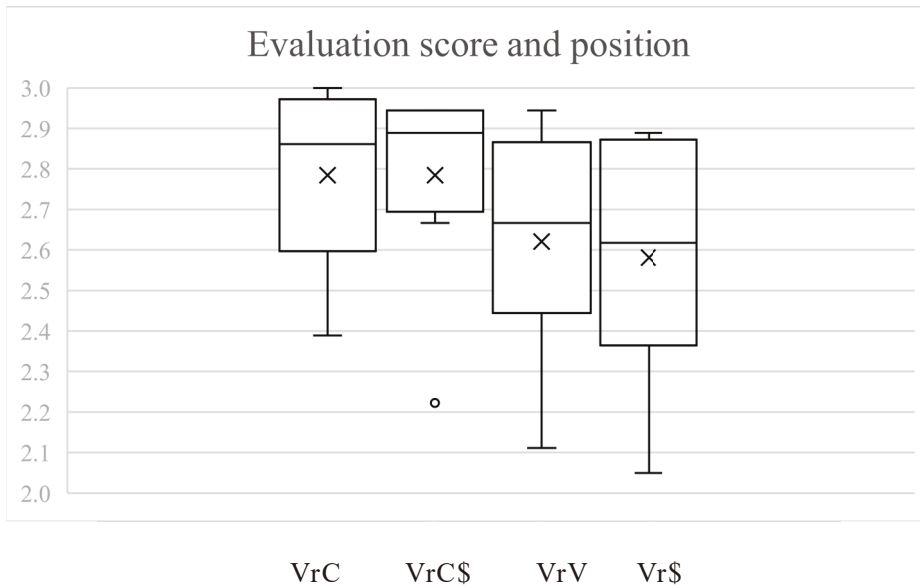


Figure 1

For the Japanese learners of Turkish, perceptive evaluation scores in the reading task of word-list 1 were generally higher than those in the repetition task of word-list 1, see Figure 2. Comparatively more deviant pronunciations were attested in the repetition task. This could be because the repetition task consisted of two separate processes of hearing and production, implying that its mechanism was more complex than that of the reading task.

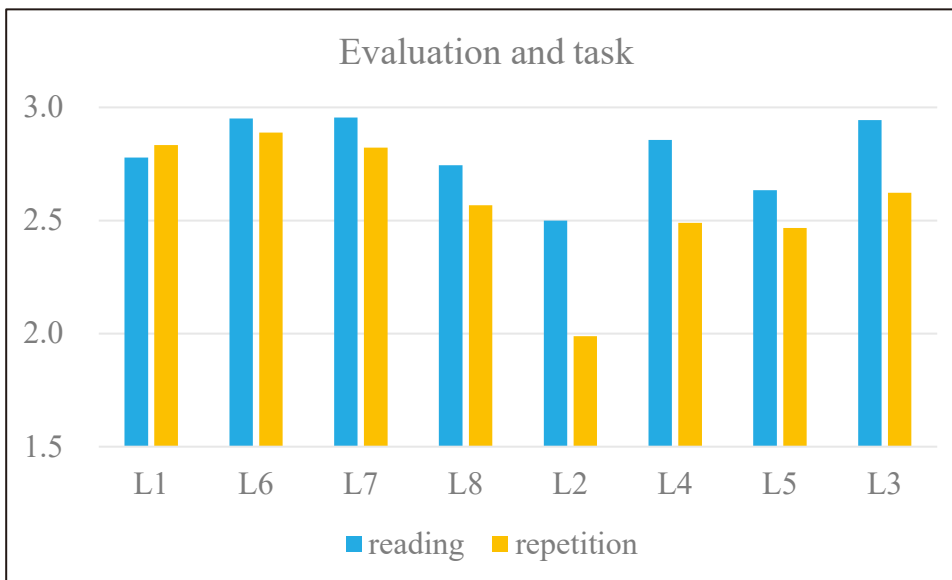


Figure 2

4. Pronunciation of /r/ by French-speaking Learners

Five months after the research on Japanese learners, we conducted the same survey with five French-speaking learners. The survey was conducted in Paris on November 23, 2018, at a French national university. I express my gratitude to my colleagues Michel and

Sibel-Berk Bozdemir for conducting this local survey. The profiles of five students are presented in Table 1.

4.1. Informants

Table 1 Profiles of French-speaking learners

		Age	Sex	Learning history (in months)	Proficiency level	Stay in Turkey (in months)
Group 1	L1	24	F	21		9
	L2	29	F	21	C1	3
Group 2	L3	26	M	48		12
	L4	28	M	36		12
	L5	24	M	36	B2	24

The subjects included two female students, and three male students. Group 1 comprised of two female intermediate-level learners (L1 and L2), who had learned Turkish for around two years. However, their durations of stay in Turkey were different, that is, nine months versus three months. It must also be noted that L2 had attained the CEFR C1 level, in spite of her short stay in Istanbul. Group 2 (L3, L4, and L5) comprised of experienced-level students who had learnt Turkish for around three years, and stayed in Turkey for a year or two. This brief introduction of our informants is intended to explain their acquisition of Turkish language at a relatively sophisticated level, implying that variations in their pronunciation of /r/ would be confined to a rather small range.

4.2. General Results

On one hand, the word-final /r/ (Vr\$) is pronounced like in standard Turkish⁹, that is, as a voiceless alveolar trill or fricative, *kar* [kaɾ] (snow) and *var* [vaɾ] (have/there is), see Figure 3. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the position of /r/, and the proportion of occurrences of voiced trill according to percentage. In the word-final position, a voiced alveolar trill is infrequent. The word-initial /r/ is occasionally realized as a voiced alveolar trill, especially in the male students L3, L4, and L5. Such a trill is not found in the female students. Given that the data we analyzed is quite small, it would be premature to suppose that there are gender differences between single flap [r] for females (L1 and L2), and voiced trill [r] for males (L3, L4, and L5), in the word-initial position (\$rVC), see Figure 3.

⁹ We are fully convinced that the term "standard Turkish" is problematic in the face of the absence of a large-scale field analysis of phonetic variations in Turkish.

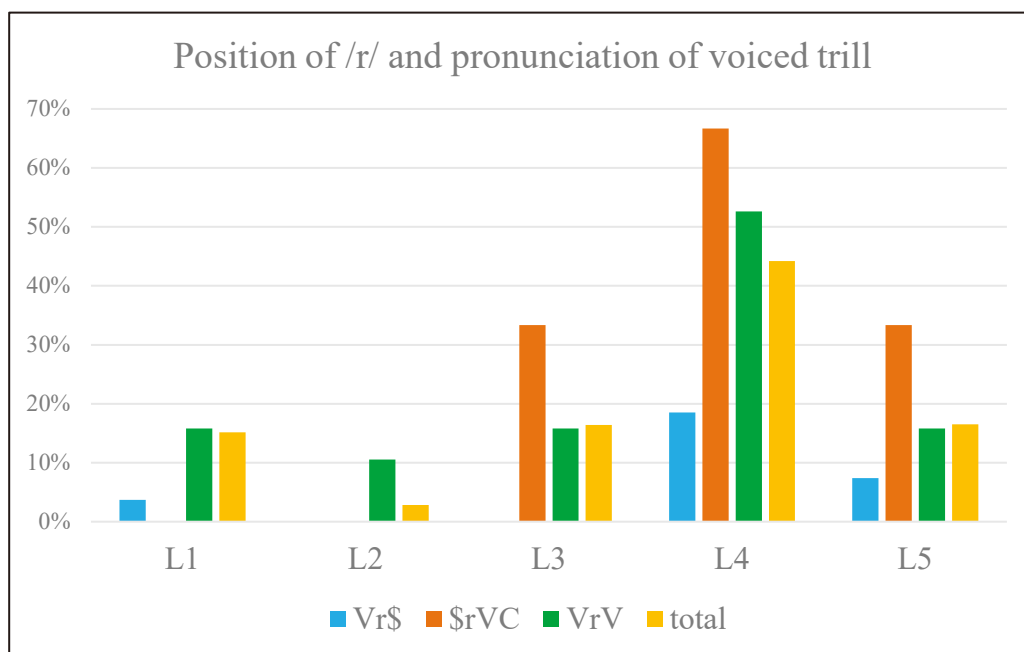


Figure 3¹⁰

The intervocalic-position (VrV) appears relevant to the emergence of voiced trill in all the informants. Does the absence of the flap [r] in French lead French-speaking students to utilize voiced trill in the intervocalic position? Moreover, it should be noted that L4’s pronunciation seemed idiosyncratic, and quite different from that of the other consultants. Table 2 presents the proportion of voiced trill occurrences. It is evident that L4 pronounces a voiced trill more frequently than the others.

Table 2

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5
Proportion of voiced trill	15.1%	2.8%	15.5%	42.4%	15.6%

Are different tasks relevant to the occurrences of voiced trills? Though the proportion of the realization of a voiced trill varies among our subjects, we can declare that for French-speaking students, the reading task triggers more voiced trill than the repetition task, see Figure 4. In addition, a relatively frequent realization of the voiced trill in the reading task of word-list 2 depends on the presence of numerous intervocalic /r/ in the list. The list was principally designed to investigate variations in pronunciation among learners, so we could confirm that the purpose of investigating variations in voiced trill among French-speaking students was achieved.

¹⁰ In the position Vr\$, /r/ is generally a voiceless trill or fricative, while /r/ in other positions is an alveolar flap or a voiced trill.

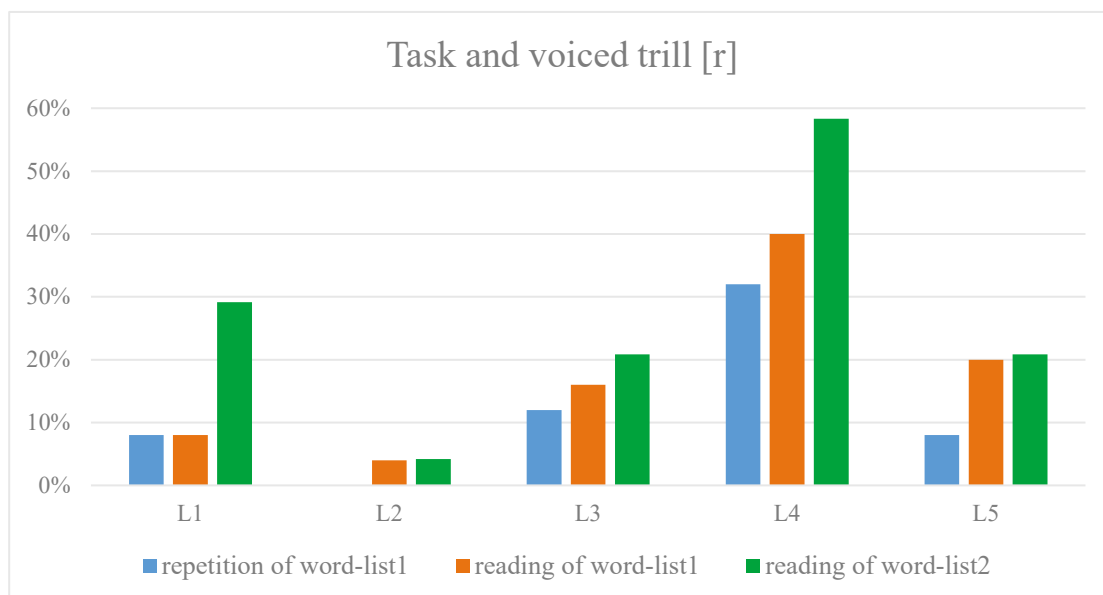


Figure 4

4.3. Other Features of French-speaking Learners

In the reading task of word-list 2, a rare prothetic vowel was observed for the word *riza* (agreement) [əɾiza] in L1 and [vɾiza] in L4. The other pronunciation traits can be regarded as idiosyncrasies, and some of them have nothing to do with the phoneme /r/, but it seems worthwhile to describe them.

In the current survey, the profile of L2 is very interesting from the viewpoint of language learning. Thanks to her own linguistic talent, she attained the CEFR C1 level at the end of two years, without having to stay long in Turkey. We could say that she was incubated in a pseudo-natural environment of learning Turkish, with poor access to natural situations for using Turkish. This could be the reason for her demonstrating characteristic Turkish pronunciations.

In the reading task of word-list 1, L2 systematically pronounced a long vowel instead of word-final /r/ in some words: [ka:] *kar* (snow), [na:] *nar* (grenade), and [va:] *var* (there is). The same phenomenon was also attested in L8 in our previous analysis of Japanese learners, see Kawaguchi (2019) p.254. Two prosogram diagrams indicate the contrasts in L1's and L2's pronunciations of the word *var* in the reading task of word-list 1, see Figure 5.

The left prosogram shows that L2 realizes *var* as two distinct vowel nuclei, like [vaa], and reads *var* in a rising tone. The black bold lines in Figure 5 denote a rising pitch in fundamental frequency (F0), calculated by semitone. On the contrary, L1 reads the same word with a flat F0 level, see Figure 5 on the right.

Prosogram analysis of *var* in reading task of word-list 1:
L2 on the left and L1 on the right

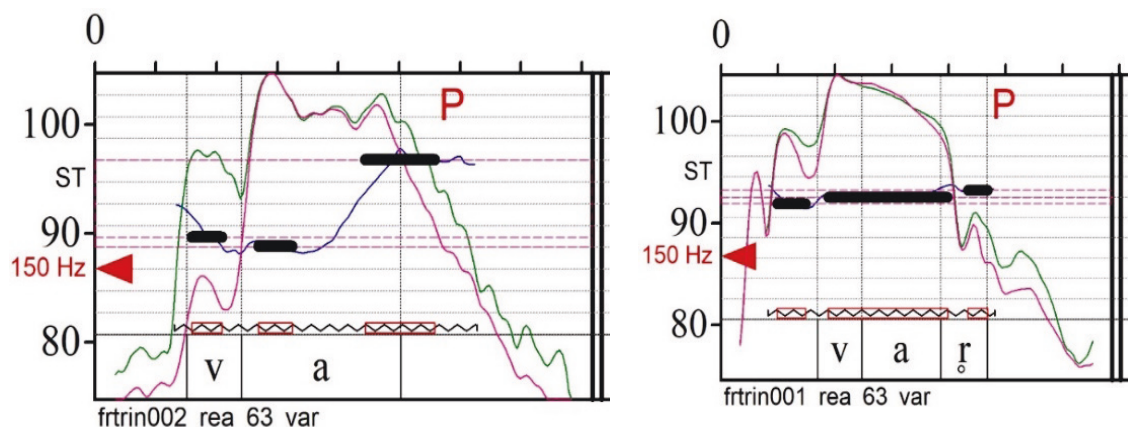


Figure 5

The Sonagrams of Praat may explain the different articulations of L2 and L1 more clearly. We cannot find a consonantal ending in L2's pronunciation. In Figure 6, the word-final consonant /r/ appears devoiced in L1's speech. However, according to Figure 5, it does not seem totally devoiced in L1's speech. The red dashed part, that is, the syllabic nucleus is attested at the bottom line below the mark P (pause). But be as this may, the two articulations of L1 and L2 are evidently different. The length of the vowel nucleus /a/ is almost twice as long in L2 (321.6 ms) on the left, than that in L1 (168.9 ms) on the right, see Figure 6.

Praat analysis of *var* in reading task of word-list 1:
L2 on the left and L1 on the right

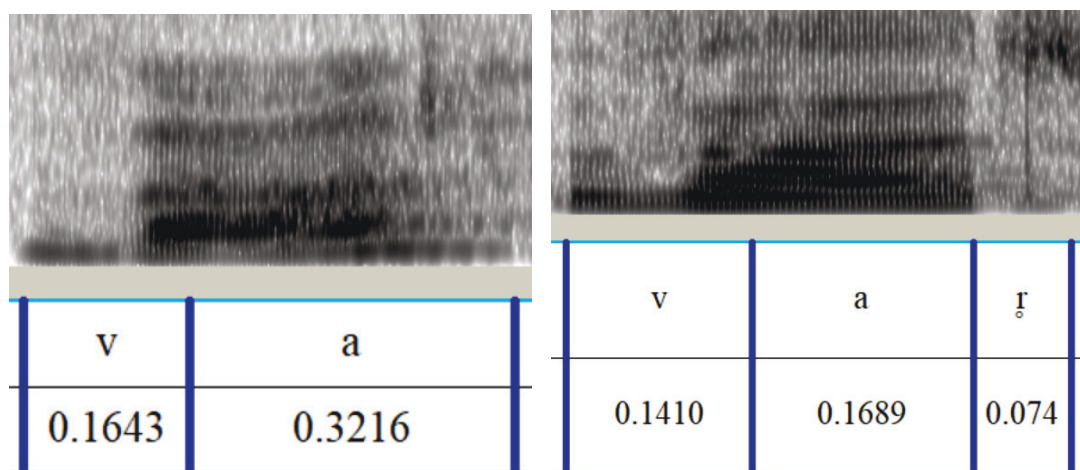


Figure 6

In L2's speech in the reading task of word-list 1, an arbitrary vowel lengthening is always observed in the first syllable of the word *kara* (black), see the black bold lines of /a/. Figure 7 presents how the /a/ in L2 is clearly longer than in L1.

Prosogram analysis of *kara* in reading task of word-list 1:
L2 on the left and L1 on the right

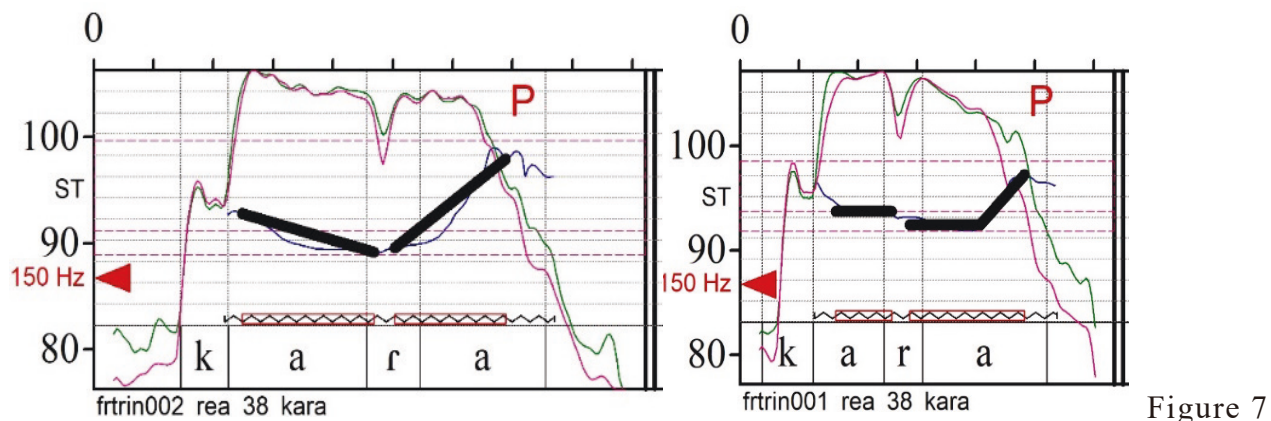


Figure 7

Finally, a distinguished accent pattern could be one of L2's salient phonetic traits. An accentuation on the first syllable systematically occurs in the following words : *arasında* (between) ['arasında], *arkadaş* (friend) ['arkadaş], *atlara* (to horses) ['atlara], *gözleriyle* (with eyes) ['gözleriyle], *severim* (I love) ['severim], and many other words without /r/, such as *'imtihan* (test), *'ondan* (then), and *'patlıcan* (eggplant).

Prosogram analysis of *arkadaş* in reading task of word-list 1:
L2 on the left and Standard Turkish on the right

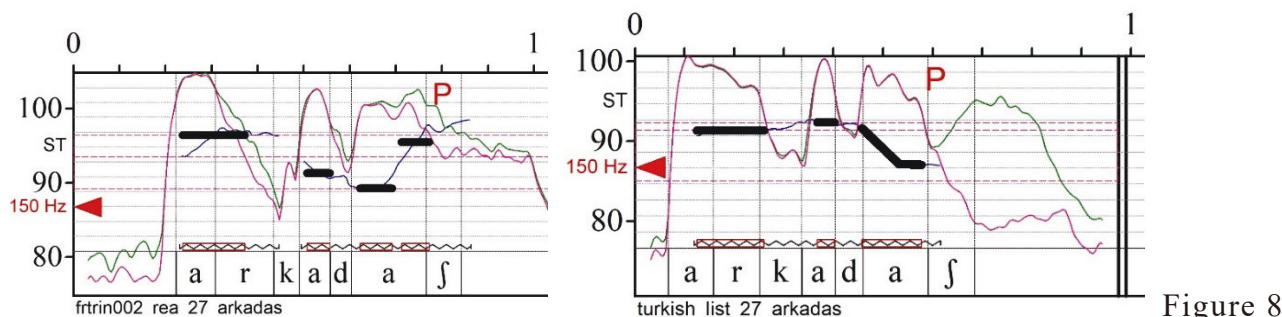


Figure 8

The high tone is assigned to the first syllable [a] in L2's speech on the left. Such a high tone is not observed in the Standard Turkish on the right, see the difference of semitone levels, 98 ST in L2 versus 90 ST in Standard Turkish.

5. Discussion

At the outset, in order to analyze the pronunciation of the /r/ phoneme among learners of Turkish, it is unfortunate that large-scale investigations are yet to be conducted on the phonetic variation among native speakers of Turkish. Our knowledge of the variation of /r/ is mainly derived from descriptions of phonologists and phoneticians. In the present situation, it is difficult to precisely determine the various latitudes of realization of the

/r/ phoneme among Turkish natives. We cannot declare whether a particular allophone is an aberration specific to a given learner, or lies in the zone of the /r/ phoneme's dispersion. In our previous survey, we conducted a small perceptual test with three native speakers to assess the pronunciation of /r/ by Japanese learners. The concordance rate in their results was relatively high, with Cronbach's value greater than .07. This explains that a certain zone of the /r/ phoneme's dispersion actually exists among Turkish speakers' level of perception. However, at the level of production, due to the absence of large-scale research on the /r/ phoneme in spoken Turkish, we are still left in a deep forest.

6. Conclusion

We conducted a survey on pronunciation, based on the IPCF protocols, with five French-speaking learners of Turkish. The survey was conducted in Paris in November 2018. Compared to the investigation of the /r/ phoneme in Turkish among eight Japanese learners, five French speakers of this study displayed a high level of Turkish acquisition, and no difficulties in pronouncing a voiceless trill at the end of words. The word-final /r/ sounded like standard Turkish among all French students, and a voiced trill was extremely infrequent in this position. However, the appearance of voiced trill distinguishes L3, L4, and L5 from the other informants. This voiced trill sound appears occasionally in the intervocalic position. The frequency of voiced trill is particularly high for L4. This manner of pronunciation seems to be particular to this consultant. For French-speaking students, the reading task of word-list 1 triggered more voiced trill than the repetition task of word-list 1.

L1 and L4 displayed certain individual features, such as, a prothetic vowel before /r/, for example, [əɾiza] or [vɾiza] for *rıza* (agreement), in their pronunciation. The /r/ phoneme can be absorbed into a preceding vowel, so that L2 realizes a long vowel [a:] in the following words : [ka:] *kar* (snow), [na:] *nar* (grenade), and [va:] in *var* (there is). In L2's pronunciation, we find an unpredictable vowel lengthening in [ka:ra] *kara* (black), and an initial accent in ['arasında] *arasında* (between), ['arkadaş] *arkadaş* (friend), and ['atlara] *atlara* (to horses).

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- Praat : doing phonetics by computer, <https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>
- Prosogram : <https://sites.google.com/site/prosogram/home?authuser=1>

Appendix**Phoneme /r/ in Repetition and Reading Task of Word-list 1**

5	art “increase”	41	görünmüyor “not to be seen”
10	kâr “profit”	46	ağır “heavy”
11	dar “narrow”	49	projektör “projector”
12	dört “4”	51	orada “there”
14	bir şey “something”	52	kırk “40”
19	beraber “together”	57	bir dakika “a minute”
27	arkadaş “friend”	58	tren “train”
29	o görüyor “(s)he sees”	63	var “have/there is”
34	rahat “easily”	67	tören “ceremony”
36	vapur “ferryboat”	68	kar “snow”
38	kara “black”		

Phoneme /r/ in Reading Task of Word-list 2

2	gözleriyle “with eyes”	25	kömür “coal”
4	görmeden “without seeing”	28	ödevler “homework”
5	soru “question”	33	rıza “agreement”
6	otlar “grass”	37	nar “pomegranate”
11	kırmızı “red”	39	atlara “to horses”
15	kuaför “hairstylist”	40	tırnak “nail”
16	sürat “speed”	41	ömrümde “in a lifetime”
17	arasında “between”	44	burnu “nose”
19	severim “I love”	45	verirler “they give”
21	karanlık “darkness”	46	tıraş “razor”
23	suare “soiree”	50	zor “difficult”