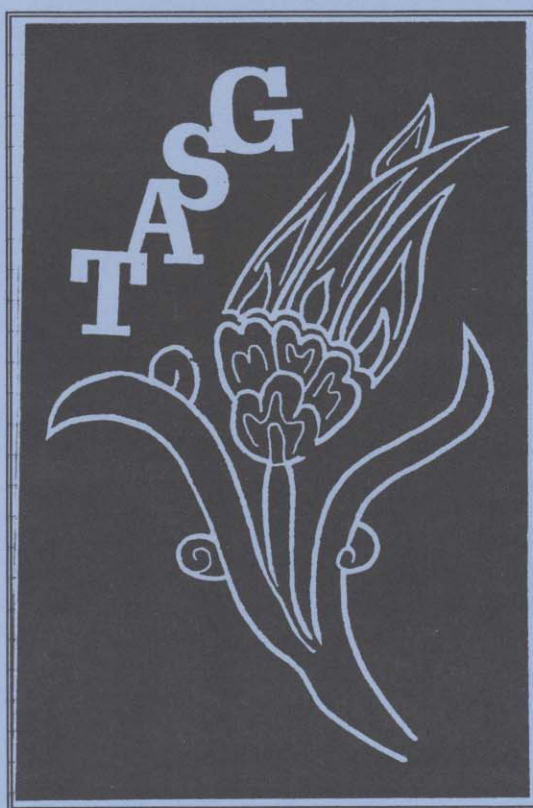


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TURKISH SPOKEN BY BILINGUAL CHILDREN IN FRANCE: MOTHER TONGUE OR WEAK LANGUAGE?

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Introduction

The first Turkish workers came to France in the 70's and their number continued to increase with family reunification at the beginning of the 80's and with marriage of the sons and daughters in the 90's. Today, the Turkish community in France is estimated at 300 000 and it is considered as the last immigrant workforce in France. Many communities in the world become bilingual when they leave their own country and settle in countries where another language is spoken. For the children born in the host countries, the majority language of the community in which the children live becomes the strong or dominant language, while the minority language spoken by the parents becomes the weaker language (Jisa, 1995 ; Lanza, 1992 ; Schlyter, 1993). The principal aim of this article is to present the Turkish language (mother tongue) spoken by the bilingual Turkish-French children aged 5 to 10 born of immigrant parents in France. The present study will be confined to oral language data and two linguistic domains will be taken into account: the temporal organisation of narratives and also the syntactic devices for interclausal connectivity, or "syntactic packaging" (Berman & Slobin, 1994). Our objective is to study the global organisation of narratives, especially focusing on the tense the children use to present events and the states and the ability to combine propositions to create coherent monologues. Bilingual children simultaneously acquiring two languages with diverging temporal systems, are faced with the task of keeping track of the right system in the right language. In this respect, the category of temporality is an interesting object of study, because it allows the researcher to investigate the order and the way in which learners tackle these acquisitional problems. The ability to weave sentences together across discourse through the use of explicit connecting devices is an important part of learning to create a coherent text (Jisa, 1987: 607). Adjacent clauses can be combined using a variety of syntactic means to encode a number of semantic relationships. A children's book, "*Frog where are you?*" (M. Mayer, 1969) was used to collect the data. The texts based on this story were recorded from 93 children in Turkish and French. Then we compared the results obtained with those of monolingual Turkish children. The questions which we will try to answer are:

1. How do bilingual immigrant children organise their narratives? Which tenses are used as the anchor-tense of the narrative? What forms of clause linkage do Turkish-French bilingual children use in Turkish?
2. Is the use of Turkish by the Turkish-French bilingual children comparable to that of monolingual Turkish children? How does Turkish develop in bilingual children's productions? Which are the important factors to be taken into consideration?

Subjects

All of the bilingual subjects were born in France to Turkish-speaking families. Their ages vary from 5;00 to 10;11. The youngest attend nursery school while the older children attend the last primary school year. The recordings were made during the school year 1993-1994. The Turkish

narratives used for the study presented here come from 6 age groups of bilingual Turkish-French children recounting the Frog story, following the procedures outlined in Berman and Slobin (1994). The bilingual children's Frog stories were collected in Turkish and subsequently, two weeks to one month later, in French. The Turkish-French speaking bilingual subjects are shown in Table [1].

Age group	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years
No. of subjects	N= 14	N= 14	N=16	N= 17	N = 17	N = 15
Mean age	5,4	6,4	7,6	8,4	9,6	10,6
Range	5;00-5;11	6;00-6;11	7;00-7;11	8;00-8;10	9;00-9;11	10;00-10;11

Table [1] : Age (years;months), number, mean age, range of the Turkish-French bilingual subjects.

To give a clearer picture of the socio-economic background of the Turkish-French bilingual subjects, the following information can be provided.

Up to the age of 7, the children acquire Turkish exclusively within the family. From the age of 7, some of these children have the possibility of attending the LCO classes (Heritage Language and Culture), up to the end of secondary school. Only 38% of the subjects attend these classes. The children also have the possibility of practising Turkish in religious instruction classes (58% of the subjects) or group activities (35%) organised by Turkish-speaking associations. French, which will become their dominant language, is acquired essentially at nursery school starting at the age of 2;6 or 3. Our research (Akıncı, 1999) shows that among 77% of the parents report that Turkish is the exclusive language at home. 68% of the children report that they speak French to one another. In terms of the social situation of their parents, 90.5% of the fathers are factory or unskilled labourers and 9.5% of them are free-lance masons. All of the mothers are housewives. As for schooling, 65% of the fathers quit their studies after primary school in Turkey, 27% completed secondary school. 8% of the fathers are illiterate. 62% of the mothers completed primary school in Turkey, 12% completed secondary school and 26% are illiterate. The monolingual subjects representing a low SES (socio-economic status) are presented in Table [2]. We borrowed this group of monolingual Turkish children from Turkey to Aarssen (1996)¹

Age group	5 years	7 years	9 years
No. of subjects	N= 20	N= 20	N=20
Mean age	5;6	6;9	8;11
Range	5;1-5;11	6;7-7;8	8;7-9;7

Table [2] : Age, number, mean age, range of the monolingual Turkish subjects (Aarssen, 1996).

In 1992, Aarssen collected this cross-sectional data in Turkey from three age groups (5-, 7- and 9-year-olds). To compete his study of Turkish-Dutch bilingual children Aarssen collected data from monolingual informants with comparable socio-economic backgrounds. He recruited monolingual informants in rural areas of Turkey that matched the place of origin of the parents of his bilingual informants. Two schools in Tarsus in the district of İçel were willing to cooperate.

Temporal anchoring of narratives

The developmental progression from a picture-description to a thematic organisation must be accomplished in different ways. One way of organizing a narrative is to maintain an anchor tense (one favoured tense) throughout the text. According to Aksu-Koç (1994: 333) "one of the criteria for well-formedness of a narrative is the choice of a consistently favoured tense". In the present context

this was defined as the tense of at least 75% of the clauses in a given text. The number of narratives in which there is not one consistently favoured tense (hence called “mixed tenses”) is expected to decrease as children grow older. Aksu-Koç (1994) found that most children and adults used the progressive present for representing the frog story in Turkish. The two past tense forms, *-di* past and *-miş* past can also be a dominant or anchor form. Besides having the function of evidential past, the second is used as narrative modality. In view of the tendency of young children to relate events to the here and now, and the assumption that they might treat the pictured events as concurrent with their telling, Berman & Slobin (1994: 17) had predicted that the younger children would prefer to anchor their narratives in the present, whereas older children would observe the narrative convention of using past tense throughout. But in fact, half of the younger children across the languages (English, Turkish, Spanish, Hebrew, German) manifest “mixed” tense usage. The following tables show the anchoring tenses in Turkish narratives of bilingual informants in France and also of monolingual informants in Turkey (Aarssen, 1996), per age group.

Age group	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years
PROGRESSIVE	28,5	28,5	44	47	53	47
<i>-di</i> PAST					12	20
<i>-miş</i> PAST					6	
MIXED	71,5	71,5	56	53	29	33

Table [3] : Percentage of anchoring tenses in Turkish narratives of bilingual subjects, per age group.

This table shows that the bilingual children start off their Turkish narratives with mixed tenses. The majority of the 5 to 8 years old informants makes use of mixed (present and past) tense in their Turkish narratives, but in the same time the use of the progressive tense as anchor tense increasing. There are no instances at all of narratives with past tense as the anchor tense for the age groups 5 to 8. However the 9 and 10 years old bilingual children begin to use more past tenses as dominant tense.

Age group	5 years	7 years	9 years
PROGRESSIVE	30	35	70
<i>-di</i> PAST	10	5	
<i>-miş</i> PAST	15	20	
MIXED	45	40	30

Table [4] Percentage of anchoring tenses in Turkish narratives of the monolingual Turkish subjects (Aarssen, 1996).

Concerning the monolinguals of high SES in Istanbul, Aksu-Koç (1994) has demonstrated that between 2 to 3 years of age, Turkish children learn to use all three tenses quite flexibly and without any error of form. Subsequently, they begin to oppose the two past-tense forms to distinguish the two evidential modes. At the age of 3, all three forms can be observed in the children's narrations but they are not used with clear discourse organizational functions. This stems from the children's inability to maintain an anchor tense across narrative discourse. By age 5, more than half of the children can adhere to a dominant tense and make discourse-appropriate use of tense/aspects shifts. By the age of 9 and beyond, all speakers manipulate tense/aspect in accordance with the demands of a thematically organized and cohesive narrative. As Table [4] shows, the study of the anchoring tense of the monolingual Turkish children does not follow the same developmental

trajectory as that observed by Aksu-Koç (1994). On the one hand, there is no development between 5 and 7 years old, and on the other, the mixed system persists until the age of 7. The performance of both age groups is approximately the same: the mixed system dominating the use of progressive present. Note that some subjects used the past tense as the dominant tense at the age of 5 and 7. Even if the two pasts are used, the majority prefer *-miş* past (15% and 20% of the two age groups respectively). For the 9 year-olds, the progressive present becomes the anchoring tense for the majority and at the same time the mixed system decreases sharply, but the two pasts are absent as favoured tense in their narrations. How can we explain the absence of the past tenses as anchor tense by the older group? It could be argued that a preference for the progressive present is a function of the task, which involves looking at the pictures while telling the story. Erguvanlı-Taylan (1987) has studied this question. Adults were asked to retell a segment of a Turkish movie immediately after viewing it. In this task, 70% of the informants used the progressive present as the anchor tense, 10% used the habitual present and only 20% *-di* past tense. Note that in the task of the frog story, the narrators see the pictures during the narration but in film retelling they do not. The lack of a clear and consistent "anchor tense" shows that the Turkish-French bilingual children have not yet established an unified narrative thread in which grammatical tense serves to establish text cohesion and coherence, providing a temporal anchoring which is consistently distinct from time of speech.

Clause linkage in the narrative texts

In an attempt to draw the developmental profile of clause linkage in the acquisition of Turkish by these children, two different types of interclausal connectivity: co-subordination and subordination (Foley & Van Valin, 1984 ; Erguvanlı-Taylan, 1988 ; Van Valin, 1993 ; Watters, 1993) and the semantic relations which these structures encode were examined. Each clause was coded for one of four types of connectivity: juxtaposition, co-ordination, co-subordination and subordination, following the criteria given in Foley & Van Valin (1984), and applied to Turkish by Erguvanlı-Taylan (1988) and Watters (1993). Juxtaposed clauses were defined as two successive clauses conjoined without a mark of nexus. Co-ordinated clauses are conjoined using a co-ordinate conjunction or another connectors. Co-subordinate clauses are related through a relation of dependence, and the dependant clause is not embedded. In Turkish these dependent clauses take a non-finite verb form (*V+ince* "as soon as", *V+(er)ken* "while, when", *V+ip* "afterwards", *V+erek* "while V+ing" etc.). Subordinated clauses are related through a relation of dependence and the subordinate clause is embedded. The Turkish forms included in this category are the infinitive *V-mEk (için)* "in order to", the nominaliser *V-mE+(case)*, *V-diği zaman* "at the time of this V-ing" etc. What is important about the two categories of co-subordination and subordination is that they are late acquisitions for monolingual Turkish children (Aksu-Koç, 1994). The mean proportion of clauses combined using these four type of clause linking were calculated for each age group for the Turkish-French bilingual children and monolingual Turkish children. The results are shown in the following tables.

Age group	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years
Juxtaposition	40,5	46,5	44,5	49,5	35,5	30,5
Coordination	52	47	44,5	35	34	49
Co-subordination	1,5	0,5	2	2	2	3
Subordination	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	2

Table [5] Mean proportions of different interclausal nexus relationships encoded by the bilingual Turkish-speaking children.

Age group	5 years	7 years	9 years
Juxtaposition	36	46	29
Coordination	38	30	40
Co-subordination	3,5	3	6
Subordination	2,5	3	4,5

Table [6] Mean proportions of different interclausal nexus relationships encoded by the monolingual Turkish-speaking children.

We will restrict our attention here to co-subordination and subordination. The bilingual children show a much lower proportion of co-subordination than the low SES groups. The difference is significant at all ages.² The bilingual children show some development between 5- and 7 years of age. Then their development appears to stop. This same pattern is even clearer for subordination: the bilingual children show a much lower proportion of subordination than the monolingual children. But only the difference for the children of 9 years of age is significant.³ There appears to be no development in the bilingual subjects from the age of 5 to 9. In order to obtain a more qualitative look at the uses of co-subordination and subordination in the texts of the two Turkish speaking groups, we have selected one particular episode, the deer episode, in which the boy climbs up on a rock and steadies himself by holding onto two pieces of wood. The pieces of wood are in fact a deer's antlers. The boy falls on the deer, the deer runs and the boy falls into a pond. We isolated the cases in which the monolingual children used co-subordination and subordination in this episode and compared them to the equivalent content in the bilingual children's texts. The results of this comparison show that where the monolingual children use co-subordination and subordination, the bilingual children use juxtaposition or co-ordination to establish the same semantic relation between clauses.

Conclusion

Based upon study of anchor tense and clause linkage, it is possible to conclude that the Turkish-French bilingual subjects lag behind monolingual Turkish children in terms of their development. More importantly, the Turkish-French bilingual children are insufficiently exposed to this type of Turkish narrative discourse. They are not exposed to reading and literacy-related activities in their families. 47.5% of the Turkish parents report that they never read or tell stories to their children. 47.5% of them report that they do so only occasionally. And finally only 5% report reading to their children often. It seems that social class attitudes toward literacy-based activities play a very important role for the bilingual subjects in the acquisition of Turkish in France. In this respect I argue that their low level of proficiency in Turkish depends on social class and attitudes toward literacy-based activities, and not on bilingualism. In a similar analysis, I also compared the bilingual Turkish-French children to a group of French monolinguals. While there were very significant differences between the two groups at 5 years, their performance on the measures

examined were equivalent to French monolinguals at 7 and 10 years of age (Akıncı, 1999). There is no doubt that the role of French nursery school and primary school is important in preparing the bilingual children to use French in these situations. While for some children the two languages develop independently and simultaneously, leading to almost balanced bilingualism (Jisa, 1999), there are indications that the status of strong and weak language changes for the Turkish-French bilinguals with their development. While the children show Turkish as a dominant language in early childhood (until age 7), their mother tongue stagnates or fossilises, compared to monolingual children. In this one particular task, the native language of the bilingual children is weak in comparison to monolinguals. Obviously, further study of other uses of Turkish is necessary before any overall generalisation concerning the weakness and the strengths of the Turkish-French bilingual children's language can be drawn. As Grosjean (1982) underlined, we must not consider a bilingual as the sum of two monolinguals but as an individual with communicative competence that is equal but different in two languages.

Notes

1 I wish to thank Jeroen Aarssen for allowing me to use his data.

2 For the 5-year-olds: $F(1,32) = 4.81, p < .03$ / 7 years: $F(1,32) = 8.81, p < .005$ / 9 years: $F(1,35) = 15.70, p < .0003$

3 For the 5-year-olds: $F(1,32) = 0.28, NS$ / 9 yrs: $F(1,35) = 5.66, p < .02$

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