



## Acquisition of Turkish of Russian-Turkish bilingual children in early childhood

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### Abstract

In this empirical study focuses on acquisition of Turkish of Russian-Turkish bilingual children in early childhood. The population of the study includes bilingual children at the age of 5–6 living in Antalya/Turkey. The sampling of the study consisted of 40 Russian-Turkish bilingual children in total (20 children are for control group and 20 children are for experiment group). During the collection of data have been used Descoeudres Dictionary Test (DDT) and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). Both of the groups were applied pre test and post test. Language-Focused Curriculum (LFC) was applied to experiment group for 16 weeks. Two factor ANOVA and t test were used in the analyses of data. As a conclusion, it was understood that LFC is effective at developing Turkish receptive and expressive language of bilingual children.

**Key Words:** Bilingual and Multi Cultural Children, Bilingual Environment, Language Focused Programme, Bilingualism.

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## Erken çocukluk dönemindeki Rusça-Türkçe iki dilli çocukların Türkçe edinimi

### Özet

Deneyisel desende hazırlanan bu çalışma erken çocukluk dönemindeki iki dilli çocukların Türkçeyi edinimlerini incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini Türkiye/Antalya’da yaşayan 5-6 yaş arası iki dilli çocuklar oluşturmuştur. Örneklemi ise random örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenen 20 deney, 20 kontrol grubu olmak üzere toplam 40 Rusça-Türkçe iki dilli çocuk dahil edilmiştir. Verilerin toplanmasında *Descodres* Lügatçe Testi (DLT) ve Peabody Resim Kelime Testi (PRKT) kullanılmıştır. Deney grubundaki çocuklara, 16 hafta Dil Merkezli Okul Öncesi Eğitim Programı uygulanmış. Uygulama öncesinde ve sonrasında her iki gruba da ön ve son testler yapılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde iki faktörlü ANOVA ve ilişkisiz- t testi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda deney grubundaki iki dilli çocukların Türkçe alıcı dil, ifade edici dil ve ortalama sözcük uzunluğu düzeylerinin kontrol grubundaki çocuklardan daha yüksek olduğu saptanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İki Dilli ve Çok Kültürlü Çocuklar, Dil Merkezli Program, İki Dillilik.

## Introduction

When the researches about acquisition of more than one language are examined, we see that bilingualism or multilingualism has occupied the attention of linguists, psychologists, sociologists, pedagogist, anthropologists, and each group approaching the phenomenon from its own point of view and in the interests of its own discipline. For example, it is handled from mental perspective in psychology, cultural and social perspectives in sociology, educational perspective in pedagogy and from perspective of the examination of linguistic structures in linguistics. According to sociolinguists, bilingualism or multilingualism is described as usage of two or more languages by the same person alternately (Watson, 1995).

According to some linguists, if the child or adult can use both of the languages in terms of reading, writing, listening and speaking as if it were his mother tongue, it is enough for bilingualism. On the other hand, some linguists argue that having an average skill for both languages is enough for bilingualism (Watson, 1995). The views about the development of bilingualism in early childhood are explained as acquisition of simultaneous bilingualism and sequential bilingualism. It is simultaneous acquisition of languages if the child is exposed to two languages from birth. In this case, bilingual children acquire two languages as if they were monolinguals (Bilingual first language acquisition) (Meisel, 2007:34). According to De Houwer (1999), Genesee and Nicoladis (2006), the most important feature that separates simultaneous acquisition of two languages from sequential acquisition is that children are exposed to two languages simultaneously from birth to the age of four according to one parent-one language rule. In the simultaneous acquisition of two languages, Unitary Language System Hypothesis is taken as a basis. According to this hypothesis, children exposed to two languages simultaneously use their languages as if they were a single system, in terms of phonology, lexicon, syntax, and pragmatics until the age of three. After the age of three, children start to use languages in their own systems by separating both language systems (Garau et al., 2000:174; Macrory, 2006: 164; Nicoladis, 1998:105; Petitto et al., 2001:455; Schelleter; 2002: 93).

It is called as sequential language acquisition, second language acquisition or children's adding a second language to their first language after the age of three. According to researchers, sequential language acquisition process occurs under natural conditions or

through education. (Clark, 2000:182; Harding & Riley, 1986; Kessler, 1984; McLaughlin et al., 1995; Pham, 1994; Watson, 1995). The researches going back to 25 years highlight that at bilingual children's acquisition of both languages from birth, neurological maturation taking Language Making Capacity hypothesis as a basis is effective and it is seen that researchers focus on what ages are critical for second language acquisition by taking Critical Period hypothesis as a basis. According to critical period hypothesis taken as a basis at sequential language acquisition, for joining linguistic structures, there are different critical periods at the acquisition of each of the linguistic structures. At conducted researches related with second language acquisition, it captures attention that different age intervals are recommended for critical period. Though 3-8 age interval is recommended as critical period for second language acquisition at the researches that examine language-brain relation, linguistic researches object to this by emphasizing that early diminishing at linguistics and syntax start between 3-4 years old (Meisel, 2007:35; Watson, 1995). According to Meisel (2007), the critical period at children's second language acquisition is between 3-7 years old. According to Meisel, uncertain age rates for critical period: at simultaneous language acquisition 0-3 ages, at second language acquisition 4-8 ages.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The population of the study includes Russian-Turkish bilingual children at the age of 5-6 living in Turkey. All of the children were born in Turkey but their mothers came from Russian. Children and their mothers are living in Antalya. Their mothers are Russian and they speak only Russian with their children and the other people. Their fathers are Turkish and they speak Russian and Turkish but they speak only Turkish with their children. All of the children have learnt Turkish language at preschool education for two years. But their mother tongue is supported only at their homes. The sampling of the study consisted of 40 Russian-Turkish bilingual children in total (20 children are for control group and 20 children are for experiment group). Firstly, both of the groups were applied pre test by the researchers. Language-Focused Curriculum (LFC) was applied to only experiment group for 16 weeks. When the LFC was applying, there are Russian-Turkish bilingual children and Turkish monolingual (native speaker) children in the classroom. But LFC was not applied to

control group. After the LFC finished, both of the groups were applied post test by the researchers.

### **Instruments**

**Descoeudres Dictionary Test (DDT)**, measures the expressive language of the children. This test was used because it had all kinds of Turkish vocabulary from adjectives to infinitives. The original form of Descoeudres Dictionary Test is in French language. The test developed by Descoeudres was translated into Turkish language by Refa Ugurel-Semin. DDT was used by Davaslıgil (1980) his/her research “The impact of school on language development of 1st grade students coming from various socio-economic and cultural environments” and by Aydoğmuş (1982) in his/her research “Diagnosis and treatment results in a group of children with dyslexia” (Öner, 1996:196). Test was recently used by Yayla (2003) in his/her research “The analyzing impact of language education program, implemented to 60-72 month-old children, on language development of children, by Şimşek Bekir (2004) in his/her research “Analyzing impact of language education program, implemented to 5-6 year-old children, on language development level” and Yazıcı (2007) in his/her research “Analyzing impact of language-centered pre-school education program on Turkish language acquisition of bilingual children whose mother and secondary languages are Turkish”.

**Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)** is measure of receptive vocabulary knowledge for standard Turkish and a screening test of verbal ability. The sequence of words progresses from easy to more complex. Validity study has been performed comparing grades of 21 girls and 21 boys with t test. However, no meaningful gender difference has been discovered in line with expectations. Besides t-test of children livings in city and village have been compared and meaningful differences have been determined in favor of city children at .01 level. Reliability test has been performed applying A and B forms of the test to 4012 children between 2:6 and 18:0 year-old. Reliability coefficient calculated based on acquired raw grades varies between 0.64 and 0.84 (Öner, 1997:104).

In order to test impact of LFC on children’s language acquisition in analysis of research data, two-way ANOVA for Repeated Measures have been utilized.  $\eta^2$  (Eta Squared) has been used to explain variance rates of independent variables.  $\eta^2$  that explains

influence quantity clarifies variance amount of independent variable on dependant variable (Büyüköztürk, 2001).

Language Focused Curriculum for the Preschool (LFC) is based on a concentrated normative model. According to normative model, children's developmental features at language acquisition are taken as a basis. Because, cognitive processes are important at language acquisition in early childhood. These processes are important at children's interactions with each others and adults. Because, interaction is the milestone of language acquisition.

LFC provides children interesting activities to talk about and pre-academic activities to stretch cognitive skills in target language. The operational guidelines of the LFC are listed as;

- Provide opportunities for language use and interaction.
- Include familiar classroom routines to support language learning.
- Use dramatic play activities to building world knowledge and accompanying

language and provide ongoing information to parents regarding daily activities and intervention needs. In additional to providing a general environment for language learning, this programme is used with some specific techniques by the teachers. These techniques: Focused contrasts, modelling of target sounds, words and sentences forms even casting (i.e., ongoing, descriptions), expansions, open questions and recasts. Objectives and acquisitions aimed to support language skills, utilizing Pre-School Education Program (2006) of The Ministry of National Education for 36-72 Month-old children, have been determined in constituting the LFC. However semantics, syntax, morphology, linguistic performance and phonetics from linguistic field have been added. Activities of the program have been planned taking objectives and acquisitions, that need to be gained, and general structure of language centered education program and education environment into account. In line with this basis, LFC has been constituted by music, drama, game, art works, experimental/study visits, preparation to reading-writing and language activities (dialogues, story, story making, story completion, finger plays, rhyme, poetry and riddle). Integrated approach has been taken as a basis to prepare all activities. Program has been applied in 16 weeks, 2 half days per week.

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## Result and Discussion

**Table 1** Means and Standard Deviation of Russian-Turkish Bilingual Children's Receptive Language Pre and Post Test Average

Groups	N	Pre-test		Post-Test	
		$\bar{X}$	S	$\bar{X}$	S
Experiment Group	20	36.60	11.30	69.60	10.47
Control Group	20	37.90	5.79	38.60	4.34

**Table 2** ANOVA Results of Pre Test and Post Test Average Points of Russian-Turkish Bilingual Children's Receptive Language Levels

Source of Variance	Sum Of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)	Eta Squared ( $\eta^2$ )
Between Groups	165074.450	1				.972
Groups (E/C)	4712.450	1	4712.450	37.14	.000	.494
Error	4821.100	38	126.871			
Within Groups						
Factor (Pre-Post)	6020.450	1	2072.237	331.99	.000*	.907
Factor*Groups (Pre-Post)	<b>4898.450</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1555.200</b>	<b>270.12</b>	<b>.000*</b>	<b>.897</b>
Error	689.100	38	31.472			
Total	10.919.589	40				

\*  $p < .05$

When Table 1 is examined and when experiment and control groups' pre and post test average points of receptive language are compared, it is seen that receptive language average points of children at experiment group are higher than receptive language average points of children at control group. It is seen that receptive language average points of experiment and control groups of bilingual children whose second language is Turkish at pre test are about 36-37 and these points are close to each other at pre test.

When Table 2 is examined, at two-way ANOVA results applied to determine whether the difference between PPVT average points of experiment and control groups is significant or not, it is seen that common effect of group scale (pre-test, post-test) on Russian-Turkish bilingual children's Turkish receptive language points is significant ( $F_{1;38}=270.12$ ;  $p < .05$ ). When group measurement joint influence quantity is searched;  $\eta^2 = .897$ ). This fact proves that applied LFC (independent variable) has 90% influences on

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Turkish receptive language acquisition change of the children. According to this finding bilingual children at experiment group gains more achievement than children at control group in terms of Turkish language receptive points from pre-test to post-test. Also when supporting language acquisition process of bilingual children in early childhood period, as in monolingual children. Language education approach should be child-centered and activities compatible to linguistic-cognitive processes should be presented, taking developmental features into consideration. Therefore activities focusing on language acquisition in early childhood should be capable of increasing child-to-child interaction in natural classroom environment. Such activities shall help bilingual children to gain affective experiences through mutual interaction and hence acquisition of conceptual words. Dereobalı (1994), determined that supporting perceptive skills and language centered activities that aim at using supportive language have a significant impact on receptive language levels of 48 month old children in expanding their vocabulary. In another study related to the impact of language education programmes on 5-6 year old children's vocabulary development. Zembat and Yurtsever (2002) have determined that language centered education programmes have contributed to the development of children's receptive vocabulary. As LFC implemented on bilingual children in this study has been prepared based on this foundation, while bilingual children in the experiment group benefitted this opportunity, bilingual children in the control group pursued their education life in general education system. Therefore increase in receptive language levels of children benefitted from LFC as compared to those who did not is considered as an indicator of success of the programme in supporting language acquisitions of bilingual children.

**Table 3** Means and Standard Deviation of Russian-Turkish Bilingual Children's Expressive Language Pre and Post Test Average

Groups	N	Pre-test		Post-Test	
		$\bar{X}$	S	$\bar{X}$	S
Experiment Group	20	47.30	11.75	90.10	11.20
Control Group	20	46.10	7.18	51.95	10.07



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**Table 4** ANOVA Results of Pre Test and Post Test Average Points of Russian-Turkish Bilingual Children's Expressive Language Levels.

Source of Variance	Sum Of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)	Eta Squared ( $\eta^2$ )
Between Groups	277183.512	1				.981
Groups (E/C)	7742.112	1	7742.112	55.354	.003*	.593
Error	5314.875	38	139.865			
Within Groups	11885.37					
Factor (Pre-Post)	11834.113	1	11834.113	172.438	.000*	.921
Factor*Groups (PreTest-Post Test)	<b>6826.512</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6826.512</b>	<b>99.471</b>	<b>.000*</b>	<b>.894</b>
Error	2607.875	38	68.628			
Total	26924.95	40				

p>.05 \* p<.05

When Table 3 is examined, it can be said that bilingual children participating at LFC show a positive development in terms of Turkish expressive language and there is not an important change in children at control group.

When Table 4 is examined according to two-way ANOVA results, DVT average points of both groups' common effect-group scale (pre-test. post-test) on Russian-Turkish bilingual children's Turkish expressive language points is significant ( $F_{1,38}=99.471$  p<.05). When measurement joint influence quantity of the groups is searched;  $\eta^2 = .894$ . This fact proves that the applied education program (independent variable) has 89% influences on Turkish expressive language acquisition change of the children. According to this finding it is understood that Turkish expressive language points of children participating at LFC increased and LFC is effective at increasing Turkish expressive language points of bilingual children whose second language is Turkish. Stories, fables, nursery rhymes and finger plays have an enormous role on language acquisition of children in early childhood. Because these activities are the ones that will provide respectively functionality for four basics of language acquisition; listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Karadağ, 1995:97). Senechal (1997:123) claimed that different kinds of activities such as telling the story, asking open-ended questions and chatting with them help children acquire and enrich their vocabulary field. These findings support the findings which can be explained here. Giving play to concepts, events and situations in line with principles of "from simple to complicated" and "from near to far" in words, sentence structures of texts, expression methods and event

depictions used in stories, finger plays and nursery rhymes to be prepared to ensure language acquisition of bilingual children gain functionality, compared to monolingual children, is more effective.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

It is understood that LFC is effective at developing Turkish receptive, expressive language and mean length of utterance of bilingual children.

Language-focused programmes should be applied to bilingual children's language education. With teacher and student exchange programmes between countries, studies can be done in order to make children living in a multicultural environment known. Lessons about bilingual children's education can be added to lesson programmes of faculties of education. By this way, education of bilingual children can be helped. In order to support language development of bilingual children, workshops should be given to parents and teachers. Bilingual or multilingual picture books should be published in early childhood for bilingual children. By this way, parents and teachers are informed about acquisition of bilingualism in early childhood.

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