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Text coherence in the narrative texts of Turkish students and Bilingual Uzbek students in Turkey

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One of the most important characteristics of a text is coherence. Coherence can be briefly defined as the semantic and the logical integrity within a text. In this study, the texts written in a narrative style by 103 Turkish students and 98 migrant students (Uzbek) studying in the fifth grade of primary school have been compared in terms of text coherence. Findings of the study suggest that the success levels of both Turkish and migrant students in terms of text coherence are insufficient and there is no significant difference between the successes of these two groups and the problems related to the coherence show a similar distribution in each group. In this study, it has been found that the migrant schoolgirls are more successful than the migrant schoolboys although there are no such differences among Turkish students. The findings of the study also show that students regarded the act of writing as the disorderly arrangement of knowledge in the brain and putting it into a written form and they have extremely poor skills of thinking, deciding and planning which are required to compose a text.

Key words: Text coherence, writing skill, bilingualism, language education, primary school students.

INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism has become one of the most important social problems of the last century. As a result of globalization, people from different cultures have started to live together and the number of bilingual communities has increased throughout the world as time went by. A bilingual, uses two languages that differ in speech sounds, vocabulary and syntax. A bilingual's native language is called first language (L1) and nonnative language is called second language (L2). L1 is often a bilingual's dominant, or more proficient, language. Bilingualism may also involve a dialect and a standard language or a "high" language for formal communication and a "low" language for intimate communication (Taylor and Taylor, 1990).

Although limited in number, linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociological researches on bilingual people living in different parts of Turkey have been carried out especially in the last two decades by Turkish academicians. For example, Imer (1997) examined the language use of Laz people living in the Blacksea region of Turkey. Karahan (1997) studied the language use of Karachai people living in Tokat (a small city in the Blacksea region of Turkey) in their social networks, where code-switching patterns are observed. Another study by Karahan (2000) was on the complex relations between the language uses of the Bosnian Turks. Alagözlü (2002) examined the socio-psychological and sociolinguistic profiles of Kabardian community in the rural and urban areas (Karahan, 2005).

Valdes (1999) proposes distinguishing between "incipient bilinguals" and "functional bilinguals" as a way to assess and develop different approaches to instruction. Incipient bilingual denotes a student who is still learning a second language and whose language contains many and varied grammatical errors. In contrast, functional *bilingual* students have developed fairly advanced proficiency but still produce frequent errors; however, their errors are systematic and repetitive, reflecting "fossilized elements" in their speech (Panofsky et al., 2005). When young children move from one language environment to another, they attain the previous level in the new language and lose the old language in a short time, approximately in six months (Taylor and Taylor, 1990).

Children learn to speak through social interaction and provide a basis for the new theorists' promotion of the use of oral and written language development in schooling in the context of meaningful social interaction and learning.

The terms whole and process highlight the importance of learning language in a relevant context rather than in a decontextualized parts, as in traditional skill-based and product-oriented approaches. Also, Piagetian research on cognitive development shows that children construct understandings of the physical world through interaction with the world (Panofsky et al., 2005). Hedgcock (2005), says that "texts are socially constructed.....written

discourse is embedded in culture and inextricably linked with conceptions of literacy". That is, texts have purposes, and the community determines their functions. Typically, bilinguals are exposed to one language at home and to another outside the home. Under such conditions, bilingual children finally become more proficient in the language spoken outside than inside the home. After all, the language spoken outside the home, the language of environment, is the language of TV, shops, schools, streets, and so on (Taylor and Taylor, 1990).

Bilingual education rests on the theory that information and knowledge acquired in the native language is transferable across languages. Literacy skills learned in one language facilitate learning in a second language. Lemberger and Vinogradova's study (2002) describes one secondary Russian/English bilingual science teacher's practice and her literate students' experiences as they learn science and adapt to a foreign school. Through questionnaires and group interview data, 70 students evaluated their literacy skills, the teaching methods, activities and materials which helped them learn science content in English.

Results in this study indicate that students' well developed reading and writing skills coupled with bilingual instruction helped them maintain and build on their prior science learning to eventually pass required exams in English. Implications are made for supporting literacy and content skills for student achievement.

The written code is different from the oral code and there is no help from body language and other para-linguistic features in the written code. On the other hand, once the pupils have started to read short texts, many of them will expect to write as well. Writing activities can also help to consolidate learning in the other skill areas. But the most important aspect of writing and indeed of reading is that they are means of developing the children's ability to express their thoughts and emotions in the target language.

Writing skills require conscious effort and practice in composing, developing and analyzing ideas. Students writing in the L2 have to acquire proficiency in the use of language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. Furthermore, certain social and cognitive factors related to the second language acquisition show that strategies involved in the language learning process also affect writing in L2 (Myles, 2002).

Flower and Hayes (1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) argue that a writing process incorporates pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing, multiple drafts and peer group editing. L2 writers are in the process of acquiring these conventions and so they often need more instruction about the language itself. Deficient content, knowledge of vocabulary and language structure can inhibit L2 writers' performances (Myles, 2002). On the other hand, those students who have acquired the skill of

writing in their L1 can transfer that skill to writing in L2 (Tshotsho, 2006).

Texts exist in the core of the language teaching all around the world (Zorbaz, 2007; Çeçen and Çiftçi, 2007). While the texts written by other people are read and listened to in order to be understood, an individual actually creates a text himself through speaking and writing. The fact that the linguistics studies shifted towards "linguistics beyond sentence" after the 1950s when it was discovered that the sentence alone was not sufficient for a linguistic analysis enabled the "concept of text" gaining importance and the creation of text linguistics (Coşkun, 2007).

In the early studies carried out on texts, a text has been defined as a regular arrangement of grammatical units and sentences. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), it is wrong to regard the text as a combination of sentences: "A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size. A text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. A text does not consist of sentences; it is realized by, or encoded in, sentences." Regarding text as a combination of sentences implies that the communicative aspects of the text are ignored (Aksan and Aksan, 1991). A text is more than the combination of sentences forming it.

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) summarized the basic characteristics required for a linguistic product to be regarded as text and to provide a healthy communication among people under 7 headings. These characteristics are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality.

Although there are different views about the scope of the textual coherence among the linguists, there is a consensus that coherence is the most important element of a text. Coherence is based on the logical order and links among the parts of the text. In the early studies related to text linguistics, coherence had been defined as all kinds of grammatical and semantic links going beyond the sentence in the text. However, in the following years, the linguistic relations among the sentences have been discussed within the framework of the concept of cohesion, another textuality criterion; on the other hand, coherence has been seen as a semantic and logical link within a text (Toklu, 2003). Thus, coherence has been evaluated in terms of the integrity of the themes in the text (Günay, 2003).

Coherence is not a characteristic solely based on a text; on the contrary, the cognitive processes experienced by the reader also have an impact on the emergence of coherence (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). A text alone does not make any sense; the meaning of the text is revealed through the interaction of the textual knowledge and background knowledge of the reader (Coşkun, 2003).

According to De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), "the type of the text is dependent on the motion and the situa-

tion in the discourse. Unless a balance is struck between the type of the text and the fiction, it is not possible to identify even the scope and the meaning of the text." And according to Van Dijk (1981), the chunks of knowledge of the text are arranged not at random but within certain "frames". The units of knowledge in a text concentrate on certain concepts. Besides this concentration, the texts have specific traditional types and frames as well. The linear and holistic coherence in the text emerges by means of these frames.

Migrant community in Ovakent

Ovakent district which is located 23 km away from the provincial center of Hatay, Turkey, embraces the houses built as post-disaster houses for sheltering the needs of Turkish citizens in 1979 by the authorities of the Republic of Turkey. For the lack of demands from Turkish citizens for post-disaster houses in those years, the migrants coming from Afghanistan have been settled in this area as of 1982. The common characteristics of the migrants coming to this area from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Uzbekistan after the first settlement in 1982 are that all these people are of Uzbek origin. Nearly 7000 people live in Ovakent now. Today, approximately 70% of the population is composed of migrants and 30% is composed of Turks. A great majority of the migrant population deals with agriculture and leather trade.

In Ovakent, the migrant community has a conservative and patriarchal family structure. It is observed that not much importance is given to education in the community. The number of students continuing their education after completing the 8 year compulsory education is very few. Although 25 years have passed after the first migration, the social change occurs very slowly in the migrant community that still continues to live together, partially isolated from the urban life. The migrants wear their local clothes in daily life and speak Uzbek language among them. In addition to this, particularly in recent years the adaptation of the new generation to the changes has been easier thanks to formal education and TV, radio broadcasts.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to compare the texts written in a narrative style by Turkish students and migrant students studying in the fifth grade of primary school in terms of coherence. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the following research questions:

- (1) Is there a significant difference between existed between migrant and Turkish students with respect to coherence scores?
- (2) Is there a significant difference between male and female Turkish students in the coherence scores?
- (3) Is there a significant difference between male and fe-

female migrant students in the coherence scores?

- (4) What are the frequencies and percentage values of the coherence problems for migrant and Turkish students respectively?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Participants

This research has been conducted with two different groups. The first group is composed of the 98 migrant students of Uzbek origin studying at Ovakent Primary School (Hatay-Turkey) in the fifth grade. The second group composed of 103 Turkish students studying at Istiklal Primary and Gazipaşa Primary Schools.

Ovakent Primary School, the only school in Ovakent, has been providing education since 1980. The number of students studying at this school in the fifth grade is 140. In this research, it has been aimed to reach all fifth grades at this school. However, on the day when this study was carried out, there were only 120 students at school. As 22 of these students were Turk, they were excluded from the sample. In this way, 98 migrant students studying at Ovakent constituted the first group of the research.

A large majority of the migrant students (63) were born in Turkey. Of those born outside Turkey, 20 have been living in Turkey for 9 - 10 years and 15 for 5 - 8 years. This situation shows that the students learn two languages (Uzbek and Turkish) together. The migrant students speak Uzbek in family and normal life while they speak Turkish in the official environments.

The second group in the research consisting of 103 Turkish students was selected among the other primary schools in Hatay by clustering sampling method. These students have studied in the fifth grade at Gazipaşa and Istiklal Primary Schools (Hatay). These schools are, similar to Ovakent Primary School, located in the same area with a poor socio-economic status.

Data Collection

The data constituting the basis for the research have been obtained from the texts written by students in narrative style. 5 topics have been provided to the students in order to ease and facilitate their writing a narration. These topics are as follows:

- (i) Write a narration about the adventures of a tiny cat on the street on a cold winter day.
- (ii) Write a narration about the adventures of a professor on his travels to the past and to the future by his invented time-machine.
- (iii) Write a narration about adventures of a lazy rabbit that does not like working.
- (iv) Write a narration about the adventures of a child who always tells lies to his friends.
- (v) Write a narration about the adventures of Uncle Saffet who gets up early and sets to work in his farm.

Coşkun (2005) determined in a study that out of 10 topics proposed by experts, these 5 were the favorite ones preferred situationality by students attending the 5th grade of primary school.

Procedures

The data obtained in the research have been evaluated by using "Analytic Rubric for the Narrative Text Coherence" (ARNTC) developed by Coşkun (2005). This scale has been arranged in accordance with the narrative text style. In preparation of the scale, the score interval from 1 to 5 has been determined. This scoring is like that: 1 = Bad, 2 = Insufficient, 3 = Middle, 4 = Good, 5 = Very

Table 1. Independent samples t Test results for differences between groups in the coherence scores.

Group	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Migrant	98	2.83	0.974	199	0.213	.832
Turkish	103	2.85	0.879			

Table 2. Independent samples t Test results for the differences between genders in the coherence scores.

Group	Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Migrant	Female	41	3.12	1.053	96	2.620	.01
	Male	57	2.61	0.861			
Turkish	Female	44	3.02	0.792	101	1.694	.09
	Male	59	2.73	0.925			

good. Four basic qualities regarding the text coherence per score have been identified. These characteristics are related to "subject, plan and the relations among text units and text genre". In this way, a scale of $5 \times 4 = 20$ items has been formed. For the validity of the ARNCT, the expert view and "prediction validity" have been utilized. ($r = .83$, $p < 0.01$). In order to determine the reliability of the scale, "correlation inter-raters" has been taken into consideration ($r = .92$; $p < 0.01$).

Independent samples t test has been applied in order to see whether or not there is a significant difference between migrant students and Turkish students in terms of the success in text coherence. The problems the students face in creating text coherence have been identified by content analysis method (Yıldırım and Şimsek, 2003). By expressing the situations impeding the coherence in the texts written by students briefly, Inventory for the Text Coherence Problems (ITCP) has been developed. While the texts of the students are assessed, the repeated problems written in ITCP have been marked with a frequency signal in accordance with the study of Coşkun (2005). When a novel problem not encountered before emerged, it has been added to ITCP and the method has been pursued. After the evaluation of the texts of all students, the frequencies (f) and percentage (%) values of the coherence problems have been determined.

RESULTS

Independent t-test was employed to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed between migrant and Turkish students with respect to coherence scores. The results of this analysis are given in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the average of the coherence scores of the migrant and Turkish students is 2.83 and 2.85 respectively. It is found that there is no significant difference between the coherence scores of both groups [$t(199) = 0.213$, $p > .05$]. These results showed that the migrant and Turkish students are similar for this variable.

Independent t-test was applied separately for both migrant and Turkish students in order to see whether there are significant differences in the coherence scores of the students in terms of the gender or not.

As it is seen in Table 2, the achievement of females is higher than the males in terms of coherence scores. However, there is no significant difference between Turkish female and male students [$t(101) = 1.694$, $p > .05$] while there is a significant difference between achievement of migrant female and male [$t(96) = 2.62$, $p < .05$] with respect to their coherence scores.

In order to investigate the coherence problems for migrant and Turkish students respectively, the frequencies and percentage values of these problems are given in Table 3.

As it is seen in Table 3, the distribution of the coherence problems is highly similar in both groups. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5th problems in Table 3 encouraged mostly that are the same in each of these groups. The most common and repeated problem in a large number of students is "the inability to form the text units adequately". The most significant difference between these two groups is observed in the 12th and 13th problems. The 12th problem (lack of any relation among text units) is seen in 20.4% of the migrant students and in 3.9% of Turkish students. However, the 13th problem (to begin to tell the story as the first person narrator and to continue as a third person) is observed in 13.6% of Turkish students and in 3.1% of the migrant students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most striking result of this study is that the success levels of both migrant and Turkish students in terms of text coherence in the narrations written by them are insufficient. This result is highly similar to the results in the studies of Coşkun (2005) and Emeksiz (1998). In the study carried out by Coşkun (2005), the success levels of Turkish students in the fifth grade in terms of coherence in the narrative texts were insufficient as well. In the research by Emeksiz (1998), it has been found that students are bad at using noun phrases introducing a new subject and showing the change of the subject during the acquisition of a second language.

Another important point regarding the coherence scores is that there is no significant difference between migrant and Turkish students in terms of success levels. This situation shows that the migrant students do not lag behind the Turkish students in terms of the skill of composing a coherent text in Turkish. This result can be explained by two reasons:

- Uzbek, the mother tongue of migrant students and Turkish are the languages of the same origin and still have many common features in terms of vocabulary and syntax. (Buran and Alkaya, 2004; Bozkurt, 1999; Erkaya, 1992). The proximity between these languages enables the migrant students to learn Turkish easily as a second language and to reflect it to their writings (Taylor and Taylor, 1990).
- A large majority (64.3%) of the migrant students invol-

Table 3. The coherence problems of migrant and Turkish students in narrations.

No	Problem	Migrant		Turkish		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Inability to form the text units adequately.	78	79.6	67	65.0	145	72.1
2	The weak relation among the text units.	56	57.1	70	68.0	126	62.7
3	Sudden change in tide of events in the text in a way to cause discontinuity.	67	68.4	55	53.4	122	60.7
4	The existence of too many events in the narration and the very short description of them.	64	65.3	54	52.4	118	58.7
5	An implicit expression of an event/a series of events having a vital function in the narration.	42	42.9	38	36.9	80	39.8
6	The disclosure of the end rapidly and/or in an irrelevant way.	26	26.5	30	29.1	56	27.9
7	The contradictions and the absence of sense among the text units.	23	23.5	30	29.1	53	26.4
8	The presence of the unfinished events and situations which are narrated in the text at first but then discontinued.	17	17.3	26	25.2	43	21.4
9	Lack of focal point in the narration.	18	18.4	23	22.3	41	20.4
10	The existence of unnecessary repetitions and explanations	11	11.2	16	15.5	27	13.4
11	The confusion in the meaning stemming from the lack of the information needed to be given before.	12	12.2	13	12.6	25	12.4
12	Lack of any relation among text units	20	20.4	4	3.9	24	11.9
13	To begin to tell the story as the first person narrator, and to continue as a third person.	3	3.1	14	13.6	17	8.5
14	The inability to transfer the relations among events to the text though they exist in the mind of the writer.	9	9.2	6	5.8	15	7.5
15	Giving explanations and advices not related to the narration.	6	6.1	8	7.8	14	7.0
16	The text being too short to compose a real narration.	4	4.1	10	9.7	14	7.0
17	The writing being too disconnected and complex to form a text.	9	9.2	4	3.9	13	6.5

ved in this study were born in Turkey. Of those born outside Turkey, 20 have been living in Turkey for 9 - 10 years and 15 for 5 - 8 years. It means that approximately all of the students have been learning Turkish since they acquired their mother tongue.

According to Taylor and Taylor (1990), bilingual children have acquired their languages before about age 6 are called "early bilingual"; and have acquired in adolescence are called "late bilingual". Early bilinguals are more likely to attain native like proficiency than late bilinguals are. Based on this classification, Uzbek students are early bilingual. For this reason, their levels in L2 are same as in L1. Also, it can be said that in learning Turkish the contribution of communication devices such as TV, radio, newspaper and the education provided at schools is great.

It can be observed in this research that the migrant schoolgirls are more successful than the migrant schoolboys in terms of the text coherence. However, there is no significant difference between Turkish students in terms of gender. In the research of Ramadan (2003) on the text written by Jordan students in a foreign language, it has been concluded that the schoolgirls are more successful than the schoolboys in terms of providing text coherence. These results show that schoolgirls can be more successful in acquiring a second language. In this respect,

the gender should be taken into consideration as a variable in the future studies aiming to evaluate the linguistic skills of the migrant students.

As a result of the qualitative evaluations carried out in the research, it has been found that both migrant and Turkish students made similar mistakes in similar frequency. In accordance with this result, it can be said that migrant and Turkish students experience similar cognitive processes during the act of writing. When the coherence problems observed in the texts of students are assessed as a whole, a problem of higher priority than the problems in writing skill appears; students regarded the act of writing as the disorderly arrangement of knowledge in the brain and putting it into a written form. This problem shows that the students have extremely poor skills of thinking, deciding and planning which are required to compose a text.

In structuring information, the writer uses various types of knowledge, including discourse knowledge. It is also important to organize at both sentence and text levels (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). Coherence problems may be due to not knowing how to organize the text or how to arrange the relevant information. Revision is also important and is a demanding task because it involves definition, evaluation, strategy selection and modification of text in the writing plan and the ability of students to

analyze and evaluate the feedback they receive on their writing (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

Tshotsho's study (2006) showed that the not-so-competent students' essays lacked coherence. In the students' essays, there was no common thread running through the paragraphs. They discussed many points within a single paragraph. As a result, their essays lacked paragraph unity. What was discussed in the previous paragraph did not relate to what was discussed in the following paragraph. There was no unified purpose in their texts. This lack of coherence in students' essays is a reflection of their problems with academic writing and lack of internal organization.

On the other hand, competent students had relatively few problems with coherence. In their essays the paragraphs and sentences were linked and not disjointed, as was the case with the essays of the not-so-competent group. One main idea was discussed in each paragraph. In their essays there was a logical development of ideas and arguments.

The main aim of teaching writing is to help students to compose texts in which they can express the events, situations, feelings and thoughts in a coherent and persuasive way. In the studies carried out in the field of writing education, it is required to focus on such topics as connections within the text, forming the elements of text, the tide of events in the text and the structures of texts before the formal qualities.

Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Because, writing involves composing, conducting research, developing ideas, analyzing ideas, writing the first draft, editing and writing the final draft (Omaggio, 1993). It is the act of composing which creates problems for those writing in L2 in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves reworking information. By putting together concepts, the writer engages in a two way interaction between developing knowledge and developing text (Tshotsho, 2006).

This study shows that text coherence problems are geared to students' knowledge about genres of writing. For the organization of text, the students must learn qualifications and structures of text genres. Swales (1990) and Raimes (1998) mention that students may be able to write well if they are exposed to a variety of genres of writing, which include flyers, magazines, articles and books. By examining a variety of written texts, students' awareness can be raised with regard to the way words, structures and genre contribute to purposeful writing. They can also be aware of different types of textual organization, which can affect L2 students' composing skills. Models of text analysis which can help L2 writers see how grammatical features are used in authentic discourse contexts, can also be used (Tshotsho, 2006).

Hyland (2004) advises the use of genre prototypes to help students develop awareness of a variety of structural features in different types of writing, highlighting the overlap with the genre standards category mentioned earlier. The

L2 writing literature strongly supports explicit teaching of genre through analysis of and practice composing in a variety of genres, as well as building on students' prior knowledge of genre (Panofsky et al., 2005).

In writing teaching, use of technology is one of the most effective ways for teaching text structures. Pennington (1996) characterizes hypermedia as a resource for creating an environment that supports communicative second language composition. Gonglewski (2001) writes that in her work in L2 classrooms, she has found that the World Wide Web "can afford a learner-centered, context-rich setting to support meaningful communication with an authentic audience-factors linked to successful L2 writing". Akyel and Kamisli (1997) report that student attitudes toward writing and planning for writing improved as a result of their use of computers. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) also encourage teachers to utilize technology because, "it seems clear that technology offers great potential for enhancing many aspects of the writing process". However, the authors note that teachers must plan activities carefully if students are to enjoy the full benefits of computer assisted writing (Panofsky et al., 2005).

Writing should not be viewed as an individually-oriented, inner-directed cognitive process, but as an acquired response to the discourse (Swales, 1990). Instruction should afford students the opportunity to participate in transactions with their own texts and the texts of others. By guiding students towards a conscious awareness of how the audience will interpret their work, students learn to write with a readerly sensitivity (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

Furthermore the use of self-evaluation can be encouraged in students' portfolios and prompts for error identification can be useful (Cumming, 1995). Teachers should provide students with language input, instruction in writing and also feedback on their writing. Classroom settings are also important in encouraging students to reflect on what they want to write and then to choose the appropriate language forms (Leki, 1990). Students should be encouraged to analyze and evaluate feedback themselves in order for it to be effective. Teachers should focus on idea development, clarity and coherence before grammar correction in student writing activities.

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