# *LITERACY ACQUISITION OF TURKISH IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN ROMANIA IN THE ROMANIAN CURRICULA*

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***Abstract:*** *This contribution examined two groups of Turkish and Romanian children both in the fourth grade, groups consisting each of 15 pupils. These two groups of children are evaluated according to a test applied in order to observe the degree of understanding and assimilation of the Romanian language.*

*The data presented in this study are part of my following research project will be carried out at Scoala Spectrum in Bucharest. One data collection instrument was used in the study: an activity chart including a short story and ten multiple choice questions.*

*The study shows that in the initial stage of literacy acquisition L1/L2 reading comprehension processes have highly intralingual characteristics. In learning in a second language, it is the structure of the target language that accounts for various comprehension difficulties and not the structure of the source language. The result on reading comprehension development in Romanian as a second language can be summarized as follows. From a temporal point of view, Turkish children have a strikingly lover level of reading comprehension than Romanian children. From the structural point of view, the present part of the study shows that these differences can be explained by intralingual rather that interlingual development futures on the part of the Turkish learners. Both groups of children find presuppositions easier to understand than implications, and assertions easier than presuppositions. It seems that the more implicit items are harder to answer correctly than the more implicit ones*

***Keywords:*** *second language acquisition, educational achievement of immigrant children, the acquisitional processes.*

## Introduction

In a multicultural world defined by globalization and characterized by increasing internationalization as well as mobility, the requirement for products and material that make it possible to learn new languages efficiently and effectively is increasing firmly. To function in an adequate manner in the second language (L2), non-natives must acquire different skills and subskills, the importance of which varies depending on factors such as the communicative situation, as well as the educational level together with the career of the learner. (Cucchiarini, Catia, Neri, Strik, 2009, p. 853) In terms of practice, some of these skills raise more problems than others in the language classroom, as their training requests additional time. For instance, a skill that can never be enough practiced in the classroom due to lack of time is represented by speaking, in the wide sense provided by Lennon (1990: 389) of "a cover term for oral proficiency, representing the highest point on a scale that measures spoken command of a foreign language". Still, speaking represents a basic skill for overall learners, no matter of their educational level or career: successful interaction in the L2 requests that non-natives speak with a minimum degree of fluency.

In this sense, early childhood represents a critical time for literacy development. Early literacy influences reading achievement later in childhood. An increased understanding of parents' cultural backgrounds and practices about their children's literacy development can assist teachers by enhancing home-school relations.

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The variety of language acquisition studies is well-known, and the diverse approaches and overviews from which the first and second language acquisition phenomenon can be noticed are extended. A lot of different persons take interest in this area: teachers, linguists, psychologists, educators. This study utilizes the perspective of the generative theory and more exactly that of the Government-Binding Framework (Chomsky, 1981, 1986).

The focus of this study is about Romanian as a second language acquisition by Turkish early school children. The parents of the children are first- and/or second-generation Turkish immigrants in Romania. Therefore, at home, the children mostly hear Turkish spoken around them, even if Romanian is not completely absent either. Several parents are fluent Turkish-Romanian bilinguals themselves, while others have only limited knowledge of the Romanian language. In almost all homes, children find code-switching, i.e. the alternative use of both languages in their day-to-day lives.

At various ages (basically seven years old), the children are immersed into the Romanian language when they go to school. Some of the children take part in the early school compound of programmes for early childhood education. It is the specific objective of these programmes to offer children who are possibly 'disadvantaged' due their poor second language acquisition, the chance to learn the Romanian language and to enable them to get off to a better start in primary school, in which Romanian is the second language of instruction.

Secondly, even if there are presently many children in Romania who grow up in bilingual contexts like the one just presented, not many studies have been done on second language acquisition in such situations. On the one hand, researches on bilingual language acquisition mainly focus on children learning two languages from birth and most of the time growing up in families in which the parents speak various languages with the child. On the other hand, researches on second language acquisition in childhood tend to take an interest especially in older school-age children.

Another major difference between the children in this thesis and in other researches on childhood bilingualism is the restricted amount of second language input that children get. Children learning two languages from birth are usually exposed to both languages in considerable proportions. School-age children with home languages other than that spoken at school are 'submerged' in their second language for several hours a day on all weekdays.

The lack of interest in children starting to learn a second language and receiving relatively low amounts of input in this language is mainly due to theoretical linguistic aspects. The appearance of so-called usage-based linguistics, with innovative theories of language acquisition and the role of input next in its wake, offers a new theoretical rationale for analyzing second language acquisition in the early-school age and among children receiving medium/low amounts of input. Not much empirical practical research in this field has yet been conducted.

It is therefore important to participate in the activity of developing literature resources which may be of assistance in understanding and successful adoption of literacy acquisition of Turkish immigrant children in Romania, in the Romanian curricula.

*Turkish immigrants in Romania*

"Turkish migration in Romania had two main waves. The first was in the early 1990s, in the immediate aftermath of the new visa regime, which was meant to ease travel. The



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second was in the early 2000s, when Romania was on track to become an EU Member State on January 1, 2007." (Ecirli, 2011, p. 8)

The main reason for the decision to leave Turkey was an economic one. For instance the economic crisis in the 2001-2002 was a factor of the second migration wave. The economic factor was reported in various ways, such as lack of economic opportunities at home, regional problems, or business failure.

What is the profile of the Turkish immigrants in Romania? Their social background (region of birth, education, family type, culture) reveals the diversity of Turkish society a generation or more ago. Most of them were born in the less developed regions of Turkey, such as the Eastern Anatolia or the South East. Their family was a traditional one, with many siblings, in which the father, usually a religious person, was the key figure.

Staying in Romania for the foreseeable future is part of their life plan. Some learned Romanian, others at least have a basic understanding of the language. The strong link with Romania is seen not only in buying property, but also in having a sensitive understanding of Romania's main social problems.

The ties with Turkey are maintained with regular, but not often, travel and by sending back money to relatives. In most cases, the sums involved are moderate.

The vast majorities do not expect to return to Turkey in the near or medium future.

In addition, some specifications need to be made: there is in Romania a small minority of ethnic Turks and Tatars with Romanian citizenship in the south east of the country on the Black Sea shore, which was not the object of this study. This research covered only Turkish immigrants that came to Romania after the Romanian Revolution (1989) and which established in Bucharest. Therefore, only the Turkish immigrants to Romania, living in Bucharest were analyzed.

Estimates on the size of the Turkish community in Romania vary around 10,000 individuals, the vast majority of which reside in Bucharest. The main results of a survey made in the Turkish expatriate community in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, on a sample of 658 adult males in 2011, proved several features, which will be presented further on, only those in accordance to the subject of the thesis.

This research is based on a study of two groups of children both in the fourth grade, groups consisting each of 15 pupils. These two groups of children are evaluated according to a test applied in order to observe the degree of understanding and assimilation of the Romanian language.

**Procedure and Data Collection**

The children were tested at the fourth grade. The tasks were administrated by the classroom teacher. The first moment of the measurement split into two halves. These were taken with one week interval. The task was accompanied by the following instructions: "one each page of the booklet you will find a short story and number of questions. You will have to read the story first. When you think you understand what the story is about, answer the questions. For each question there are four possible answers. Mark the right answer by circling the letter before it."



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*Selection of informants*

In selecting informants the natural variation of instructional practices was taken as a starting point. In view of the study of literacy acquisition in the L2, Scoala Spectrum of Bucharest, which had substantial numbers of Turkish minority children, was selected. School teams were offered written data about the research project and were required to participate, if all of the criteria mentioned below could be met:

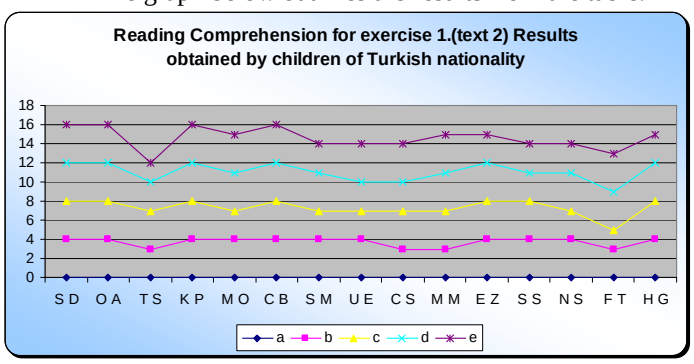
Table 1.Selection of informants

| | **Boys** | **Girls** | **Totals** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Turkish sample** | **7** | **8** | **15** |
| **Romanian sample** | **9** | **6** | **15** |

**Findings**

After applying the second text to the children of Turkish nationality the next results were highlighted in the table 4. Data obtained highlights the score of each child in reading comprehension exercise points. The results obtained from the exercises of the second text were processed after scoring them, further being drafted statistical graphs to compare the two study groups. As far as the children of Turkish nationality, there appear certain aspects of misunderstanding in respect of certain aspects of the text. Observing Table 4 above can be seen that each column separately presents the results of solving the exercise for text no. 2.

The graph below outlines the results from the table.




Results obtained at *Reading comprehension* (text 2) for the group made up of children of Turkish nationality

As far as the results of the children of Turkish nationality, their results are the following: point a. 11:4 mistakes of understanding; Point b. 9:6 mistakes of understanding; Point c 11:4 mistakes of understanding; Point d 9:6 mistakes of understanding. For the control group there were not registered mistakes of understanding.

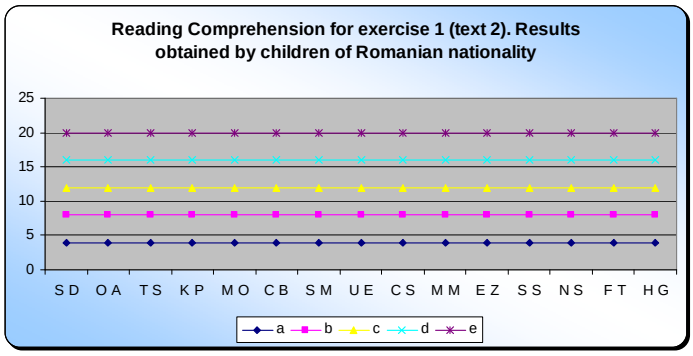
The level of comprehension of study participants who responded incorrectly remains a relatively small one showing a positive trend in the level of understanding relative to the entire group.

As far as the results of the children of Romanian nationality are concerned, they are comprised in the above table:



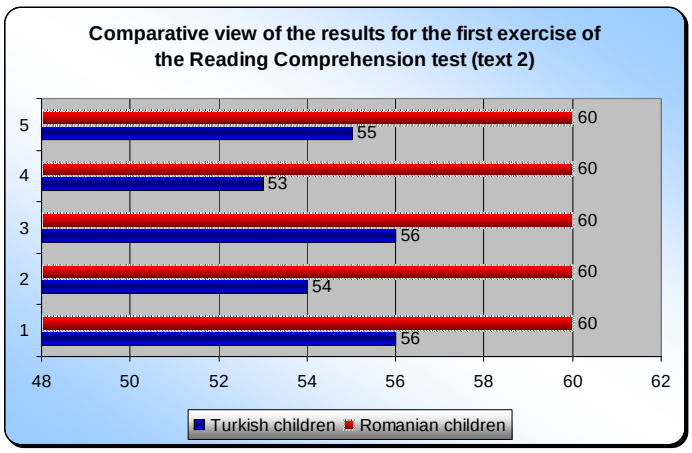
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Results obtained at *Reading comprehension* for the group made up of children of Romanian nationality. (text 2)




Results obtained at *Reading comprehension* for the group made up of children of Romanian nationality. (text 2)

Further on, a comparative perspective of the results for the first exercise of the Reading Comprehension test is presented (text 2).




The results for the first exercise of the *reading comprehension* test (text 2)

The results obtained by the group made up of children of Turkish nationality are average compared with the results of the group made up of children of Romanian nationality. After applying the test, it was noticed an error of understanding regarding the conduct of proceedings in the text of the test.

It can be seen that Romanian children generally obtain higher scores than Turkish children. It can be concluded that the comprehension scores of Turkish and Romanian children refer in both fourth grade to similar underlying abilities, based on highly intralingual strategies.

The result on reading comprehension development in Romanian as a second language can be summarized as follows. From a temporal point of view, Turkish children have a strikingly lover level of reading comprehension than Romanian children. From the structural point of view, the present part of the study shows that these differences can be explained by intralingual rather that interlingual development futures on the part of the Turkish learners. Both groups of children find presuppositions



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easier to understand than implications, and assertions easier than presuppositions. It seems that the more implicit items are harder to answer correctly than the more implicit ones. This finding corresponds to the more general finding that both first second language learners (Cummins, 1979) have more difficulty with reading as the text gets more decontextualized (see Scribner&Cole, 1981)

On the basis of these findings, it is claimed that in the initial stage of literacy acquisition L1/L2 reading comprehension processes have highly intralingual characteristics. In learning in a second language, it is the structure of the target language that accounts for various comprehension difficulties and not the structure of the source language.

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