

From emergent bilingualism to biliteracy competences of French-Turkish bilingual children and teenagers in France

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The last three decades has seen a significant increase in the number of research projects dedicated to investigating the language practices of children from a migrant background and their schooling. These questions are attracting growing attention from parents (keen to see their children succeeding at school but also wishing to transmit their language of origin), politicians (concerned with social integration) and more and more, also teachers (concerned with better support against school failure) and speech therapists (wishing to provide better treatment). These will often face two divergent discourses: first, a pro-bilingualism discourse and, secondly, an anti-bilingualism speech. The prevalent belief that monolingualism is the normal and natural way of linguistic development and that an alternative developmental path could involve risks, gives rise to many negative attitudes which reveal a profound misunderstanding of this question.

In this presentation, we will first present the state of the art research findings on bilingualism and migration. Then, after having examined the specificity of the Turkish community in France, we will characterize the emergent bilingualism of very young and analyze the development of biliteracy in both languages of French-Turkish bilingual children and adolescents born of immigrant parents.

As concerns the emergent bilingualism of very young children, we will mainly focus on the research done by Hamurcu (2015). In a longitudinal study, she has observed the interactional and language development of Turkish-French bilingual children since the first year until the end of the second year of preschool. These children are exposed to different language practices at home such as essentially Turkish (Type 1) and a mix of Turkish and French (Type 2). The data consists on verbal interactions between the adult and children. The results show that home language practices have an impact on interactional and language competences of children. In a developmental point of view, at the end of the second year of preschool, in French interactions, there are very few differences between the two types of children, while in Turkish ones, Type 1 children have more developed competences compared to Type 2 children, especially on lexical diversity.

As for the biliteracy development, the study is part of a larger crosslinguistic study of bilingual language development in France and Germany (Akinci & Schroeder, 2012). The corpus consists of data from bilinguals in four age-groups: 5th (grade school), 7th (secondary school) and 10th and 12th grades (high school). In each age-group, at least 15 subjects were asked to produce two types of text (personal narration and expository) in two modalities (spoken and written). The results reveal that all participants make clear distinction between the two types of texts (narratives vs expository discussions) in content and in linguistic means of expression. The youngest children produce relatively well-organized, though minimal, narrative texts, but expository text construction is not consolidated until high school. The grade and secondary school children made more spelling mistakes and they relied less on conventional punctuation and page layout.

References

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