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## INTRODUCING REFERENTS IN TURKISH CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

The present study investigates the acquisition of narrative skills by bilingual Turkish children in Bulgaria. The data consist of narratives based on two series of pictures, told by three groups of Turkish children aged 7, 9 and 11. Their results are compared with the narrative skills of bilingual Turkish adults from Bulgaria. The main objective is to give a description of linguistic devices children use to introduce characters in a story.

### **Introduction**

The goal of this study is to investigate the first mentioned referential devices in Turkish narratives used by bilingual Turkish children living in Bulgaria. In recent years different studies on narratives with bilingual Turkish children have been made. Aarssen (1994) presents the way in which bilingual Turkish children from the Netherlands introduce referential devices. I will try to compare the results of these two groups. There are also a number of studies carried out with monolingual Turkish children, which will not be taken into consideration.

### **The study**

#### **Materials**

In the study presented here narrative productions were elicited with two picture stories: the "Horse story" and the "Cat story". The Horse story consists of 5 pictures and the Cat story of 6 pictures. These two picture stories are well known from the previous studies of M. Hickmann (1982), M. Smoczyńska (1992), H. Hendricks (1993), and H. Jakubowicz-Batoréo (1996).

In the Horse story there are three main characters, and the story is represented at one location only. In the Cat story there are four main protagonists which enter at different points of location. The plot of the stories is the following (M. Smoczyńska, 1992, p. 113).

## HORSE STORY

- HORSE** The main character of the story and the first animate referent to be introduced. It is there from the very beginning, running in a meadow (and not entering the scene). It is the unique active protagonist until the accident on picture 4. It becomes passive on picture 5.
- COW** It appears from picture 2 on, but until picture 5 it is passive. It is seen by the horse who is trying to reach it. Due to its large size it is perceptually salient. On picture 5 it becomes active.
- BIRD** It actually appears on picture 2 and – like the cow – continues to be seen on all the following pictures, but it is much less salient than the cow. It becomes active on picture 5, but between pictures 4 and 5 there is a puzzling problem to be solved: where does his first aid kit come from? In order to explain it the existence of a non-depicted episode taking place between pictures 4 and 5 has to be assumed during which the bird left the scene in order to fetch the kit. It is also possible for the speaker to ignore its (purely decorative) presence on pictures 2-4. In such a case the bird can be treated as if it (dynamically) appeared on picture 5.

## CAT STORY

- MOTHER** The mother bird is the first character to appear on picture 1, accompanied by her babies. They form a static group which was there before the story began. The mother leaves the nest on picture 2, probably to look for some food for her babies. She comes back on picture 5 with the expected food.
- BABIES** They are present throughout the story. Although they are not perceptually salient, they are made so by the story script. Their main characteristics are lack of individuation and total passivity. Even their existence is referred to in relation to the mother. They appear mostly as a global OBJECT (being born, being taken care of, being left alone, being threatened to be eaten by the cat, being saved by the dog, being fed by the mother) or at best as EXPERIENCER (being hungry, being afraid, feeling relieved). The most active behavior which can be ascribed to them is that of crying.
- CAT** The most active and in a way the central character in the story. It appears on picture 2 by coming onto the scene. It is active on pictures 2-4. On the last two pictures, when the dog takes over, it becomes passive. The cat is the unique Swartzcharacter in the story.
- DOG** It appears on picture 4 coming to the tree exactly in the way the cat did. Then it takes the leading role, being active on pictures 5 and 6. The dog is the “good guy” who has saved the baby birds.

**Procedure**

For the purpose of the study the children were audio recorded in a separate room at school. They were given the task to tell the story in a way that s/he would tell it to a smaller brother or sister. Between the children and the interviewer there was Mutual Knowledge (MK) of the content of the stories.

The children had the task to look at the pictures and create a coherent story in their mother tongue – Bulgarian variety of Turkish, which is different from standard Turkish, and in Bulgarian as a second language. The total number of narratives on which the paper is based totals 160. The Bulgarian data is not analyzed in this study. After the recording the stories of the children were transcribed.

### Subjects

The total number of subjects included in the study was 60 bilingual Turkish children students in Bulgarian primary schools and 20 bilingual Turkish adults as shown in Table 1. Usually the children speak Turkish at home and Bulgarian at school. All of them are from the northeast part of Bulgaria where in large part the Turkish minority is concentrated.

The subjects are divided into two groups: experimental group – EG (Turkish children) and control group – CG (Turkish adults).

Table 1. Total number of informants by age

Age	Experimental Group	Control Group
7 years	10 boys +10 girls	
9 years	10 boys +10 girls	
11 years	10 boys +10 girls	
Adults		10 male +10 female

### Research questions

Narrativity is the ability to produce a coherent text (oral or written) with its own beginning (introduction), plot (development) and end (conclusion). In the present study I would like to determine the narrative skills of bilingual Turkish children in their mother tongue – Turkish (L1). In answer to this question I show the children's ability to introduce referents in a narrative and will analyze the linguistic devices used by the children to introduce a character. The results of the children will be compared with those of adults.

## Theoretical background

### Overview of the literature

In his study of narrativity among German speaking children and adults Bamberg (1987) analyzes the linguistic devices used for introducing the characters in a story. I follow his methodology of analyzing the first mentioned characters. According to Kail (1998) the age of 9 years is a critical one for Spanish and French children in the use of "indefinite first mentions" in both situations: MK (Mutual Knowledge) and NMK (Non Mutual Knowledge). Designing the study, I decided to have a group of children under the age of 9 years and one over the age of 9 years, in order to see how the age factor influences the use of first mentions.

### Definiteness and indefiniteness in Turkish

As is known, Turkish is not an Indo-European language. However, in our case Turkish being in contact with Bulgarian (which is an Indo-European language) one can find some changes and, looking through the narratives of the children, such changes are easily iden-

tified. Here I am not going to focus on the changes of Turkish under the influence of Bulgarian, but will accept the grammatical rules of Standard Turkish.

One of the important features that makes it different from the Indo-European languages, is vowel harmony. It is also known that Turkish has seven noun cases: nominative (zero marked), accusative, dative, locative, ablative, instrumental and genitive. Accusative and genitive are only used on definite noun phrases. Nominal subjects in Turkish are expressed by zero-marked noun phrases. There are no articles that determine the status of definite versus indefinite nominal subjects. However, the numeral *bir* ('one') can be regarded as an optional marker of indefiniteness (Dede, 1986 after Küntay, 1997) as is shown in the following example:

bir çocuk ev – in – den çık – mIs (after Küntay, 1997)  
 INDEF child home-GEN-ABL go.out-EVID  
 "A child went out of his house"

The presence of the indefinite numeral *bir* signals that the following entity is newly introduced for the listener. The absence of *bir* leaves the indefiniteness status of the relevant noun unmarked, leaving it to the situational context and/or the listener's inferential system to fill in the information. Erguvanli-Taylan and Zimmer (1994) summarize the following four distinct direct-object constructions that are differentiated in terms of the parameters definiteness and specificity:

- 1) definite direct object, where the head noun of the object NP is marked with the accusative suffix *-(y)I*;
- 2) indefinite direct object with the indefinite article *bir* and with accusative marking on the head noun;
- 3) indefinite direct object with the indefinite article *bir* and no case marking on the head noun;
- 4) indefinite direct object with neither an indefinite article nor any case marking on the head noun.

Küntay (1997, p.95) summarizes the definite and indefinite nominal forms in Turkish in the following table:

Table 2. Definite and indefinite forms in Turkish

Grammatical role	Definite	Indefinite
Subject	bare noun	<i>bir</i> noun
Direct object	noun-ACC	<i>bir</i> noun-ACC, bare noun, <i>bir</i> noun
Oblique object	noun- Case	<i>bir</i> noun- Case

## Results

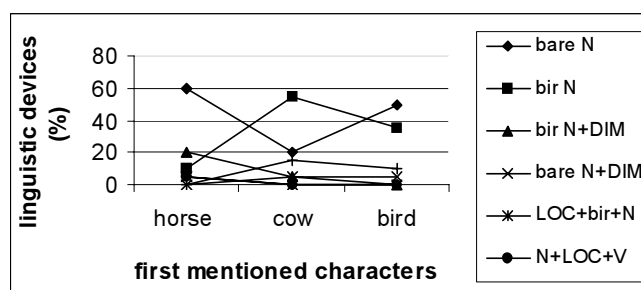
The study is focused on the introduction of first referents in the stories, noting the first mentioned devices for *horse*, *cow* and *bird* in the "Horse story" and for *bird*, *cat* and *dog* in the "Cat story". I examine the children's ability to introduce referents in discourse and to use the appropriate linguistic devices in their L1.

### A. Experimental Group

#### First Group (age seven)

Observing the children's narratives based on the pictures of the Horse story the following patterns can be observed.

Figure 1. "Horse story": First mentions at age 7



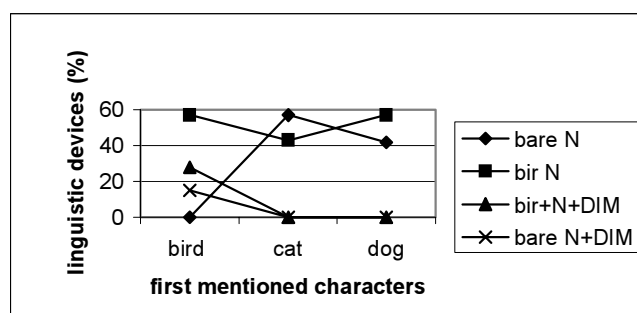
In the first story the linguistic devices used for introducing the three main characters are the following: 60 % of the children introduce the *horse* as bare *N*, 55% introduce the *cow* as a *bir N* and 50 % of the children introduce the *bird* as a bare *N*. Comparing the linguistic constructions used by boys and girls for first mention of the protagonist *horse*, the girls use more interesting linguistic patterns. 20% of the children who use the *bir+N+DIM* constructions are girls (for example, *Bir beygircik = One horse + DIM*). In this Turkish dialect, some of the children use the *N beygir* instead of the *N at*. Among the boys there are also interesting constructions like: *At merede kaçıyor* (*N+LOC+V*) and *Burada bir at var* (*LOC+bir+N*).

Introducing the other two protagonists *cow* and *bird* the children use mainly bare *N* or *bir N* constructions. However, the boys use all bare *N+ACC* constructions and only girls use all *N+DIM* constructions. Some of the children missed the protagonist *cow*, and others first presented the *bird* and then the *cow*.

Summarizing, one can say that the children use diverse nouns for all three protagonists. For the *horse* they used *at* and *beygir*, for the *cow* they used *sır*, *inek* and *buza* and for the *bird* they used *kus*, *güvercin* and *bülbül*.

As for the narratives of the children based on the pictures of the Cat story, one can observe the following linguistic constructions shown at Figure 2.

Figure 2. "Cat story": First mentions at age 7

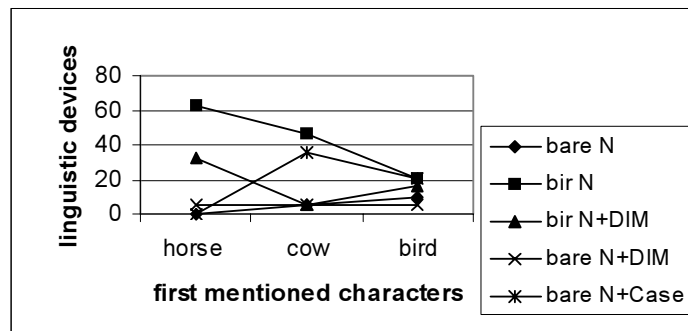


Most of the children introduce the *bird* as a bare *N* (57%). The second character (*cat*) is introduced as a bare *N* in 57 % of the children's first mentions and the third character (*dog*) is introduced as a *bir N* again in 57 % of the cases. It is obvious that there is a tendency towards simplification of the linguistic devices. It is interesting that some of the children start the story with constructions like *Bir kuşçaz vamIs* = *There was a bird+DIM* (28 %). The other two protagonists *cat* (47 % *bir N*) and *dog* (42% bare *N*) are introduced in much the same way. In most of the children's stories the baby birds as protagonists are missing, and so I excluded them from my observations.

#### Second Group (age nine)

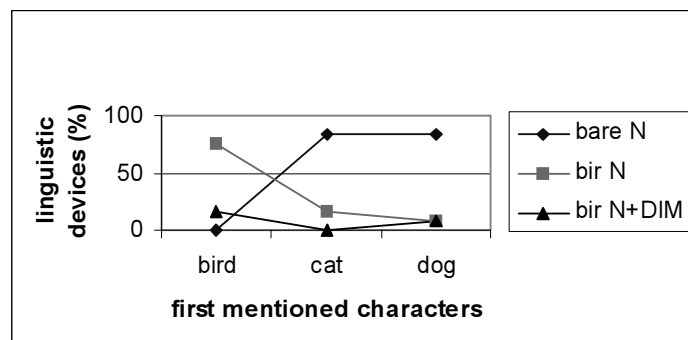
As concerns the first mentions of the second group (9 years old) the following patterns were found. They are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. "Horse story": First mentions at age 9



In this group 2 % of the children do not introduce the protagonist *cow* and 27 % do not introduce the protagonist *bird*. The children use the more simple constructions for introducing the first protagonist *horse* (*bir N* – 63% and *bir N +DIM* – 32%). For introducing the second protagonist (*cow*) the children use 47% of *bir N* constructions and 36 % of bare *N+ case* constructions (*inegi görmüs*). The third character (*bird*) is introduced as a *bir N* 21% and as a bare *N+Case* (*soylemis kusa*) 21%. The results from the Cat story are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. "Cat story": First mentions at age 9



As in the first group the 9 year olds used also very limited linguistic constructions introducing the characters from the second story. In both groups, the most often used structure is *bir N* for introducing *bird* (75%): *bir kus* or *bir guvercin* and bare *N* for introducing *cat* (83%) and *dog* (83%).

*Third group (age eleven)*

The results of the third group are presented in Figure 5 and Figure 6. It is interesting that the children in this group have preferences for use of diminutives. In most of their narratives there is a very similar model: *beygircik* (horse+DIM) < *sIr* (cow) < *kusçaz* (bird+DIM). If we compare how the three protagonists are introduced in the story we note the following: The *horse* is introduced as a *bir N + DIM* in 70 % of the cases, the *cow* as a *bir N* in 55 % of the cases, and the *bird* is introduced as a *bir N+DIM* in 50 % of the cases. Other linguistic devices used by the children are *bir N* (30%) for the *horse*, bare *N* (15%) and bare *N+Case* (25%) for the *cow* and *bir N+DIM* (15%) for the *bird*.

Let us now turn to the Cat story and see how the characters are introduced by 11 year olds. The results are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 5. "Horse story": First mentions at age 11

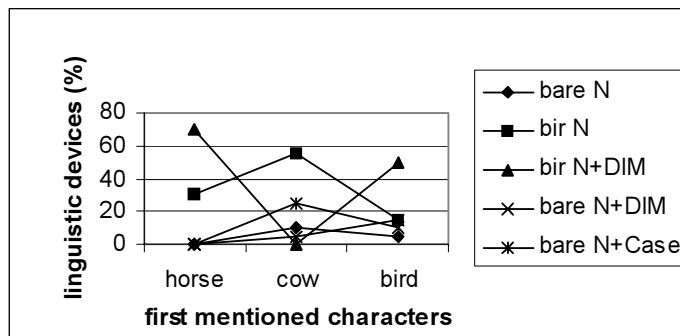
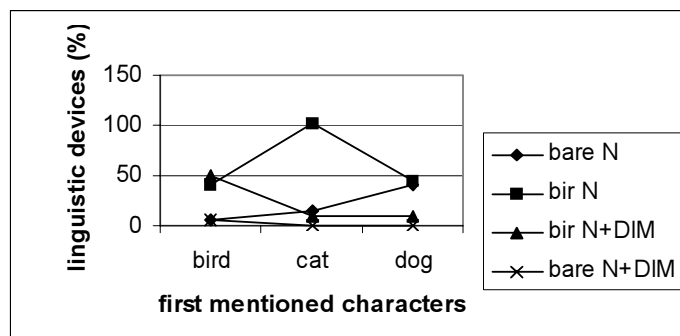


Figure 6. "Cat story": First mentions at age 11



The same phenomenon is observed in the second story. Introducing the first character *bird*, the children use mainly the diminutive form (50% – *bir*+DIM). The second (*cat* – 75%) and third (*dog* – 45%) characters are mainly presented as *bir N*. Some of the children (5%) do not introduce the *dog* at all.

### B. Control Group (adults)

The narratives of the children are now compared with the narratives of the adults. First, we will see the linguistic patterns which the adults use and then we will look for an explanation for some of the linguistic patterns which the children use. Let us see how the adults construct their narratives. The results are shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7. “Horse story”: First mentions by adults

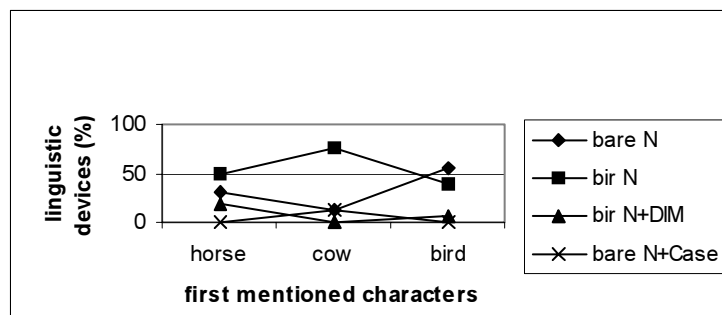
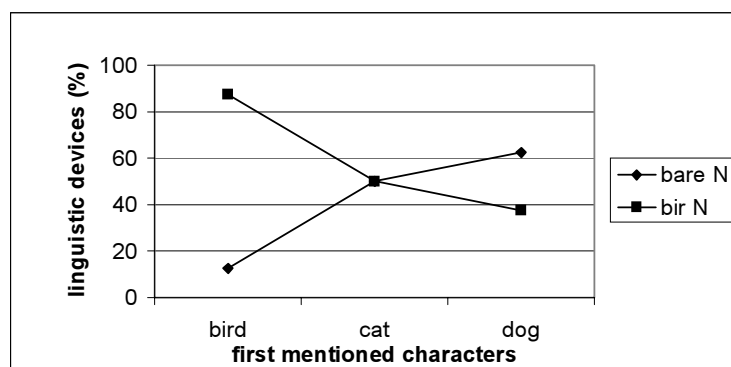


Figure 8. “Cat story”: First mentions by adults





*Horse story*

The adults were recorded in their home environment. They were to tell the stories in a natural way as they speak in everyday life. The findings from the first story are shown in Figure 7. In most of the adults' narratives the first protagonist *horse* is introduced with the indefinite marker *bir N* (50%). The adults use both terms *at* and *beygir* (for horse) in their narratives as did the children. Some of them use the noun *at* and others *baygir* for introducing the first character. For introducing the second character *cow* the adults again use the indefinite marker *bir N* in 75 % of the cases. The *bird* is presented as bare *N* in 56 % of the narratives.

*Cat story*

The second story elicited more simple narratives from the adults. All protagonists in their narratives are introduced as bare *N* or *bir N*. In most of the narratives the first character *bird* is introduced with the indefinite marker *bir N* – 87.5%. The second protagonist *cat* is presented equally as a bare *N* and *bir N* – 50 % each. And the third protagonist *dog* is dominantly presented as a bare *N* – 62.5%.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Comparing the results of 7-year-old children from this study with those of the 7-year-old children of Aarssen (1994), one sees that the bilingual children from the Netherlands use only bare *N* forms. In most of the cases the Turkish children from Bulgaria use the bare *N* (introducing the first protagonists in the narration – *horse* and *bird* in the Horse story and introducing the *bird* and the *cat* in the Cat story). But they use *bir N* forms introducing the *cow* in the Horse story and introducing the *dog* in the Cat story. Such differences do not exist among bilingual Turkish children from the Netherlands.

Comparing the results of the experimental groups with those of the control group it is obvious that the children have a tendency to use more linguistic diminutive forms than adults who very rarely use diminutive forms in their narratives. The narratives of the adults are more cohesive and coherent. The narratives of the second group of children (9 year olds) are very similar to those of the adults. Usually the adults use *bir N* forms for introducing the first protagonist and *bir N* or bare *N* for introducing the second and third protagonists. The same phenomenon is observed among the 9 year olds. In fact, the data of Aarssen (1994) on the Turkish children in the Netherlands show that the use of *bir N* in children's narratives starts after the age of 9. The evidence from those data show that age 9 is the critical one when children's language becomes more adultlike, and they start to introduce indefinite first mentions. This confirms a similar finding for Spanish and French children (Kail, 1998).

Other studies with monolingual Turkish children (Aksu-Koç, 1994) show that 9 year old narratives present a more stable picture referring to the components of the plot. Berman and Slobin (1994, p. 84) say that the "school age children are able to use an array of linguistic means to organize their narratives more rigorously, and to achieve a higher level of narrative coherence. They also manifest greater familiarity with the storytelling norms of their culture". Bilingual children often have influences from the majority culture as well. These influences are observed on all language levels, including the creation of a narrative. However, it seems all cultures show the same similarities regarding the ability of children to develop narratives. Most of the studies show that children around age 9 have

adultlike narrative features, and the present study with Turkish bilingual children from Bulgaria supports this further.

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