

Akdeniz Language Studies Conference 2012

Evaluation of a textual exercise in the 6th grade Turkish course workbook in terms of textuality

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Abstract

To understand a text, it is necessary to support a text with some exercises. The main focus of our study is the relationship between the textuality and textual exercises in the 6th Grade Turkish Course Workbook. For this purpose, in this study firstly, it has been analysed that which exercises are used in workbook to consolidate a text in the 6th Grade Turkish Course Course book and which skills are related to these exercises. Afterwards, by identifying the standard of textuality corresponding to the activity of skill area, suggestions have been made in this direction.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of ALSC 2012

Keywords: Turkish Course; workbook; textuality; textual exercise; skills.

1. Introduction

Turkish courses at primary education as a whole aim at our language to be used correctly, clearly, understandably and reinforce learning the language constructively and creatively. “What are expected from Turkish education during the eight –year of primary education are students’ improving their reading, listening/monitoring, speaking, and writing abilities in pursuant of the language rules” (Ministry of Education,2006:2). In this respect, the Turkish Curriculum for the 6th grade is considered to be a “transitional period” (Ministry of Education, 2006:2) for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. In the *Cousebook of the 6th grade* there are texts suitable for the subjects and in the *Student Workbook* there are activities that enhance the comprehension of the text. The aim of the Turkish course is to enable students understand

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what s/he reads or listens to and write what s/he thinks. Within these general aims, in order to enhance students' reading comprehension, students are given various texts and activities about the texts (Ataman, Çalık, Akyol, et. al., 2001: 26). By means of these activities, what the students gain at the end of the lesson are observed and tested (Ministry of Education, 2006: 8). It is stated in the *6th grade Turkish Curriculum* that the activities are intended to develop more than one skill, and teachers can use these activities as they are given or they can make necessary changes, prepare new activities, yet pay attention to which skills these activities are intended to develop. If these activities are suitable for the *standards of textuality*, it will be easier for the students to understand and comment on them, and make preparations for the other texts s/he is going to read.

2. Aims and Methodology

The aim of this study is to make suggestions, which contribute to text linguistics by evaluating an activity in the *Turkish 6th Grade Student Workbook*. By this way a text linguistic point of view will be provided to mother language teaching. It is planned to indicate that in terms of an active mother language learning process, it is possible to make creative comments only if the activities are created considering the *standards of textuality*. In this respect, firstly related literature is reviewed. Reading and method of reading are emphasized based on the deconstructionist approach of J. Derrida which enhanced creative interpretation. Later, this method is associated with standards of textuality and the text in the student workbook called "*Morning in the Forest*" is analysed by using descriptive analysis method.

3. Reading Method and Creative Interpretation in terms of the Texts in Turkish Course book and Exercises in Student Workbook.

In Turkey, Turkish (mother tongue) courses at primary level are covered systematically including the activities. "Mother tongue courses at primary level should not be considered only as a tool to improve children's mother tongue abilities, but should also be considered as a whole with their life, experience and world views. In other words, mother tongue lessons should enhance children's both *creative*, emotional and aesthetics abilities" (Yıldız et. al., 2006: 1). The most important resource for creative, emotional and aesthetics abilities that Yıldız et al. mentioned is mother tongue course book. The *Turkish Course book* is a supplementary material for reading, reading comprehension, narration, listening and writing processes. Via the *Turkish Course book*, students see the literary texts and the types of the texts (fictional and informative) that will be covered during the year.

The properties of the reading texts that are supposed to involve in the course books are listed as 28 items in the Turkish curriculum of Ministry of Education (2006: 56). According to the curriculum, the texts that are going to be included in the *Turkish Coursebook* ought to be suitable to the aims and the gains of the course (item 6); cohesive and coherent (item 13); gain the students fondness and habit of reading (item 20); enrich vocabulary knowledge of students and enhance learning new ones (item 23). As seen from the stated items, "texts' being written within a framework of a plan plays a crucial role in students' understanding these texts and the design of reading comprehension instruction. Restructuring the fictional texts enhances organization of the information units and their relations. Information units are the sentence or sentences that put forward a number or state a situation. The information units must be in an order to best present the topic" (Ataman et. al., 2001: 21). Including the text in the *Turkish Course book* which fit the items will help students understand the text better that they are reading. Using activities which are prepared by baring the texts in mind would enhance understanding and analysing the text in Turkish courses. The *deconstruction* method of Jacques Derrida which reveals the meaning in the texts and by this way enables the text to be analysed easily is called by Yavuz (1997: 55) as a kind of (creative) reading method and stated that in poetry Mallarme and in novel Sollers used this method. Yavuz (1997:

55) also stated that in this method the linguistic antecedents which form the text are examined. This means “the meaning of an element depends on either its being different from the other elements, or sometimes it depends on which word it refers to, former or latter” (Yavuz, 1997: 57). Thus, the activities that are going to be done after reading the text are also supposed to refer former or later elements. To that end, preparing different activities considering each type and each text is only possible with cohesive and *coherent* texts as a whole. The activities prepared for the texts without a message in it and without a clear plot cannot be expected to be *coherent*. For Derrida’s *reading method*, intention of the writer is not important. This method “erases what the writer has written and rewrites it” (Yavuz, 1997: 58-59).

The text is rewritten by the reader (students) in each reading. It is clear that the activities done after reading the text should consist of the questions not to assess the understanding of what the writer has meant, but to assess what the reader has written himself. In every reading the reader contributes to the text himself unconsciously. Especially for the 6th graders that contribution is bigger because of the fact that their imagination is more active. *Deconstruction* method directs the reader to *creative reading*. Conducting creative studies by this method is an approach which refuses only one objective meaning but analyses and comments on the text, and examines the connection between different parts of the text. This method can also be considered as a *reading method* which is independent from other readings. But what is meant here is not solely reading the text in Turkish course. What is meant is reading the text in the course book in accordance with the activities in the *Student Workbook*.

For that reason, this study is based on linguistic view which consists of *creative reading* and other reading methods which enable students be active in the lessons. Via those reader-centred activities which are based on *linguistic* view, students start to face with the text. The text gains the meaning the student attaches to it. All the activities done after reading the text are “the study of student’s (reader’s) finding the meaning of his/her own text”. In this respect, this study can also be considered as a part of post-structuralist approach which is formed by the linguistic structures. According to post- structuralist approach, an activity in the *Student Workbook* is examined in terms of text linguistics under the umbrella of linguistics. The ultimate aim is to show that the activities prepared considering the standards of textuality would enhance creative interpretation in each skill.

4. The Assessment of an Activity in the Turkish Student Workbook in terms of *Active Learning* and Standards of Textuality

In Turkish lessons, in order to check if the text read in the course book is comprehended or not, the activities in the Student workbook are used. That is a kind of *active learning* process. M. Wittrock (<http://education.calumet.purdue.edu/>) stated that *active learning* is an effective way of learning. According to the active learning of Wittrock, a student can do these in general: “Seeks for the meaning correlation between text and the title, makes prediction about the following paragraph, questions if the events in the text are possible to occur in the real life, tells the teacher about the familiar and meaningful examples about the text...” (<http://education.calumet.purdue.edu/>). The broaden form of the items stated here are included in *Primary Turkish Education (6th- 8th Grades) Standards of Course books* examining and assessing outline. In this outline, these standards are given about what the content of the student workbook should be: “the comprehension questions and activities must be about the text, theme, gains and higher skills; must be organized in order the students to gain critical and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, and interpreting skills; the comprehension questions and activities must be associated with the social/ daily life; the instructions concerning the associations in the cousebook must be given correctly; different questions types appropriate for gaining that the curriculum serves ; the scientific information about the content must be up to date; the activities must be given considering the concepts and examples suitable for the students’ levels...”(pg.7-8). As is seen, it is not enough only

reading the texts in the Turkish course book and speaking about the texts for students to achieve *active learning*. Students want to know why and how the text in the course book is written because each text has a special meaning, plot, and main idea. Therefore, the activities are supposed to be about how the students understand the text rather than what they understand.

The activities in *the Turkish Student Workbook* are used as a method in mother tongue teaching and keep student from being passive while s/he deals with the text. “In learning with the activities, it is determined that the learning process directs itself, and the trial-and-error and learning from mistakes methods are activated according to success and failure. As a result of learning with activities, apart from gaining children habit of working with adults, children are also taught the responsibility of finishing the activities correctly, and making interpretations, and the logic, validity and responsibility of their decisions.” (Yıldız et al., 2006: 3). By this way, learning of mother tongue in the classroom in a natural environment will become more enjoyable. The reason why a conscious Turkish learning is anticipated is just because it is *mother tongue practice* course. As long as the 6th graders improve their language abilities in that natural environment, they would perceive easily the text, the structure of the text, and the elements of the text. The activities in *the Turkish Student Workbook* are prepared by the writers consciously; they are not randomly prepared studies. Looking for the answers in the activities actually enables students reveal the four language skills. It can be stated that the students are in connection with the questions like they are in connection with the text they are reading if the questions are considered as texts.

The following items can be the basic assessment criteria for the questions in *the Student Workbook* in terms of standards of textuality:

- Are the questions/activities (cohesive and coherent)?
- Are the questions/activities informative?
- Are there questions/activities suitable for the situation?
- Are there questions/activities referring to (intertextuality)

As seen from these items, what is important is not the level of the activities in the workbook, but the types of the activities. While the students try to assess the text via the activities, s/he is also concerns about what those questions gain him/her. If these are prepared considering the standards of textuality, the students can;

- Make a connection with other disciplines (intertextuality),
- (Written Texts) starting from the question s/he is reading. (Günay, 2007: 213),
- Find the relations between the vocabulary and sentences in a text and find the grammatical relations in the activity (cohesion and coherence).
- Find the purpose of the question in the activity (intentionality).
- Assess if these questions are designed considering the purpose of the text. (If the purpose is clear, it is accepted by the student) (acceptability).
- Understand s/he would reach new information via the activities (informativity).
- Understand if the activity is suitable for his/her level, the purpose of the text and the type of the text (situationality).

The most important duty of the ones preparing questions is to combine the words from question text and other questions each other with the suitable connections. For example, provided that the question that would be asked after the sentence ‘*Little kid left the room.*’, ‘*What did the little kid take with him?*’, student could easily comprehend the cohesion relations in the text units even if the word ‘the room’ in the question is not mentioned, s/he will establish the connection in his/her mind. This is completely based on

the relation emerging from the text. In another sample, in the following sentence ‘*the child used to love his mother. His life changed after she went.*’ the pronoun ‘*she*’ refers to ‘the mother.’

In order to make student understand such a reference, after the question ‘How did his life change after she went?’ student could figure out that it was the child whose life changed after she went. In another reference example, ‘*You are so stubborn that you hurt me in any moment.*’ *I cannot understand how you hurt me! I am your mother.*’ ‘*I*’ is used as a pronoun. However, student can find out what this ‘*I*’ means in the following sentences. ‘*I*’ is used instead of ‘*mother*’ word.

Coşkun (2010) cited from De Beaugrande ve Derssler regarding (1981: 183-184) coherence: “Text type is dependent on discourse actions and situations. Unless harmony between text type and its fiction is provided, it may be impossible even to define the content and meaning of a text. For instance, whereas scientific texts are required to hold close relations in terms of cohesion and coherence, dialogue-based texts display a more free structure. Cohesion in poetic texts is sometimes achieved in non-traditional ways. “If text types are presented with inconvenient fictions, communication may be impaired” (Coşkun, 2010: 139). As supported in the quotation, provided that text types are presented with inconvenient activities to them, communication between student and activity cannot be carried out.

In order for activities to be coherent, there should not be lack of information in activity question. Besides, the events in the text and the correlations between these events must be transferred to questions in the activity. This also prevents disconnection between the parts of activities. For example, if the sentence ‘*If you give nicknames to animals, your end becomes such*’ is given place in the activity, but the meaning of ‘*becoming such*’ cannot be found in text, student has difficulty in understanding the text. Likewise, providing a sudden change of question types occurs in the parts of activities, this will hinder student from commenting. Moreover, it is significant to pay attention pronouns employed in the parts of addressing in activities in respect of *coherence*. For example, in the sentence ‘*What do you understand from this sentence?*’ instead of second-person plural used like in this sentence above, later as in the sentence ‘*Have you encounter such an incident before?*’ the use of second-person singular is emphasized. This does not display a *coherent* view. Furthermore, apart from the events that have taken place in the text including an explanation and advice in activities will prevent coherence of study.

5. Application

From the title of the study forth, *Morning in the Forest* selected from 6th grade Turkish course book was assessed in terms of coherence to the criteria of textuality, which is a subject of text linguistics in activities of Student Workbook. “Text linguistics deals more with principles merely in the construction of a text, production of texts, and communicative functions rather than the content of texts” (Şenöz, 2005: 58). Hence, it has been tried to account for how communication based on reading comprehension carried out between student and activities in Student Workbook in the light of text linguistics. *Morning in the Forest* text studies in the student workbook are composed of 8 activities. Two of these activities are for the field of grammar, one of the activities is for the field of writing and five of them are about the field of reading skill. In the first three activities, studies concerning *Morning in the Forest* text and in the other five activities studies independent of text subject are included.

1st Activity: It is for the field of reading skill and it covers *word meaning* subject. The relations of synonymy, antonymy, figurative meaning, and real meaning in texts have been touched on. While *meaning of word* issue is taken into consideration, from the examples forth the other meaning relations are mentioned from holistical point of view, moreover, students are asked to find samples for term

meaning and connotation in the text. In the activity under the title of *Synonymy*, 7 words are listed one under the other and students are asked to find synonymous ones in the texts.

In the activity under *Antonymy* title, 7 words from the text are put in order and students are asked to write antonymous ones opposite these 7 words. In the activity, finding synonymous and antonymous words results in constitution of a *hyponymy cluster*. In the activity under the title Real-figurative meaning, words with figurative meaning are used in *word groups* afterwards, students are required to do the same for the words with real meaning. The use of *synonymous* word could be explained with *lexical cohesion*. As Watson cited (2005: 140-141) from Halliday & Hasan (1976: 284) “lexical cohesion is composed of harmonious association of lexicographic units.” According to Halliday & Hasan (1976: 274-292), lexical cohesion could be assessed in five stages: “Repetitions, synonymous words, antonymous words, hyponymy, and collocation”. Kreyer (2006), who cited lexical cohesion from Hawkins (1978: 123), construes lexical cohesion as “common anaphora”. As is seen in the examples of this activity, words having meaning relations with one another have been opted out. For instance, the word **nature** is the hyponym of life and alive; the words **life** and **alive** are the hyponymy of the word nature.

While addressing *meaning relations* in word, with the use of real and figurative meanings in word groups ‘references’ have been made to *idiomatic meaning*. The relation between words and word groups in the activity and reflection of the meaning relations from the text also show *cohesional concordance*. “The cohesional concordance originates from the use of words related to the same semantic field.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 274-292). Another issue is that from the first activity to the eight activities all questions should be in second plural person. From this point of view, it could be said that all questions concerning the text are coherent.

2nd Activity: It is for the field of reading skill and covers *meaning in sentence* subject. In this activity, there are seven sentences having a meaning relation one with another, which are taken from the text.

- *The sun is about to rise, yet all voices are asleep.* (For a student who has read well and understood, it would be rather difficult to write a sentence having the same meaning to this sentence. After student reads *all voices* phrase, he will ask the question where voices?, because the subject is left implicit.)
- *A growing beam of light starts from the dawn.* (There is a lexical incoherency in this sentence. Is a beam of light bigger than the dawn meant in this sentence? , or is a growing beam of light meant?)
- *It has started to blow a musical air with crackling leaves and birds tweeting over us.* (It is not obvious over who blows the air with crackling leaves and birds tweeting. There is a drop of noun phrase and elliptical expression.)
- *The lights filtering from the branches show the stems of the trees **from now on**.* (With the word **from now on**, there is obscurity in terms of time period)
- *Is it possible to think as decorative and vital beauty as the composition of soil, water, and tree?* (What is beautiful in the sentence is not mentioned. It is unclear whether it is the beauty of the forest or the beauty of nature. If there had not been a drop of noun phrase here, cohesion could be ensured.)
- *What things does water bestow to soil, soil bestow to tree, tree bestow to environment and humanity?* (The words **water**, **soil**, and **tree** are the hyponymies of the word **environment**. Student, by the medium of this sentence, could realize the interrelated words.)
- *It is time to farewell to the forest.* (The sentence, which is the focus of the text, shows the coherence of the sentences put in order above. With this final example, student will get the word forest remained implicit. The sorting made of seven sentences in the activity is coherent. However, student will not be able to be aware of the pattern of the sorting since necessary instructions are not available. Accordingly, not the sorting of the sentences, but the incoherence in question type and instruction draw the attention .)

3rd Activity: It is an activity designed for reading skill. The question *'Illustrate one of the sceneries told in the text.'* can be assessed as *intertextuality*. It is seen that this activity is an interdisciplinary study related to painting course.

4th Activity: The question *'What are the meanings of the symbols on some products you see?'* appears to be *intertextual* concerning geography course. In the meanwhile, with the exploration what these three symbols mean, student will reach new information. This could also be explained with the standard of *informativity*.

In the same activity, the question *'What is the importance of doing what these symbols require in terms of forests for you? Please write.'* is a *written text*. "Written text is a kind of constructed text in order to assess a subject...A subject that could be employed for written text may be in the form of not only a single word, but also a question or a quotation." (Günay, 2007: 213-214). This study serves to create awareness of environment. Hence, it has an aim (*intentionality*): 'To make students protect the natural life'. At the same time as the aim in the question clear, this might also be associated with the standard of *acceptability*.

5th Activity: In the question a graph *showing the distribution of forest in Turkey within the regions* is given. Then these four sentences are required to be identified as correct or incorrect according to the graph. This activity is an *intertextuality* study on mathematics and geography and students are aimed at reaching new information via this graph. The second question of the same activity is follows: *'Imagine that you were the Minister of Environment and Forestry, what would you do in order to resolve the imbalance of distribution of forest within the regions? Write below please.'* This question is appealing for children considering the aims of the text (contingency).

6th Activity: This activity is an independent activity from the text *Morning in the Forest* and focuses on writing skills. *'First read aloud the following sentences with the guidance of your teacher. Then use the abbreviations in bold in a sentence by adding new suffixes and prefixes.'* That is not a question aiming at reinforcing the text. Further shifting from the above examples to this kind of questions abruptly creates an incoherent situation.

At the end of this activity, there is a study called *'information box'*. In this part the full forms of abbreviations are given. This box has an informative function. Yet, only three of the abbreviations are about environment (FİSKOBİRLİK; TÜBİTAK; TEMA). The others are independent from text and can only be described in (*intertextuality*).

7th Activity: The first question of this activity is a fill-in-the-blanks activity. The words are required to be added necessary possessive suffixes or inflexinal suffixes. None of the ten sentences in this activity are about the text read. The second question of the activity is a self-assessment form. The aim of this form is to observe how many correct and how many incorrect answers were given by the student.

8th Activity: in this part there is a sample text called *'The Little Seagull'*. The text is about two kids called Gürcan and Kaya who find a little seagull. In the first question about the text, the students are required to write the bare forms of the underlined words. In the second question, the underlined words in the first question are referred by saying *'Be careful about the last letters of these words.'*

6. Results and Suggestions

The activities in *the Student Workbook* should be constructed suitable for the theme, structure and genre of the text. By this way, the distributions of skills in terms of genres and text and the content of the activities suited to this distribution should be assessed considering ‘text linguistics’ because the distribution of skills within the activities are inconsistent. For instance, the activities about the text *Morning in the Forest* there are five activities on reading, one activity on writing, and two activities on grammar. Moreover, only two of the activities are questions about the text. Because of that reason the student would not have a chance of interpreting what s/he has read. Via the activities constructed considering the standards, the text can better be understood. That is an important way of improving *reading skill*. All of the language skills are important in improving mother tongue. Yet, reading and understanding the text correctly are the main goal of all languages. Any kinds of language skill activities will be left half-finished if it is covered without understanding the text. The activities constructed considering the standards of the textuality will also be a preparation for the upcoming texts. Turkish course is not only a *text reading course*. It is a process during which the background information carried by the students are activated and reinforced by other activities to scaffold the views of the students. By this way, the students defines the key concepts in the text, understands the relations between words, sentences and paragraphs. The student also learns what the text is about, how and why it is presented. Further, s/he starts to comprehend the usage of phrases and how the elements of these phrases came together. These comprehension activities, as it is stated at the beginning of this study, improve the creative interpretation skills. The activities constructed considering the standards of textuality enhance understanding of the text and enable anticipation of the message in the text. Because of that reason, the activities in the Turkish course books or in *the Turkish Course Student Workbook* are supposed to enhance comprehension of the text.

The types of the activities in Turkish Workbooks must be enriched. Alternative activities should be developed in order the text to be understood completely. By inclusion of these activities in Turkish workbooks, students would easily read and understand every kind of text, and make interpretations on them. As a result, we think that the post reading activities constructed considering text linguistics will be beneficial in comprehending the texts and establish a ground for further readings.

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