

Acquisition of Second Language by Children of Immigrant Turkish Families in Romania: Parents' Role

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Abstract

This contribution examined participation and performance of Turkish immigrant parents' role and their children's language acquisition and development in linguistically different context. Romania is the country with huge number of Turkish immigrant's families. The children live with parents who speak little or no English, they are taught mostly English speaking teachers at the school. The aim of this study is to explain the means by which immigrant parents support their children study English effectively and maintain their mother tongue.

The data presented in this study are part of my following research project will be carried out at the International School of Bucharest and International Computer High school of Bucharest. Four data collection instruments were used in the study: an activity chart, a parent questionnaire, an observation guide during home visits and parent interviews

The study shows different factors and parent's role encourage children's acquisition of languages. The factors are: the parents' attitudes towards language in general, parents' interest in both mother tongue and English, joint parent-child activities and direct linguistic exchange between child and parent, teacher flexibility, teacher-parent communication, English classes for parents, school support, and parents' concern to school support.

The problems are: parents' lack of English proficiency to communicate effectively about children's school learning, and lack of effective linguistic link between home learning and school learning.

Keywords

Second language acquisition, immigrant children and families, parents' role

1. Introduction

Education plays very important role for the successful soci-economic integration of immigrants. For immigrant children and their families in particular, the participation and attainments in the education system of the country of the immigration are key components of their integration into society.

Despite the fact that most of the world's population learns and functions in two or more languages [11,360], second language learning has been a topic of

controversy in many countries, and especially the United States [25]. While young learners acquiring two or more languages simultaneously try to speak both effectively by the early primary years, second language acquisition is perceived as particularly challenging to both teachers and learners.

In many countries acquisition of multiple languages is an assumed fact, it is known that children can learn more than one language and use both of them effectively. When immigrant children start schooling they get used to academic and simple English and Romanian by their peers and teachers however their native language might not be available outside their families. The children then hesitate between their native language and English. If the immigrant parents don't know English the children's acquisition of language will be much more difficult and mostly parents won't be able to help their children.

The part of my study presents the role of immigrant parents in supporting and helping their children's language acquisition. My research process involved 15 Turkish immigrant families who live in Bucharest with children ranging 32 months to 6 years. This age group is extremely important because of the necessity of language at the school instruction and other activities outside the home. The study reports immigrant parents' procedure used to help their children to face linguistically changeable settings of mother tongue at home and English at school. The study also investigates the problems confronted by their teachers.

2. Study Framework

My current study is supported by four language perspectives on language acquisition.

1. Identifying the sound in childhood
2. Transition from receptive language skills to productive language skills
3. Acquisition of multiple languages at the same time is more effective than acquisition of them successfully.
4. The skepticism of childhood bilingualism

2.1 Explanation of Study Framework

2.1.1 Identification of Language Sound

Research evidence suggests that young children perceive language differently from other sounds. Newborn babies were found to display more activity in the left side of their brains when they heard language, and more activity on the

right side of their brains when they heard music [20] This “natural inclination” to language is in line with the perception that children are “wired” for language [10, and 13]. Everything around us offers linguistic contexts which are needed for achieving language acquisition capability. The nativist point of view is inefficient explanation for language acquisition, i.e., behaviorist, cognitive, pragmatic, social interactionist and information processing interpretations have proposed other wisely sound approaches that pays much more attention to the phenotype (genetics and environment) rather than the genotype (genetics alone).

While theoretical approaches will continue to be debated, practical observations of the factors affecting children’s learning of two or more languages are of more interest to researchers, teachers and parents. Research has documented strategies such as scaffolding [28], “expansion” and “recasts” [4, 360], “expansion” and 518 S. L. P. MUSHI “extension” [15, 149] to help children in their process of language acquisition. While these strategies help children use words and sentence structures they learn, they are not universal [27], yet all typically developing children experience strong urge to communicate and be socially connected.

2.1.2 Receptive Language Skills Precede Productive Language Skills

Research has shown that children acquire the receptive skills of language before they acquire the productive skills [18 and 16 and 24]. This means that before children can pronounce words they hear and find the meaning of the words. The two processes, comprehension and production should support each other. For instant, if a young learner is able to ask “where ” the young learner has definitely acquired the sense of place. Intercourse with others is essential if a young learner is to hear a word and find the meaning to it. When the language that is spoken at home and at school is different, teachers and parents face very difficult situation and it is hard to accomplish this role by parents and teachers.

2.1.3 Simultaneous Versus Successive Second Language Learning

Learning two languages at the same time is more difficult than learning one language. But due to help of both languages in the social circumstances it is available and possible to acquire two or more languages successfully. Young learners in multilingual settings get help to study simultaneously and successfully in daily life. This model is not possible for immigrant learners disseminating themselves into predominantly English, Romanian or other languages speaking society. These young

children have to acquire English after the mother tongue has been learnt. Acquiring second language needs parental and school support and help.

2.1.4 The Skepticism of Multiple Languages

Although the number of children who grow up learning two languages may be just as high as that of monolingual children, childhood bilingualism is poorly understood by many educators and regarded with skepticism by others. The term “bilingual children” has been used in different meanings in different situation. This term often misused to mean “children who already speak mother tongue successfully and fluently, but are only beginning to learn different language”. This can be deceiving interpretation of bilingualism. To be bilingual, one has to speak two languages fluently enough to be understood. Individuals who cannot speak fluently in any of the two languages are semilinguals [25] while individuals who are already fluent in one language and are trying to learn a “second” language are second or foreign language learners, depending on the socio-linguistic context [5 and 22]. If the new language being learned is spontaneously accessible within the socio-linguistic context, then it is being learned as a second language [1]. If the language being learned is used only in specific contexts like the classroom or the legal system, or the medical system or in businesses then the language is being learned as a foreign language. Children exposed to two or more languages at the same time can simultaneously achieve native speaker competence in all of them [14]. This is because in simultaneous second language learning the child’s brain accure new synaptic connections to adapt structures of the three languages at the same time..

2.2 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are;

1. How do immigrant parents’ attitudes towards their mother tongue and their attitudes towards English?
2. What languages other than English do teachers of young children deal with directly or indirectly in trying to understand the children and help them learn successfully?
3. What kind of activities do immigrant parents use to develop their children’s skills of language?

4. How does the school associate with the family to promote language learning among the immigrant children?
5. What kind of support does the school accommodate the immigrant families to promote their children's communication using English and learning in general?
6. How conscious are immigrant parents to the support accommodated by the school, given the language obstacles?

3. Procedure

My research process involved 15 Turkish immigrant families who live in Bucharest with children ranging 32 months to 6 years. This age group is extremely important because of the necessity of language at the school instruction and other activities outside the home. The study reports immigrant parents' procedure used to help their children to face linguistically changeable settings of mother tongue at home and English at school. The study also investigates the problems confronted by their teachers.

3.1 Materials

I used four instruments in my research: an activity chart, a parent questionnaire, an observation guide during home visits and parent interviews. The questionnaire accumulated information on preferences, parents' attitudes, and attitudes towards English and the child's language used at home (mother tongue). The observation guide used during home visits accumulated information on the use of English and the use of mother tongue. Parent interviews helped me to make clear my observations as a way to crosscheck meanings with the parents. This helped to make sure the internal validity of the study.

3.2 Data Collection

I gathered the data in four different ways in order to evaluate the coincidence of the findings. For instant, data from the parents' questionnaire were compared to the interview replies and observations to make a decision how closely the data indicated similar results. When the different kinds of data appeared to give contrasting messages, the parent interviews came to save. The interviews brought out additional information that helped me to make rational sense of the four sets of data.

3.3 Data Analyses

The data from the parent's questionnaire, observation and interviews was analyzed to deduce topics connected to language learning in the variable settings, home and school. The topics specified were: attitudes of parents towards English and their mother tongue, spontaneous linguistic interaction with their children, relating to school and home linguistic activities, and school support.

4. Findings

The findings of the study were classified in six parts

1. Parents' Attitudes towards English and mother tongue
2. A language profile of the groups studied
3. Immigrant children and with their parents' interaction
4. Spontaneous interaction at home and school-home linguistic coordination
5. School help
6. Parent conscious to school help

4.1 Parents' Attitudes Towards English and Mother Tongue

Among the 15 toddlers and preschoolers studied, who came from families that valued the mother tongue Turkish as extremely as English. Parents' fair ratings of English versus mother tongue on a scale of 1¼lowest, 4¼ highest were 3.8 and 3.3, respectively, showing that parents wanted their children to be skilled in both English and their mother tongue, with slightly more preference for English. Parents' attitudes towards English and mother tongue (L1) were compared to children's accurate skills to speak the languages. Although 90.05% of the parents indicated they wanted their children to speak English well. It seemed that parents overrated their children's abilities in English. All the observations during the English classes and home interviews with children indicated that the children seemed to make afford with English much harder than the parents indicated. The parents considered their children were smoother in English than the children actually were.

4.2 Immigrant Parents' Interactions with Their Children

Parents communicated with their children in different ways. The activities are; drawing and coloring, making paper flowers, sort, going for a walk, reading, arranging books, storytelling, singing a favorite song, preparing a meal, asking

direct questions. My researcher classified the parent child communication into three categories:

- (1) Together parent-child activities without linguistic statement,
- (2) Together parent-child activities with linguistic statement, and

(3) parent-child statement alone. Pearson Correlation analysis of parent statement (outside together activity), parent statement during parent-child together activity, and child statement showed linear relationships to differing area. Instances of communication during together activities were highly connected to child statements. It was amazing that this connection was higher ($r = 0.84$) than the correlation between parents' statements (without together activity) and child statement ($r = 0.30$).

**Table 1 Parents' Attitudes towards English and L1
Compared to Their Apprehended Skills of the Children to Speak the Languages**

Question	Very well	About average	Only a little	Not at all	Total
1. How well do you wish your child to speak your first language (mother tongue=L1)?	13 %91.5	1 % 4.25	1 % 4.25	0 % 0	15 % 100
2. How well do you wish your child to speak English?	14 % 95.5	0 % 0	1 % 4.5	0 % 0	15 % 100
3. How well can your child speak your first language?	4 %12.20	10 % 84.75	1 % 3.5	0 % 0	15 % 100
4. How well can your child speak English?	9 % 76.4	5 %19.48	0 % 0	1 %4.12	15 % 100

4.3 Spontaneous Interaction at Home and School-home Linguistic Integration

Interviews and observations showed that while exposure to the two languages was significant for the children, what was even more significant was the spontaneous use of language. Integration of the two languages, with English being spoken more at school, and mother tongue being spoken merely at home was vital. The parents studied were mostly of fathers who worked outside the home, and mothers who were housewives. It accrued that the fathers seemed to have more education than the mothers,. There was also a cultural attitude from interviews that

the mother was more likely to stay home irrespective of her education level. It looked to be much easier for the mother to be given a job outside the home if the father was also given a job.

The mothers occupied with the children more than the fathers did. That's why the most linguistic interaction at home was in the mother tongue, since the mother spoke little or no English. During home visits it was noticed that fathers sometimes communicated to their young children in both English and in mother tongue. The children would understand and respond correctly. When the response was linguistic, it was not inevitably in sufficient English, or in English at all. Sometimes the child answered in two or three words in English, and sometimes definitely in the mother tongue.

According the resaerch and information from the teachers most children spoke English to their fathers and they spoke Turkish (mother tongue) to their mothers. It indicates that children relate thier fathers and school to the English, mothers and home to the mother tongue.

4.4 School Support For Linguistic Skills

School support was very important for these linguistically challenging children. Accessibility of materials to communicate with, other children from different language backgrounds, teacher support were major factors that were noticed to help the Turkish children during the school day. Two children could be corrolating with materials and, since they both could not speak English smoothly they would express themselves mostly through actions. When an English speaking child communicated with a non-English speaking child the latter lacked the words or the proficiency to answer in English, therefore a quarell over toys and materials was more likely.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The important findings of this study were:

1. Parents wished their children to be successful in both English and in Turkish (their mother tongue).
2. The more parents got involved in a together activity with their children the more the children got involved in linguistic attitudes.
3. There was little calibration between home and school in the form of spontaneous linguistic development.

4. School support was available and helpful to develop language skills for the immigrant children and parents to learn English.
5. There was little parent concern to the support contributed by the school

This study was an example to the researcher and hopefully to readers in connection with the factors that support young learners from immigrant families acquire English and their mother tongue successfully. Parents' role in their young children's education is important, and so is the achievement to relate to school learning activities and the child's home activities.

One of the most important immigrant children learning steps is parents' motivation to have their language and English successfully in school and home. In different language classroom instruction will be a supplementary means to establish the linguistic fiber of the Romanian society. Different language acquisition develops the intellect. By using and living in multiple language environments the society will acquire the intellectual rewards.

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