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# The comprehension of humorous texts by Turkish first graders

Nalân Kızıltan

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This study will be of great help for language acquisition studies since it discusses to what extent children's cognitive development affects their comprehension of humorous texts.

In this study, two groups of 60 Turkish first graders in Turkey have been tested to determine to what extent they are able to understand six Nasreddin Hodja jokes through reading and listening skills. Although the first graders are significantly better at understanding the jokes through reading skills than listening skills, due to the design of the jokes, none of the groups has shown significant success in comprehending the jokes.

In conclusion, humorous texts may not be comprehended well by seven-year-olds because these texts have a structure specific to humor, in which the paradox between superstructure and substructure causes laughter and explosiveness. Since they are beginning readers and at the very beginning of the Concrete Operational Period, they can be said to have failed to comprehend the punch line hidden in each joke. Therefore, the results of this study may be taken into account in first language acquisition studies. It is important to point out that texts chosen for beginning readers should match their current language development.

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## 1. Introduction

Books are a great medium for introducing the world, imagined or real, to children and teaching them how to cope with its problems and dangers. They help children to develop their language skills. Books can expand vocabulary and organize more cohesive and coherent texts. Glazer (1991: 103) holds that "children's language develops best in an environment where mature language is heard, where children have many opportunities to communicate with others, and where language is presented in context".

Children learn language by constructing for themselves the grammar of the language they hear. They need to hear stories and see print in their environments. Children can be exposed to adult language in literature, hearing varied and complex syntactical structures. Therefore, through textbooks, children are exposed to some literary materials. However, the difficulty level of the language in those literary materials must be taken into account. Literary texts may be full of some incomprehensible in-

put that uses unknown and ambiguous vocabulary items and compound complex sentences. In Turkish primary schools, this difficulty level is adjusted according to the Bulletin of Notices (Tebliğler Dergisi) published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, which puts forth the educational objectives in elementary schools. For instance, in the first grade, teachers aim to help students

1. develop the ability to listen to the teacher or a story for 3-5 minutes,
2. learn to write words, and take dictation what they have listened to,
3. be interested in learning to read,
4. pronounce the vocabulary items accurately according to Turkish phonetic rules. (Kızıltan 1995)

Since reading plays an important role in the development of children's language within the school program, reading texts are chosen according to the criteria given by the Bulletin of Notices (Tebliğler Dergisi). According to the Bulletin of Notices, reading texts are chosen, taking the following criteria into consideration.

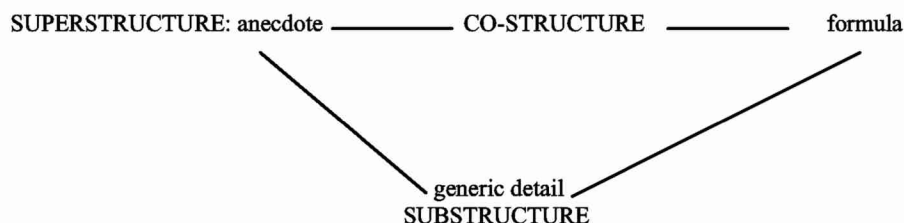
1. Texts must be suitable for children of this age group; they must appeal to children's interests and pleasures.
2. Texts must be good examples of Turkish literature.
3. Texts must be appropriate to the subjects of other courses students take. Appropriateness is valid only for the choice of vocabulary items (Kızıltan 1995).

Although reading texts are chosen according to the above criteria, they may not be appropriate for children's present literacy level or appeal to their immediate interests in reading or listening. For example, humorous texts may be problematic for first graders since humorous texts are different from other narratives in terms of syntactic and semantic structures. Nash (1986: 1-13) points out that humorists compress the soul of wit, word-play and banter; slogans and captions and catchwords; allusion and parody; ironies; satires.

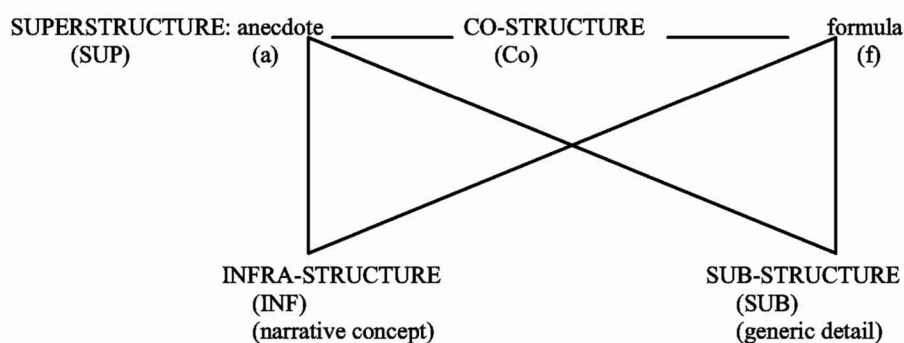
First graders may not comprehend witty compression or comic expansion properly since their reading skills are still in the process of emerging. Listening skills may help them to understand the culture of the joke, the natural facts, logic and language of jokes if their schemata, which is knowledge of the world activated from memory represents the children's knowledge about the underlying concepts, objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions.

Özünlü (1992: 194), referring to Raskin (1985) describes "two types of texts one of which is in the superstructure and the other of which is in the substructure. If the elements in both texts do not overlap, the paradox between these texts cause laughter and explosiveness".

Nash (1986: 32) presents a simple structure of humor, assuming that the superstructure is some kind of formula, and that the substructure consists of a few relevant generic details.



Nash (1986: 33) also presents a complex structure of humor:



“A complex piece of humor involves diverse relationships between what is overt—i.e. the texts—and what is covert—i.e. the generic detail and the narrative concepts” (Nash 1986: 33).

Nash (1986: 34-36) explains design of the joke in two main parts: Pre-location, which is some sort of preparation for the discharge of the joke and location, which clinches or discharges the joke. Pre-location embodies three elements: the *signal* that a joke is intended, the *orientation*, the type of joke, and the *context* in which the joke operates, whereas location embodies locus, which is a word or phrase clinching or discharging the joke. Witty compression is accomplished through foregrounding, parallelism, repetition and deviation (Özünlü 1992: 199).

On the other hand, from a pragmatic point of view, if Grice’s cooperative principles such as quantity, quality, relation and manner are violated in the text, they may create locus. Raskin (1985: 56) considers presuppositions, implicature and speech acts as humorous elements (quoted in Özünlü 1999: 140). Besides, if any one of Halliday’s (1975) seven basic functions—the instrumental, the regulatory, the interactional, the personal, the heuristic, the imaginative or the representational—is violated, it may cause laughter and explosiveness.

When the afore-mentioned elements are taken into account in a humorous text, children who are said to be in Piaget’s (1995) concrete operational period may not

understand the logic and likelihood of a joke. Although children begin to use rudimentary logic and problem solving during the concrete operational period, which covers roughly the ages of seven to twelve, if they are not broadly informed before being exposed to the humorous texts, they are unable to understand the humor. In humorous texts, if the children are exposed to a context in which the punch line is not comprehended, the input may not be comprehensible for them according to Krashen (1985), since it is beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language. The input must be slightly beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language (what Krashen (1985) calls 'i+1') for both comprehension and acquisition to occur (Lightbown & Spada 2000: 39). Therefore, the context should be defined through the students' schemata, their world knowledge. In this way, children may be able to understand the joke regardless of the complex structure of humor in which the superstructure is made up of both the infra-structure and sub-structure of humor.

Recognizing the importance of jokes in the cognitive development of children, textbooks for children include some jokes in their selections. But if children are not able to read closely an unfamiliar literary text of above-average difficulty with good comprehension of its content and literary characteristics, the joke goes nowhere, and it may cause some comprehension problems. Therefore, in this study, the comprehension of the humorous texts by first graders who have just learned how to read has been tested using six Nasreddin Hodja jokes.

The aim of this study is to examine whether the first graders are competent enough to comprehend the humorous texts.

In order to understand to what extent these jokes match the level of the first graders' language development, the study addresses the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the overall comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills?
2. Are the first graders successful in comprehending the jokes in terms of the reading and listening skills?
3. Do the first graders show significant comprehension differences between the various jokes?
4. What types of questions are most frequently answered correctly by the first graders in reading and listening comprehension skills?
5. Which jokes are understood better by the first graders?
6. How competent are the first graders in comprehending Turkish humorous texts which conform to their current level of competence?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Sources of Data**

The research is based on sets of data from 120 first graders in Samsun Atatürk Elementary School, whose students come from middle class families.

## 2.2. Data Collection

As humorous texts, six Nasreddin Hodja jokes in the first graders' Turkish textbooks were chosen: "The quilt is gone and the fight is over", "The cauldron died", "Do you believe a donkey's word rather than mine?", "What day is it today?", "Let the quilted turban read", "One who gives the money".

During the summer semester of the academic year, the first graders were divided into two groups. Each joke was given to both groups in the respective Turkish lesson. To assess listening skills, the researcher read aloud the above given jokes to 60 first graders twice, and the 60 first graders were then asked to read these jokes twice silently. After the first graders had read the jokes, the written texts of the jokes were collected. Comprehension of each joke was tested by a series of questions designed to detect to what extent the first graders had understood the jokes with regard to reading and writing skills. Although both groups were given the written questions prepared by the researcher on separate sheets beforehand, each question was read out loud and the students were given enough time to write their answers on the sheets. Then the answer sheets were collected. 41 questions were given in total.

Computerized evaluation of the data received from the questions was conducted research assistant Mustafa Caner and the Department of Statistics at Ondokuz Mayıs University. The programs used for this purpose were SSPS 10-0, Minitab 13-0 and Microsoft Excel.

T-tests and proportion tests were run to explore possible differences between the comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills.

## 3. Findings

The findings are given in the order of the research questions.

1. Comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills.

To test whether there is a significant difference between the comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills, a t-test was conducted. The results are as follows:

Table 1: Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills.

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,495	2,15	0,034
Listening	60	0,432		

$$P=0.034 < \alpha=0.05$$

The first graders' comprehension scores show a significant difference between reading and listening skills. According to these scores, the first graders' reading skills are better than their listening skills.

2. The first graders' comprehension scores indicate that they have not understood the jokes well in terms of either reading or listening skills. The mean comprehension score for each skill is as follows:

$$\text{Mean}_{\text{Listening}} = 0.432$$

$$\text{Mean}_{\text{Reading}} = 0.495$$

According to these results, the first graders are better in comprehending jokes in terms of reading than in terms of listening. But none of them indicated success in fully comprehending the jokes.

3. The comprehension of each joke according to reading and listening skills.

a) "The quilt is gone and the fight is over"

In Table 2, the t-test results of the first graders according to reading and listening skills have been given.

Table 2. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,551		
Listening	60	0,468	2,12	0,036

$$P=0.036 < \alpha=0.05$$

As can be seen, the difference between the comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills is significant. It may be concluded that the first graders are more successful in reading skills than they are in listening skills.

b) "The cauldron died"

In Table 3, the t-test results of the first graders according to reading and listening skills have been given.

Table 3. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,490		
Listening	60	0,438	1,33	0,185

$$P=0.185 > \alpha=0.05$$

As can be seen, the difference between the skills in this respect is insignificant.

c) "Do you believe a donkey's word rather than mine?"

In Table 4, the t-test results of the first graders according to reading and listening skills have been given.

Table 4. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,406		
Listening	60	0,464	-1,63	0,106

$P=0.106 > \alpha=0.05$

According to the above results, it may be said that the difference between the skills is not significant.

d) "What day is it today?"

In Table 5, the t-test results of the first graders in terms of reading and listening skills have been shown.

Table 5. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,457		
Listening	60	0,342	3,18	0,002

$P=0.002 < \alpha=0.05$

The first graders seem to have comprehended the joke better by means of their reading skills. The difference is significant.

e) "Let the quilted turban read"

In Table 6, the t-test results of the first graders in terms of reading and listening skills have been presented.



Table 6. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders according to reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,475	2,57	0,011
Listening	60	0,369		

$P=0.011 < \alpha=0.05$

As the results indicate, the first graders have comprehended the joke significantly worse through listening skills than reading skills.

f) "One Who Gives the Money"

In Table 7, the t-test results of the first graders in terms of reading and listening skills have been given.

Table 7. Difference-of-means between comprehension scores of the first graders in terms of reading and listening skills

Skill	N	Mean	t-Test	P-Value
Reading	60	0,587	1,73	0,086
Listening	60	0,514		

$P=0.086 > \alpha=0.05$

As can be seen, the first graders have performed more highly in getting the meaning of the joke through reading skills. The difference between the comprehension skills is significant.

4. Tables 8-11 illustrate comprehension scores in listening and reading skills for each question. (black indicates wrong answers, grey indicates incomplete answers and white indicates correct answers).

Table 8. Frequency of the comprehension scores according to the questions of the first three jokes in reading skills

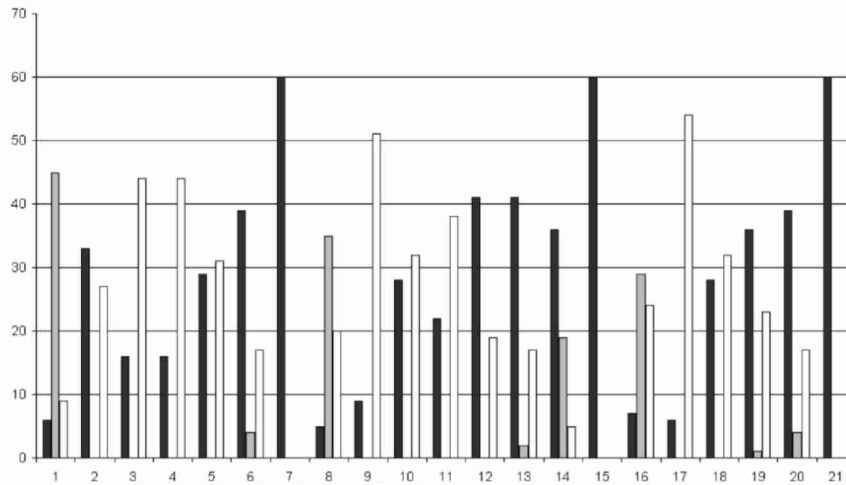


Table 9. Frequency of the comprehension scores according to the questions of the last three jokes in reading skills

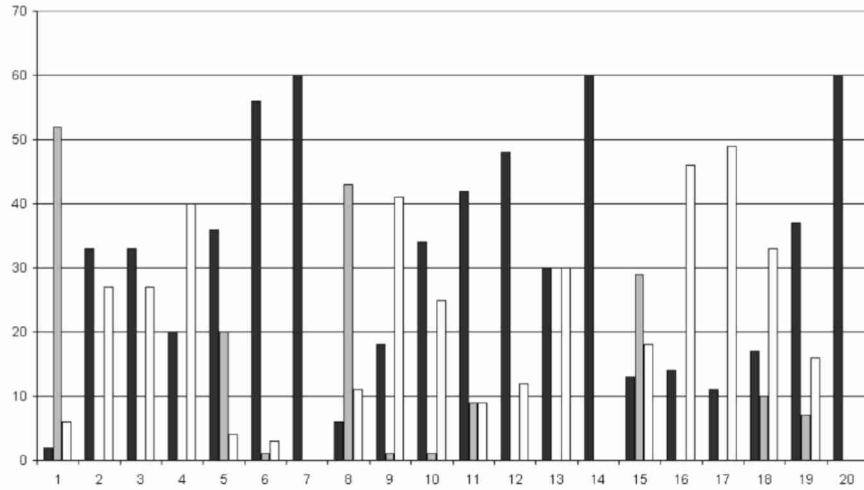


Table 10. Frequency of the comprehension scores according to the questions of the first three jokes in listening skills

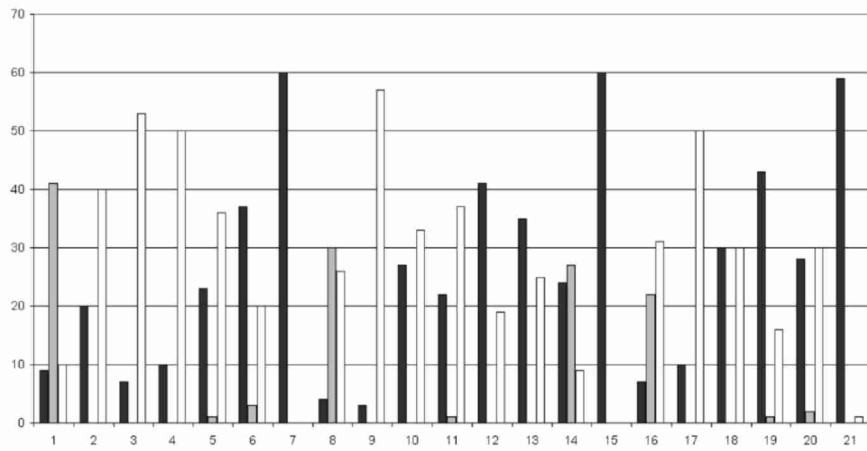
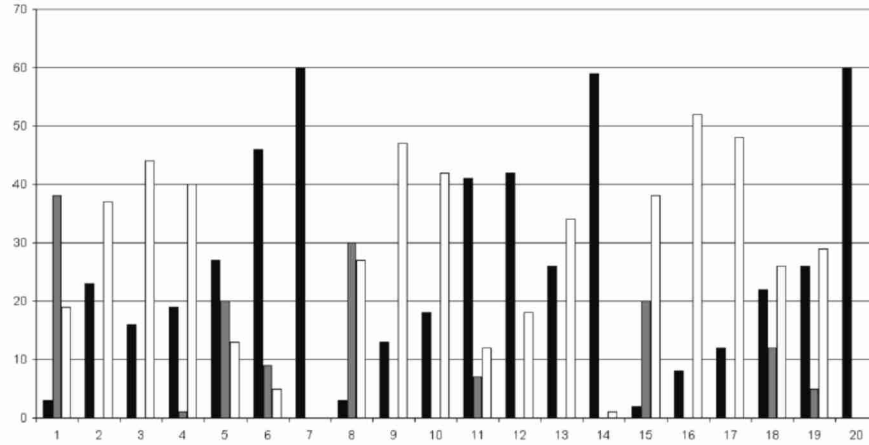


Table 11. Frequency of the comprehension scores according to the questions of the last three jokes in listening skills



Tables 8-11 indicate that the correct answers are less in number when they are compared with the wrong answers. Additionally, incomplete correct answers have also been given by the first graders.

The following comprehension questions were used to check to what extent the first graders were able to understand Nasreddin Hodja jokes. Additionally, Tables 8-11 show the frequency of the comprehension scores in listening and reading skills on the following questions for each joke .

### Questions

“The quilt is gone and the fight is over”

1. Who are the characters of the joke?
2. Why was Hodja curious?
3. What did Hodja take on his back when he went out?
4. Why did Hodja go out with his quilt wrapped around himself?
5. Why did Hodja go inside helplessly?
6. What utterance of Hodja makes us laugh?
7. Why is this joke so funny?

“The cauldron died”

8. Who are the characters of the joke?
9. What did Hodja borrow from his neighbour?
10. What did Hodja do while he was giving the cauldron back to his neighbour?
11. How many times did Hodja borrow the cauldron from his neighbour?
12. What did Hodja’s neighbour do when Hodja said that his cauldron had died?
13. What did Hodja say when his neighbour said “Cauldrons don’t die!”
14. What utterance of Hodja makes us laugh?

15. Why is this joke so funny?

“Do you believe a donkey’s word rather than mine?”

16. Who are the characters of this joke?
17. What did Hodja’s neighbour ask Nasreddin Hodja?
18. What was Nasreddin Hodja’s answer about where the donkey went?
19. What did the neighbour say when he heard the donkey braying?
20. What utterance of Nasreddin Hodja makes us laugh?
21. Why is this joke so funny?

“What day is it today?”

22. Who are the characters of the joke?
23. Where does Hodja live?
24. Where does Hodja go?
25. What does the man who approaches Hodja ask?
26. How does Hodja answer the man’s question?
27. What utterance of Nasreddin Hodja makes us laugh?
28. Why is this joke so funny?

“Let the quilted turban read”

29. Who are the characters of the joke?
30. Why did the man give his letter to Hodja?
31. What did Hodja do when he took the letter?
32. What did the man say to Hodja?
33. What utterance of Nasreddin Hodja makes us laugh?
34. Is the joke funny?
35. Why is this joke so funny?

“One who gives the money?”

36. Who are the characters of the joke?
37. What did the children of the neighborhood asked Hodja to buy in the marketplace?
38. Did Hodja buy all of them a whistle?
39. Whom did Hodja buy a whistle? Why?
40. What utterance of Nasreddin Hodja makes us laugh?
41. Why is this joke so funny?

5. When the findings in Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 are scrutinized, the first graders have understood the jokes “The one who pays the Money” and “The Quilt is Gone and the Fight is Over” better in both reading and listening skills than the other jokes in the study.

### 3. Discussion

According to the findings, the first graders seemed significantly incompetent in understanding the jokes. The problematic jokes in terms of reading skills are “Do you believe a donkey’s word rather than mine” and “What day is it today?”. In listening

skills the problematic jokes are “Let the quilted turban read” and “What day is it today?”. In explaining the first graders’ comprehension of the texts, their linguistic competence, needs, interests, and knowledge on the subjects in the given jokes must be taken into account.

The students have not comprehended the witty compression and comic expansion properly since they are “unnamed and unacknowledged” (Brady 1999) in the superstructure of the jokes, but they are given in the substructure of the joke, which contains a few relevant generic details. These details can only be understood if the meaning is activated by means of the learners’ schemata. Therefore, most of the first graders had difficulties in comprehending the jokes due to their lack of experience and background knowledge.

The first graders’ reading comprehension seems better than their listening comprehension in this study. This may be because of the usual aids such as pictures illustrating the jokes and written verbal material (Bloom 1974: 89). According to Bloom’s classification of comprehension, the first graders scored better on the questions of jokes 1 (2,3,4), 2 (8, 9, 10, 11); 3 (16, 17, 18); 4 (23, 24, 25); 5 (29, 30, 31, 34); 6 (36, 37, 38, 39, 40) in both reading and listening skills since these questions relate to interpretation behavior the evidence of which may be found in the inferences, generalizations, or summaries produced by the individual. Incomplete answers were given to the questions of jokes 1(1); 2(8, 14); 3(16); 4(22, 26); 5(29); 6(36, 39) since they are related with extrapolation behavior that involves making inferences with respect to implications, consequences, corollaries, and effects which are in accordance with the situations described in the jokes given. The answers to the questions (1, 8, 16, 22, 29, and 36) that tested to what extent the first graders were able to understand the orientation were incomplete, as the first graders were unable to name the other characters in the Nasreddin Hodja jokes. Most of them wrote Hodja’s name, but could not identify the other characters in the jokes. The last two questions for all the jokes tested to what extent the first graders were able to understand the location, which clinches or discharges the joke. As seen in Tables 8-11, the first graders gave wrong answers since they were unable to comprehend the location. Due to the orientation, Nasreddin Hodja, they gave answers such as “The joke was funny because it was about Nasreddin Hodja; it was funny because it was a joke; since the joke was about Nasreddin Hodja; I laughed at each single utterance of Nasreddin Hodja”. They were able to grasp the funny utterance better in “The Quilt is Gone and the Fight is Over”. This may be due to the comic rhyme of the two past tense verbs in “Yorgan Gitti, Kavga Bitti”.

Paralinguistic features are significant in understanding the content, as Nash (1986) indicates:

In comic versifying, rhyme and rhythm have, potentially, a dual function. We may regard them as merely decorative applications, providing a setting and, so to speak, a lighting for the humour, or we may assign to them a more significant role as directive elements, features that organize the comedy and are essential to it. (154)

When the jokes in this study are taken into account in terms of listening and reading skills, significant differences in comprehension are detected for “The quilt is gone and the fight is over”; “What day is it today?”; “Let the quilted turban read”, and “One who gives the money” (Tables 2, 5, 6, 7). The first graders seemed to have comprehended “The quilt is gone and the fight is over”, “What day is it today?”, “Let the quilted turban read” and “One who gives the money” better from reading them than from listening to them. Paralinguistic features did not help the first graders in this study.

In the test of reading skills for “The quilt is gone and the fight is over”, the first graders were able to give the correct answer to question (3), which asked about the quilt. This may be due to the title of the joke. In listening skills they might have missed the title. In reading skills they were able to give the reason for what made them laugh, with more incomplete answers than in listening skills.

In the listening comprehension test for “What day is it today?” the first graders were unable to understand the allusion asked for in question (26). Although social questions such as “What Day is it Today?” are generic knowledge, when listening, the first graders were unable to catch Hodja’s answer consisting of an indirect remark to the ridiculous question: “I’m a foreigner here. I don’t know the days of this village. Ask someone who lives here”. Additionally, they misunderstood question (25), giving as an answer the name of the day on which they were given the joke during the experiment. Whereas Hodja had violated the maxim of relevance, the first graders did not violate it. Since the first graders gave the wrong answer to the question (26), they also failed in questions (27) and (28).

In “Let the quilted turban read” the first graders were able to get question (32) regarding the signal of the joke, which introduces the joke, on the reading skills test, providing an incomplete answer to that question. The utterance “Shame on you!” helped them to find the answer. However, they were unable to get the hidden meaning of “quilted turban”. Within the design of the joke “the quilted turban” was the locus. It was used as a hyponym for “learned person”. Since in the schemata of the first graders the subordinate term of the subordinate concept was missing, they were unable to answer questions (33), (34), (35) properly. Besides, this hyponym seems to be beyond the first graders’ literacy level. Therefore, Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis has been violated here.

In listening skills, the first graders confused the word “kavuk” (the quilted turban) with “tavuk” (hen). This might be due to their lack of knowledge of the meaning of “quilted turban”.

About half of the first graders in both groups did not find the joke very funny since they were unable to interpret the function of Hodja’s utterance “Let the Quilted Turban read”.

Although according to the findings, the first graders demonstrated better comprehension in both listening and reading skills for the joke “One Who Gives the Money”, question (41), which tested the locus, was left unanswered and question

(40) was answered incompletely and incorrectly. The students could not grasp Hodja's entire utterance, which was supposed to make them laugh.

An analysis of the first graders' common answers to the questions asking where the punch line of the jokes was hidden makes the following results plausible:

1. "The quilt is gone and the fight is over"

The punch line in this joke is that one of the fighters pulled Hodja's quilt off his back and fled although the fight had nothing to do with the quilt. The first graders misunderstood that the fight was over since one of the fighters had taken Hodja's quilt away.

2. "The cauldron died"

The first graders understood the 'logic' factor concerning how many times Hodja had borrowed his neighbor's cauldron, returning it with a stewpot inside and the explanation "Your cauldron gave birth".

Additionally, they comprehended that Hodja did not return the cauldron after he had taken it again. They remembered that Hodja snapped at his neighbour: "Well, you believed that it gave birth, so why don't you believe it died?!" However, they did not understand the 'likelihood' factor requiring the acceptance of an absurd proposition. They did not give complete answers to question (14). They were unable to reproduce Hodja's full utterance. In the last question, (15), they were unable to explain the violated 'truth conditions' in the joke which function as a locus.

3. "Do you believe a donkey's word rather than mine?"

In this joke, although Nasreddin Hodja's neighbour wants to borrow his donkey, Hodja, who does not want to give it to the neighbour, lies that it is not there. Upon hearing the donkey braying in the shed, the neighbour accuses him of telling a lie, to which Hodja retorts "Is it good manners to believe a donkey's word rather than that mine?"

The first graders, as in other jokes were unable to name both Hodja and his neighbour as the characters of the joke. Almost half of them gave only Hodja as a character of the joke. They understood well what the neighbour wanted to borrow from Hodja, but they could not get Hodja's full utterance after being accused of telling a lie. They did not get the comic unlikelihood compelling the logic in question (21). According to the truth conditions, animals do not speak. A donkey is an animal and it cannot speak. In this joke, truth conditions are violated, so it is a logic-twisting joke. At the same time Hodja violates the Maxim of Manner, which makes the joke funny.

4. "What day is it today?"

In this joke, Hodja leaves his village for Konya. While he is strolling in the market a man approaches him and asks: "What day is it today?" Since to Hodja this is a ridiculous question, he answers "I'm a foreigner here. I don't know the days of this village. Ask someone who lives here".

The first graders were unable to understand why the joke was funny. They were unable to find the signal (of the intention of the joke) and they seemed to have missed the locus which clinches the joke.. Since Hodja is a foreigner in Konya, he

cannot define the days there. The joke violates the generic knowledge of the truth in which the days of the week are the same all over the world. The first-graders were unable to give this answer.

5. "Let the quilted turban read"

In this joke, a man asks Hodja to read a letter he has received since he is unable to read cursive handwriting. Hodja looks at the letter, but he cannot read it. Upon hearing this, the man gets mad and says "You should be ashamed of yourself. You are wearing a Quilted Turban, but you can't read the letter".

The first graders were unable to get the idea about the man's visit to Hodja in terms of the substructure of the joke, where the generic detail of the visit was hidden. The man sought out Hodja, and nobody else since Hodja was the wise man to be consulted. They were unable to relate "the quilted turban" to being a literate human being.

6. "The one who pays the money"

In this joke, some neighborhood children gather around Nasreddin Hodja when he is on his way to the marketplace and ask him to buy each one a whistle. But only one of them gives him the money for the whistle. When Hodja returns from the marketplace, the children surround him and ask him if he has bought each of them a whistle. Hodja gives one whistle to the child who had given him the money and says "The one who pays blows the whistle".

The punch line of this joke was almost understood by the first graders. The parallelism helped them here. However, they were unable to explain why the joke was so funny. Here they did not relate the formula to the infrastructure, where the narrative concept was hidden. The narrative concept here is to buy something with the help of money, not with the help of somebody.

The findings of this study indicate that the first graders may not comprehend the humorous texts well because the humorous texts have two types of texts, one of which is in the superstructure and the other of which is in the substructure. The paradox which causes laughter and explosiveness may not be understood by children since they are unable to see the two types of texts in one humorous text.

### 3. Conclusion

Our findings and analysis indicate that the first graders may not comprehend the jokes properly in reading and listening skills. They appear to do better with written humour than oral humour. The written words and illustrations accompanying the jokes may have helped the first graders to develop memory strategies.

Although they are able to understand the superstructure of the jokes, they are unable to get the punch line in the substructure of the jokes due to their lack of world knowledge. The signal in the pre-location may not help them to get the locus which clinches or discharges the joke. They may laugh at the orientation, the type of joke rather than the punch line. Nasreddin Hodja in their schemata is a comic person and his name enables them to dissolve into laughter.



In order to comprehend, the beginning readers may have the interpretation behavior, that is, they may reorder the ideas, make inferences and generalizations implied in the jokes, but they may not have extrapolation behavior, which includes the making of estimates or predictions, implications in the jokes.

This research may be useful to both first and second language acquisition studies, since neither cognitive language development nor socio-psychological factors in language acquisition can be ignored. As Turkish first language acquirers are at the beginning of Piaget's concrete operational period, they have difficulties in understanding the humorous texts, which have a specific text structure in terms of text linguistics. This result can be taken into account in second language acquisition studies, and cultural factors as a part of language development, therefore, cannot be underestimated, since they clinch or discharge the joke in humorous texts. Linguists who conduct studies in first language acquisition may take into account the statistical results of this study to understand how cognitively mature Turkish first graders are in comprehending humorous texts. Additionally, the results indicate that the acquirers' general knowledge of the world makes it easier to understand the texts. Thus, the first graders have understood the jokes 'One who gives the money' and 'The quilt is gone and the fight is over' better than the other jokes in the study. Their responses indicate a better understanding of these two jokes' infrastructure, where setting, events and responses are given.

This study may bring about a profile of the first graders. Therefore, the results of this study should be considered by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The primary school curriculum prepares the first graders for being good readers in Turkish by introducing them to selected informative texts, jokes, poems and short stories. However, as is seen in the research, the level of difficulty for the first graders is ignored. Since this study is limited to jokes in Turkish text books for the first grade, it has tested the jokes' level of difficulty for the first graders' current literacy level. Since jokes are humorous texts that make readers laugh when they are comprehended, they help the first graders enjoy their reading experience; but if they are incomprehensible to them, they may discourage their reading skills.

Our findings and discussion indicate that the first graders may not comprehend the jokes properly in listening skills. They understand written humor better than oral humor. Written visual letters and pictures illustrating the jokes must have helped the first graders to develop memory strategies. The first graders may have missed the humor in all the jokes (tested in questions 7, 15, 21, 28, 35 and 41). Thus, they appeared unable to understand the punch line in the substructure of the jokes due to their lack of world knowledge.

The findings also clearly indicate that the first graders are not cognitively mature enough to be able to engage in problem solving, deduction and complex memory tasks. Their general knowledge of the world is not extensive enough for some of the humorous texts given in this study. Therefore, they would not seem to be competent enough to understand humorous texts.

Furthermore, these jokes perhaps should not be included in the first-year curriculum, but instead in the second-year curriculum since beginning readers first need to develop some literacy. To develop the first graders' literacy level and introduce them to the culture of jokes, such humorous texts may be presented through simulations which will help the children to understand written discourse by incorporating verbal and non-verbal language. Paralinguistic signals, such as gestures, motions and tone of voice make both the denotative and connotative meanings of the vocabulary items in written discourse clearer. Additionally, some anaphoric, cataphoric, and exophoric items missed by children in reading may be understood better. Maxims of conversation cannot be violated by children during the first language acquisition period. When their exposure to humorous texts is accompanied by supportive and relaxed discussions, the first graders are able to extend their world view, and develop important critical thinking skills. Research also reveals that jokes must be chosen according to the first graders' interests and experiences.

The results clearly indicate that the first graders' linguistic competence, which is their mental representation of linguistic rules, may not be sufficiently developed for them to comprehend the pragmatic meaning hidden in the humorous texts. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of the child's experience and cognitive development in the comprehension of humorous texts. Children at this age may not understand the paradox hidden in the humorous texts which causes laughter and explosiveness.

Finally, similar studies should be conducted for each type of text in elementary schools textbooks in order to test to what extent students are able to understand the various texts. Linguists interested in first language acquisition should take the above results into account when determining the significance of cognitive development for the comprehension of certain types of texts.

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