

Language and Rhetoric in Turkish Children's Books

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Introduction

- **Children's Literature Role:** A multidimensional field shaping linguistic, cognitive, and emotional development.
- **Language Development:** Early exposure to literature builds vocabulary and influences children's meaning-making at the sentence and text levels.
- **Text Comprehension:** Understanding written content requires analyzing formal structure; rhetorical (inter-sentence) relationships are crucial to overall meaning.
- **Age-Appropriate Relations:** Mann & Thompson (RST) stress that understanding relations like cause-effect, explanation, and contrast is critical for age-appropriate pedagogy.
- **Research Gap in Turkey:** Most studies emphasize themes or morals, neglecting text structure; yet children's comprehension depends on recognizing text-level relations.
- **Study Framework:** Grounded in Mann and Thompson's (1988) Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), this study analyzes inter-sentential relations in children's literature through the nucleus-satellite framework to reveal the text's hierarchical organization and communicative structure.
- **Problem & Aim:** Lack of systematic analysis of rhetorical structures by age; aim to provide data to guide book selection and pedagogical text design on a scientific basis.



The Multilayered Nature of Children's Literature

- **Tailored to developmental level:** Children's literature serves aesthetic, educational, and cultural functions appropriate to kids' age and perception.
- **Personal and social growth:** These texts support individual development and transmit social values, acting as a bridge between childhood and adulthood.
- **Discursive field:** Viewed as a multi-layered text genre shaped by historical and cultural context, influencing how children receive and construct meaning.
- **Formal analysis needed:** Books must be examined at content, structural, and functional levels because they influence not only what children learn but how they organize knowledge and use language.



Text-Linguistic Approach and Rhetorical Structures

- **Text linguistics:** Treats text as a coherent whole (not just sentences), emphasizing context, cohesion, and coherence.
- **Cohesion & coherence:** Halliday & Hasan note these are fundamental for text unity.
- **Sentence links:** Functional relations (cause–effect, contrast, exemplification, explanation) structure the text and guide the reader's understanding.
- **Pedagogical function:** The rhetorical structure in children's books is not merely stylistic; it supports learning by organizing information in age-appropriate ways.
- **Current research gap:** Turkish studies rarely analyze these structures, yet comprehension requires ability to parse such textual relationships.



Rhetorical Structure Theory and Its Application Area

- **RST overview:** Identifies functional sentence relations via a core (nucleus) and satellite structure. The core carries main meaning; satellites support or elaborate.
- **Communicative goals:** RST assumes authors structure text to achieve specific effects, not just follow grammar rules.
- **Analysis benefits:** Systematic RST analysis reveals a text's discursive logic and pedagogical intent.
- **Pedagogical texts:** RST is especially useful for evaluating educational materials (including children's books) because age-appropriateness hinges on the clarity of these rhetorical links.



The Applicability of RST to Children's Literature

- **Developmental fit:** Children's books reflect age-level cognition: elementary school texts use simpler sequential/cause–effect structures; middle school texts employ more complex elaborations, explanations, contrasts.
- **Age-group differences:** This shows that rhetorical patterns systematically vary by target age group.
- **Authorial intent:** RST uncovers not only sentence links but the author's communicative intent and narrative strategies.
- **Functional adequacy:** RST's tools are crucial for evaluating if a children's text is well-suited to its audience's developmental level.



Method

- **Research design:** Qualitative document analysis of children's book texts to identify rhetorical structures.
- **Sample:** 8 Turkish children's books chosen from the Ministry's recommended "100 Fundamental Works" and the "I Read, Istanbul Reads" project. Criteria: official approval, balanced age groups, varied genres (stories, fairy tales, novels).
- **Age categories:** Works classified into two groups – elementary school level and middle school level.
- **Analysis steps:** (1) Segment each text into meaningful units, (2) Code sentence connections by RST, (3) Calculate frequency of each relation type, (4) Compare patterns between age groups.
- **Limitations:** Only written text was analyzed (no illustrations); small sample of 8 Turkish titles; only two age groups considered; no cross-linguistic comparison.



The 10 Most Common Rhetorical Relations in All Books

Rank	Rhetorical Relation	Total	Percentage
1	Elaboration	86	19.1%
2	Contrast	53	11.8%
3	Sequence	43	9.6%
4	Condition	35	7.8%
5	Purpose	27	6.0%
6	Circumstance	26	5.8%
7	Evaluation	25	5.6%
8	Concession	23	5.1%
9	Volitional Result	21	4.7%
10	Non-volitional Result	21	4.7%

Distribution of RST Relations in Children's Books

- ▶ The analysis identified the most frequent rhetorical relations in both primary and middle-school texts.
- ▶ The most common type in both groups is “**Elaboration.**”
 - ▶ Elementary books: **19.11%**
 - ▶ Middle-school books: **25.84%**
- ▶ This suggests that middle-school texts contain more explanatory and descriptive structures.
- ▶ “Elaboration” indicates the writer expands or clarifies the nucleus sentence by adding examples, details, or explanations.
- ▶ **Examples:** “This is a kind of code we use when requesting our favorite songs on the radio’s social media account. That way, others cannot decipher our identity and we can send messages secretly.” (*Crazy Questions in My Mind*, p. 7)
- ▶ “There is also a grave in that garden. I buried its owner there with my own hands. The owner was a little sparrow I had kept in a cage for a while. It was very cute. One day I saw it puffing up its feathers inside the cage. The next morning, I found the poor thing lifeless.” (*Ömer’s Childhood*, p. 12)



Other Common Relations: Sequence and Contrast

- **Sequence:** Reflects chronological event order.
 - Elementary: **9.56%**, Middle: **13.14%**
 - Indicates increasingly complex narrative structuring.
- **Contrast:** Highlights opposites or comparisons.
 - Elementary: **11.78%**, Middle: **5.12%**
 - Simpler comparative forms appeal to younger readers.
- **Examples:**
 - “This family was poor, but they lived happily.” (*40 Nights, 40 Tales*)
 - “He would rise before dawn, go to gather firewood, and return as the sun rose.” (*Fadiş*)

Cross-Group Differences and Interpretation

- **Title:** Comparative Distribution of RST Relations by Age Group
- The study identified **24 rhetorical relation types** overall.
- Key contrasts:
 - **Condition:** Elementary 7.78% → Middle 2.90% (−4.88)
 - **Volitional Result:** Elementary 4.67% → Middle 8.24% (+3.57)
 - **Justification:** Elementary 1.56% → Middle 3.34% (+1.78)
- Indicates that older readers encounter more reasoning and causality-based structures.
- Rare types (Summary, Enablement, Joint) appeared minimally in both groups.

Table 2:
Percentages
and differences
of relationship
types

Type of Relationship	Elementary school (%)	Middle School (%)	Difference (Middle - Elementary %)
Elaboration	19,11	25,84	+6,73
Circumstance	5,78	4,68	-1,10
Solutionhood	0,22	0,22	0,00
Volitional Cause	3,11	2,45	-0,66
Volitional Result	4,67	8,24	+3,57
Non-Volitional Cause	1,78	3,79	+2,01
Non-Volitional Result	4,67	6,46	+1,79
Purpose	6,00	3,79	-2,21
Condition	7,78	2,90	-4,88
Otherwise	0,89	0,89	0,00
Interpretation	1,56	2,00	+0,44
Evaluation	5,56	2,67	-2,8
Restatement	0,22	1,11	+0,89
Summary	0,00	0,45	+0,45
Sequence	9,56	13,14	+3,58
Contrast	11,78	5,12	-6,66
Motivation	2,89	1,56	-1,33
Antithesis	0,89	0,45	-0,44
Background	4,00	3,79	-0,21
Aneblement	0,00	0,22	+0,22
Evidence	2,67	3,79	+1,12
Justify	1,56	3,34	+1,78
Concession	5,11	3,12	-1,99
Joint	0,22	0,00	-0,22

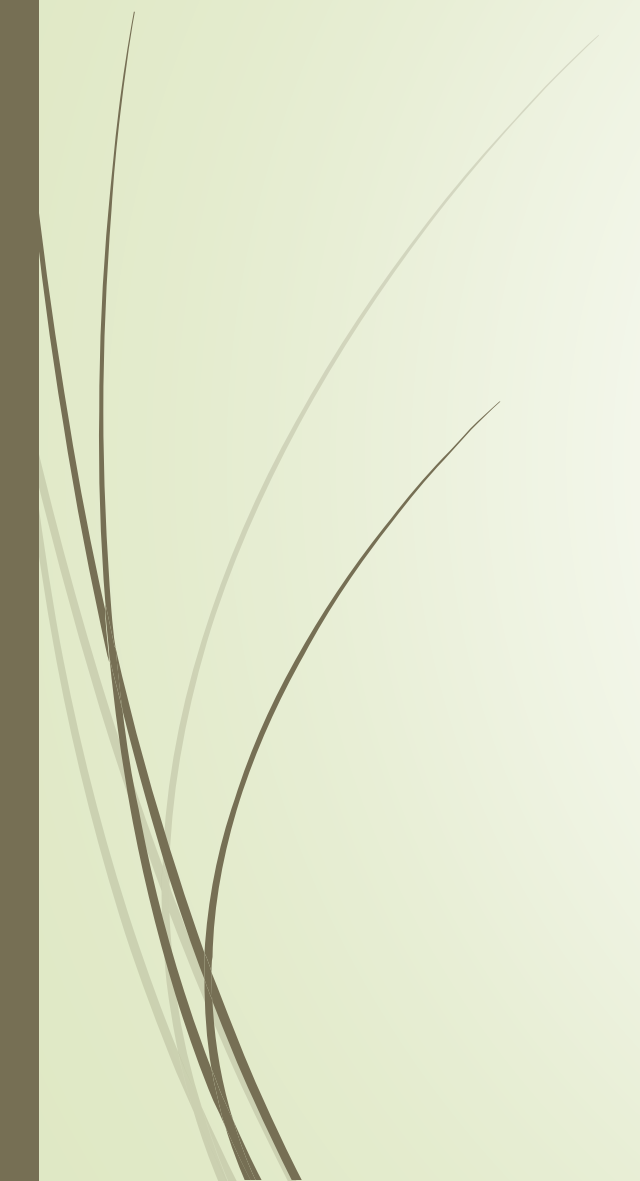


Result

- **Distinct linguistic identity:** Turkish children's literature follows universal children's narrative norms but also reflects unique cultural/linguistic features.
- **Elaboration & sequence:** The dominance of elaboration enriches descriptive imagery for young readers, while heavy use of sequence underscores Turkey's chronological storytelling tradition, aiding plot comprehension.
- **Recommendations:** Educators should match books to children's language level and ensure age-appropriate distribution of relations; authors should balance elaboration/sequence and incorporate cultural elements in their writing.
- **RST effectiveness:** RST successfully reveals 24 different relation types, demonstrating children's books' rhetorical richness; this richness is crucial for children's language, cognitive, and cultural development.
- **Impact:** These findings provide a scientific basis for educational policy and practice in children's literature – from curriculum choices and textbooks to cultural transmission in storytelling.

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*Thank you for
listening!*