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TAHIR BALCI
ALI OSMAN ÖZTÜRK
MUNISE AKSÖZ



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Edited By
Tahir Balcı
Ali Osman Öztürk
Munise Aksöz

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(Edited by: Tahir Balci, Ali Osman Öztürk, Munise Aksöz)



IJOPEC Publication Limited

60 Westmeade Close
Cheshunt, Waltham Cross
Hertfordshire
EN7 6JR London

www.ijopoc.co.uk

E-Mail: info@ijopoc.co.uk
Phone: (+44) 73 875 2361 (UK)
(+90) 488 217 4007 (Turkey)

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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT POLICY WITHIN CITIZENSHIP CONTEXT: A CASE OF CANADA AND TURKEY

Hülya Tuncer¹, Tuçe Öztürk Karataş²

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by the mass movement of people across borders, especially for migration purposes. This trend is still continuing, and the total number of international migrants reached nearly 272 million, increasing the share of the international migrants in the total population up to 3,5 per cent (United Nations, 2019a). In recent times due to such vast amount of migrants around worldwide, the debates about the types and recruitments of the membership that immigrants can have in the new countries have increasingly become the battleground on which human rights and state benefits are fought. It is because the current movement does not bring any isolation from the home country, family, and culture the migrants have due to the electronic and global age we are in today. In terms of human rights, migrants do not have to abandon their traditions or culture like it was decades ago. "Today's migrants, in contrast, can most often find people and culture from their homeland in their receiving countries so that they can continue to follow their home languages and traditions" (Kunnan, 2012, p. 163). By the way, this modern migration has changed the way states think of the concept of *citizenship*. Put in other way, three essential axes, extent (rules and norms of inclusion/exclusion), depth (thinness and thickness), and content (rights and duties) of the concept of citizenship have been redefined (Isin & Turner, 2002).

Modern citizenship includes various struggles not only about legal status of new citizens but also about political and social recognition and economic redistribution in the new society (Isin & Turner, 2002). It is because gaining citizenship is regarded as the highest level of membership for newcomers because of obtaining

¹ Dr., Çukurova University ² Dr., Mersin University

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rights and benefits of citizens (Shohamy, 2009, p. 45). For the states, ‘citizenship’ can be controlled to decide who should be entitled to the rights, benefits and duties versus who should be denied. It includes techniques and criteria for inclusion and exclusion of new comers. This function of citizenship leads the deployment of the state power as a technique of sovereignty, discipline and surveillance. Thus, from a governmentalistic perspective, Van Houdt (2014) states that citizenship is *complex* since it has various dimensions, *contextual* as it may take new forms in different places or times and *relational* because it is closely related to other techniques and technologies of power employed by a government.

Embodying such a nature, the concept of citizenship necessitates a very exhaustive and comprehensive definition; nevertheless, it is quite difficult to arrive at one thorough definition to cover all the related dimensions of the term. Marshall (2006) argues that there are three dimensions to citizenship: civil, political and social. Each dimension involves distinct rights and institutions such as legal systems, democratic government systems and welfare systems. For instance *civil* dimension is concerned with the rights for individual freedom - freedom of speech, the right to possess property- while *political* dimension involves the rights to participate in political power. *Social* aspect of citizenship includes the rights to live a civilized life within the confines of the standards of the society. Each of these dimensions is successive stages. For him, citizenship begins with civil and legal rights, and moves on to the political inclusion of wider numbers of people in the democratic process. Finally, obtaining social citizenship having the extension to the rights to education and housing is essential for new comers to exercise citizenship.

Thus, citizenship is currently a central issue in social and political debates because citizenship is “an ‘institution’ mediating rights between the subjects of politics and polity to which these subjects belong” (Isin & Nyers, 2014, p.1). It becomes more and more difficult to describe what a citizen is, and to characterize his/her legal and administrative presence and identity. The states can regard newcomers “as either a threat or an opportunity” (Wodak, 2012, p. 226). In order to handle the procedure of conferring citizenship successfully, the states bring “new methods to determine who can access the territory and who cannot” (Extra, Spotti & van Avermaet, 2009, p. 4). To become a legal citizen, one needs to present certain attitudes, dispositions and values. Studying for citizenship entails learning and conforming to the ‘correct’ form of civic behaviour required for new comers (Isin & Nyers, 2014, p. 5).

Nowadays in the world, there is an inclination to stipulate ‘language’ and ‘tests’ as criteria for obtaining citizenship (Shohamy, 2009). It is assumed that “shared civic knowledge and a shared language are necessary prerequisites for social cohesion and a more participatory, active form of citizenship” (Ryan, 2016, p.313). The use of language and tests in conjunction with the movement of people is not something new (Saville, 2006). Regarding language and tests generally in citizenship context, it is possible to see that “states that wish to encourage immigration (e.g. Romania, Poland and Hungary) place less emphasis on language and assessment than states that perceive immigration as a ‘problem’ (e.g. Austria, Finland, United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Germany)” (Wodak, 2012, p. 226). However, the eligibility requirements for language and assessment may vary from one country to another.

The countries viewing migration as a treat has widely used language and assessment as conditions for obtaining citizenship for entrance to those countries. These conditions present how the national language of the host country and knowledge of those societies are closely related to being part of the nation. As Shohamy (2013) points out these conditions provide the “messages of superiority and priority of the national language and cultures in the transnational contexts along with negation of any other languages and cultures which the immigrants bring with them from their home countries” (p. 230). A large number of studies deal with how ‘language’ and ‘assessment’ become devices controlling the gates of host countries for immigrants and asylum seekers and new citizens (see Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaat, 2009; Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero, & Stevenson, 2009; McNamara & Shohamy, 2008; Shohamy, 2009). The discussion in those studies show that “the use of these very high stake tests as conditions of residency and the provision of basic services, such as education, health, and welfare, depend on the power and status of national languages and perpetuate the power and status of national languages while marginalizing the language proficiency that the immigrants already possess” (Shohamy, 2013, p. 231).

McNamara (2009, p. 154) states that the growing number of language tests in citizenship contexts demonstrate some practical (how we should act) and some theoretical (how we can understand what is being asked of us) challenges for language testing researchers. Within this frame, this descriptive study aims at presenting citizenship contexts in two countries Canada and Turkey and then comparing

them as to the laws, regulations and procedures governing the citizenship in terms of host country language assessment policy.

2. THE STUDY

Present study is descriptive in nature, and it provides a description of the policy regarding the connection between citizenship, language and assessment in Canada and Turkey so as to present the citizenship contexts of one developed and one developing country respectively (United Nations, 2019b). In spite of the fact that Turkey hovers in gray areas as to *developing* or *developed* (Investopedia, 2019b), this paper sides with the UN report (United Nations, 2019b) and examines the situation of Turkey under a *developing country* label. Based upon these two countries, objectives of this study are to describe the linguistic requirements of the prospective citizens in Canada and Turkey and to portray how language proficiency of the prospective citizens is examined in those countries.

2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through official documents (laws, regulations, etc.) and official websites of the concerning countries in relation to citizenship applications. The policy regarding the connection between citizenship, language and assessment in Canada and Turkey is described through various factors such as population, national welfare status, official language of the host country, and so forth. For this reason, the information regarding those elements is given in the following parts for Canada and Turkey.

2.1.1 Canada

a) Basic Information about the country

Canada is one of the countries that successfully combine the process of integration with the multicultural rights of the immigrants. With its extensive multicultural programs, Canada example demonstrates that first and second generation immigrants are not only proud of their heritage but also they are among the most patriotic citizens of their new country (Kruhlak, 1992, as cited in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). The information about Canada concerning the present study was collected through various sources and demonstrated in the following table.

Canada is a developed country with the 11th largest world economy (Investopedia, 2019a), and the details contained in Table 1 are closely related to the status of the country within the citizenship context. As it is observed in the table, Canada is categorized as a migrant-receiving and a high-income country, and in comparison to its land area, Canada does not seem a highly populated country.

Table 1 Basic Information about Canada

Canada's	
Population	37,742,154 million (2020 estimates)
Growth Rate	0.89% (2020 estimates)
Rank according to Population	39 th
Land Area	9,093,510 km ²
Net Migration Rate	5.6 migrant(s)/1000 population (2020 estimates)
Rank in accordance with Migration Rate	20 th
Ethnic Groups	Canadian 32.3%, English 18.3%, Scottish 13.9%, French 13.6%, Irish 13.4%, German 9.6%, Chinese 5.1%, Italian 4.6%, North American Indian 4.4%, East Indian 4%, other 51.6% (2016 est.) * percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were able to identify more than one ethnic origin (2016 est.)
Income Category	High income country (\$12,376 or more)
Migration Status	Migrant-receiving country

Sources: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/347.html>
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ca.html>
<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519>

b) Language assessment for citizenship

The emergence of a citizenship test in Canada dates back to 1995, and it was revised in 2010 (Chapnick, 2011; Paquet, 2012). Officially, so as to become a Canadian citizen, applicants must: “be a permanent resident, have lived in Canada for 3 out of the last 5 years, have filed their taxes, if they need to, pass a test on their rights, responsibilities and knowledge of Canada, prove their language

skills” (Government of Canada, 2020d). This means the new guide has two purposes: “[t]o test general knowledge of Canada and [to] assess linguistic competency” (Paquet, 2012, p. 250).

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the federal government department responsible for overseeing immigration, refugee and citizenship issues in Canada. IRCC facilitates the arrival of immigrants, provides protection to refugees, offers programming to help newcomers settle in Canada, grants citizenship, and issues travel documents (such as passports) to Canadians (Government of Canada, 2020a). In order to provide these services, IRCC has some offices. The offices receiving and processing citizenship or immigration applications are the Case Processing Centres, the Centralized Intake Office, and the Operations Support Centre. Newcomers can mail to these offices for citizenship application. These offices are not open to the public and are by appointment only (Government of Canada, 2018).

Legally, the citizenship process in Canada is regulated in accordance with Citizenship Act, Citizenship Regulations . According to the Citizenship Regulations Article 15, the applicants need to “have an adequate knowledge of Canada” and an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship” To test what the applicants know about Canada and rights and responsibilities of citizenship, since 1995 Canadian citizenship test has been utilized in Canada for new citizens (Joshee, 2004). This means in order to get Canadian citizenship, the new applicants have to take and pass Canadian citizenship test administered by IRCC. This test includes questions about the rights and responsibilities of Canadians and Canada’s history, geography, economy, government, laws and symbols. “An adequate knowledge of Canada” means having a general understanding about Canadian political and military history, Canadian social and cultural history, Canadian physical and political geography, and the Canadian system of government (Minister of Justice, 2020).

In addition to this, the statement of “have an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship” refers to having the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship by participating in the Canadian democratic process and Canadian society, respecting for the environment and the protection of Canada’s natural, cultural and architectural heritage and the rights, freedoms and obligations set out in the laws of Canada (Minister of Justice, 2020).

In order to lead the applicants for the test, there is an official citizenship study guide named “Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship”. It is the primary source for this test and freely available. In short, this test is “usually written but may be oral, in English or French, 30 minutes long, 20 questions (pass mark: 15 correct answers), [and] multiple-choice and true-false questions” (Government of Canada, 2020g).

In addition to Citizenship test based on *Knowledge of Canada and Citizenship Criteria*, the Citizenship Act also requires that citizenship applicants have “an adequate knowledge of one of the official languages of Canada”. Article 14 of Citizenship Regulation provides the criteria to determine whether an applicant has adequate knowledge of one of the official languages of Canada. Canada has two official languages: English and French. English and French speaking people have been living in Canada for more than 300 years, and more than 98% of Canadians speak either English or French or both (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). In Article 14, the *adequate knowledge* includes competences in basic communication in one of these languages defined as to “(a) take part in short, routine conversations about everyday topics; (b) understand simple instructions and directions; (c) use basic grammar, including simple structures and tenses, in oral communication; and (d) use vocabulary that is adequate for routine oral communication” (Minister of Justice, 2020).

To measure those competencies, the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) or Niveaux de Compétence Linguistique Canadien (NCLC) is utilized. In Canada, CLB/NCLC is the formal standard describing, measuring and recognizing how well adult immigrants can communicate in their second language. This standard is used to be sure about evaluating everyone in the same way (Government of Canada, 2020c). In order to be a Canadian citizen, an applicant must be able to speak English or French and meet the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) level 4 (CEFR Level, A2) or higher in speaking and listening or must provide the proof of completion of a secondary or post-secondary program in English or French. This means that a person can “take part in short, everyday conversations about common topic, understand simple instructions, questions and directions, use basic grammar, including simple structures and tenses, and show [knowledge of] common words and phrases to answer questions and express [himself/herself]” (Government of Canada, 2020e).

After taking the citizenship test, an interview is held with the applicants with a citizenship official. During the interview, using the CLB/NCLC, the citizenship official reaches the final decision if the applicants have adequate knowledge of English or French (Government of Canada, 2020e). In addition to this, some various certificates, diplomas and tests are accepted as proof of applicants' language skills. For example, if the applicants send the copy of a diploma, transcript, certificate that they completed or are attending a secondary or post-secondary program with application, it is accepted for language criteria (Government of Canada, 2019) (For further information on language criteria, see Government of Canada, 2020b).

In sum, the applicants' language skills are measured through the following ways: "reviewing the proof [they] send with [their] application, noting how well [they] communicate when [they] talk to a citizenship official anytime during the process, assessing [their] language level during a hearing with a citizenship official" (Government of Canada, 2020f).

2. 1. 2 Turkey

a) Basic Information about the Country

The information about Turkey concerning the present study was collected through various sources and demonstrated in the following table. Turkey is a developing country with the 19th largest economy in the world (Investopedia, 2020), and the details contained in the table are closely related to the status of the country within the citizenship context. Table 2 demonstrates that Turkey is categorized as a migrant-sending and an upper-middle income country, and in comparison to its land area (and also compared to Canada), Turkey seems a highly populated country.

Table 2 Basic Information about Turkey

Turkey's	
Population	84,339,067
Growth Rate	1.09%
Rank according to Population	17 th
Land Area	769,630 km ²
Net Migration Rate	-4.3 migrant(s)/1000 population (2020 estimates)
Rank in accordance with Migration Rate	191st
Ethnic Groups	Turkish 70-75%, Kurdish 19%, other minorities 7-12%
Income Category	Upper Middle income country (\$3,996 to \$12,375)
Migrant Status	Migrant-sending country (De Bel-Air, 2016)

Sources: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/347.html>
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/country-resource/turkey>
<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519>

b) Language assessment for citizenship

In accordance with the 11th Article of Turkish Citizenship Act No: 5901 (Türk Vatandaşlığı Kanunu, 2009), applicants for Turkish citizenship must be able to speak *sufficient* Turkish. For the documentation of such knowledge, applicants may attend Turkish courses given at Public Education Centers (Halk Eğitim Merkezleri) organized by *Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education* or TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Language Application and Research Center). Public Education Centers can be found in every county of all cities in Turkey and they have been organizing various Turkish Language courses within the framework of Lifelong Learning. Turkish courses centre around Communicative Language Teaching, thus concentrating on all four language skills. It is sufficient to obtain A1 level certificate in Turkish or “literacy” certificate from those centers for citizenship purposes. A1 level course requires the trainees to attend 120 hours of education (90 hours of within class activities + 30 hours of online activities), and daily teaching cannot exceed 8 hours. The curriculum was designed in line with

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), for this reason, the trainees who obtain A1 level certificate:

- Can understand and use familiar every day expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.
- Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.
- Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p: 24)

TÖMER also delivers “regular” (96 hours within 2 months) and “intensive” courses (80 hours within a month). Upon completion of the mentioned course(s) -whether through Public Education Centers or TÖMER-, applicants are submitted a certificate with which they can apply for the citizenship in addition to the other required documents. Applicants are then informed about the final commission organized in accordance with the related articles in the law. On a specified date, the members of the commission ask questions to the applicant about world knowledge together with the knowledge of Turkish culture all in Turkish. Whole assessment within the commission is performed orally. The applicant has the right to invite a sworn translator if s/he is not proficient enough in communicating through Turkish.

2. 1. 3 Comparison of Canada and Turkey

The following table demonstrates the comparison of Canada and Turkey with regard to language assessment policy in citizenship context.

Table 3 *Affecting Factors in Language Assessment Policy of Canada and Turkey within Citizenship Context*

		Canada	Turkey
	Official language	English and French	Turkish
General information	Category for development	Developed country	Developing country
	Rank in accordance with migration rate	20th	191st
	Acts and Regulations related to citizenship	Citizenship Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. C-29), Citizenship Regulations	Turkish Citizenship Act No: 5901
Criteria for knowledge about the country	Citizenship requirements/ requirements for knowledge about the country	The Citizenship Act requires that citizenship applicants have "an adequate knowledge of Canada and of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship".	
	Articles related to citizenship test	Citizenship Regulations No: 15	
	Assessing knowledge about the country	Citizenship test (usually written but may be oral)	During the oral assessment within the authorized commission, applicants are questioned about Turkish culture
	Official guide to study for citizenship test	Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship	
Language criteria	Language requirements	The Citizenship Act requires that citizenship applicants have "an adequate knowledge of one of the official languages of Canada"	11th Article of Turkish Citizenship Act No: 5901 requires that citizenship applicants "must be able to speak <i>sufficient</i> Turkish"
	Required level of host language	CLB Level 4 (CEFR A2 level)	A1 level or a diploma received from the schools of National Education Directorates or a "literacy" certificate
	Official explanation about required level of host language	Clear /clarified by the regulations "an adequate knowledge of one of the official languages of Canada" (see Minister of Justice, 2020 for further details)	Vague regulations in outlining "speaking sufficient Turkish"
	Assessing language skills	No specific language test (reviewing the proof applicants send with their application, noting how well they communicate when they talk to a citizenship official anytime during the process, assessing their language level during an interview with a citizenship official)	No specific language test (Oral assessment within a commission)

As it is illustrated in the above table, Canada tests the applicants in either English or French while Turkey's official language is Turkish. As for the category for development, Canada has been viewed as *developed* for a long time; however,

Turkey has been labeled as a *developing* country (only recently having debates as to whether to be categorized as developed or not). With its many years of citizenship application history, Canada has a well-regulated, easy to access and transparent process while it is comparatively vague and tiring within Turkish context.

3. CONCLUSION

It should be noted that the concept of citizenship is subject to change and it has been shaped and reshaped by the developments within local and worldwide scopes. As Isin and Wood (1999) stated “[c]itizenship is a legal status and practice that progressively widens its sphere to include various rights. It is a contested field and democracy ensures that it will remain thus” (p.ix). A more recent source supports and advances that idea by expressing that “citizenship is certainly much more than legal status, although formal legal citizenship remains important for accessing citizenship rights” (Isin & Nyers, 2014, p.3).

Turkey, in comparison to Canada, is not viewed as an attractive country for citizenship applications. For this reason, there are not many regulations strictly controlling the incoming citizenship applications. The nearby war in Syria has caused millions of people seeking shelter in Turkey because of escaping from war, persecution and political turbulence. This situation -together with those seeking better opportunities- resulted in an unexpected migration wave which Turkey was unguarded for. Turkey currently hosts 3,589,289 registered Syrian refugees (Refugees Operational Portal, 2020), and Turkey continues to host the world’s largest refugee population (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2019).

Despite the fact that Turkey has been performing and is still trying to do its best, there are still some steps to take for a better handling of the process, which the following quotation exemplifies:

The new legislative framework reflects growing pressure to delineate migration policies for legal immigrants as well as to create an explicit procedure for humanitarian migrants. Sweeping in scope, the law seeks to put in place a comprehensive approach to migration management and tackle many of the current gaps in Turkey’s migration policies, including disjointed oversight, excessive bureaucracy for applicants seeking work and residence permits, and the lack of a policy framework for asylum seekers. Its enactment

reflects the growing conviction that a strategic approach to migration can deliver benefits. (Migration Policy Institute, 2014)

With its geography (being in-between Asia and Europe, chaotic atmosphere in Middle East countries), religion (Islam- 99.8% of the population- World Population Review, 2020) history, recent economic growth, and social structures, Turkey seems to attract many people into citizenship applications in the near future. Within this frame, there has to be rigid, legitimate and well encapsulating regulations which ease the process for both citizenship applicants and for those who process the applications. One of those steps might be about the clarity of the requirements for *sufficient knowledge of Turkish language*. A similar reform was achieved by UK by transforming the vague requirement into a 24-question citizenship test entitled 'Knowledge of Life in the UK', thus assessing English language proficiency together with the knowledge of the country systematically (Goodman, 2011). The comparison of Turkey to Canada in this paper may present a better picture of where Turkey stands and what needs to be done to enhance the citizenship application process with regard to language assessment.

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