
THE COMMUNICATION OF SYRIAN STUDENTS WITH THE DOMINANT CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: OMER HALISDEMİR UNIVERSITY CASE

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ABSTRACT

In this study, communication of ethnic groups with dominant culture, also conceptualized as intercultural communication. The current study aims to explore the communication practice of Syrian students, one of the ethnic groups studying at Niğde University, with the dominant culture as part of intercultural communication. For the purposes of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve Syrian students studying at Niğde University and form snowball sampling was used in the selection of participants. The findings were discussed on the basis of the data obtained. In the theoretical approach of the study were utilized the components of Edward T. Hall's Information Systems Theory, Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Milton Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The results of the study revealed that Syrian students have continued to interact with the dominant culture while trying to preserve their own culture. In the study, it is accepted that each culture has different sense of the world. The results showed that these differences, which are due to cultural doctrine influenced the communication of Syrian students with the dominant culture.

Keywords: Culture, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Dimensions,

Intercultural Sensitivity

1. Introduction: The Issue Definition and Problem

In order to survive, human beings have to fulfil some vital needs like food, drink, housing, resting. People who fulfil these needs physically make themselves. By maintaining their physical subsistence, humans produce their intellectual existence at the same time. Shaping their history through the activities of production, humans are social beings who make this production in an organized unity. Maintaining physical and intellectual existence brings about the necessity to communicate. Through communication, humans produce both their material existence and intellectual consciousness. The way of making this production composes their culture. The changes in the way of producing humans themselves change their lifestyle, the expression of this style, and hence its culture (Erdoğan and Alemdar, 2011: 13-14).

Human communities on earth are constituted as a result of individual communications among people. They found the way to agree with each other through reconciliation, that is to say by generating common symbols. Initially these symbols were objective facts perceived through senses of hearing, seeing, touching, smell and taste. Meanings to be conveyed have grown in time and the number of symbols has increased while their quality changed. Meanings transmitted with voice have been attributed to words and thereby languages emerged. Abstract concepts like feelings, thoughts, and imaginations are been expressible with the progress of verbal communication. With the development of language, people started to perceive and give meaning to their environment to the extent their language permitted, thus every community found various solutions for the problems they encountered. This lifestyle called culture began to separate communities from each other (Kartarı, 2014a: 3).

In conjunction with the separation of communities, diverse lifestyles have emerged, and individuals were alienated from each other's culture. The emergence of different cultures brought about the fact of cross-cultural interaction. And this interaction is possible through the communication between cultures. Communication is the transfer of attitudes, judgements, thoughts and feelings which; indicates the changes about objects, events, facts in the circumstances of individuals; transfers each other's experiments about these; emanates from similar life experiences in relation to the same facts, objects, problems; and which is realized in the community life consisting of people who have similar feelings and express them to each other (Oskay, 2007: 9). When this transfer of feelings, thoughts or attitudes is realized between individuals of different cultures, we reach the concept of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication, which considers the face-to-face interaction among people from different cultures, tries to understand the communication differences that might occur in symbol sharing between the source and receiver of different cultures (Jant, 2004: 39).

It is not possible to speak of intercultural communication in terms of pre-industrial traditional societies. In pre-industrial societies, in which means of transportation and communication are not advanced as in present day and people are rather bound to where they live, it is impossible for different cultures to encounter with each other and merge. This situation started to change by the disintegration of traditional societies; the written records and dissemination of culture were enabled especially with the printing press and people in different parts of the world became familiar with each other's culture. By the advancement of transportation means and facilities such as the compass, railway, airplane etc. people have found the opportunity to reach various parts of the world and different cultures. These developments enabled different cultures to get familiar with each other and interact. Therefore, it is possible to specify the dynamics of intercultural communication as urbanization, modernization and industrialization (Güngör, 2013: 51). Apart from these

dynamics, international migration is another factor providing cultures to encounter and accelerate cross-cultural interaction. International migration is part of a transnational revolution that reshapes politics and societies all over the world. The fact of migration plays an important role in the occurrence of cultural differentiation. The homogeneity of communities and societies has begun to collapse due to displacements of diverse cultural groups and those groups to share the same environment (Castles and Miller, 2008: 11; Yalçın, 2004: 4).

People migrate due to war or political conflicts, to live in better economic conditions, and because of excess of labour. In other words, migration might be a result of economic, political, ecological or individual reasons (Jandt, 2004: 323-324; Yalçın, 2004: 13). Migration is a collective action caused by social change. It affects both immigrating and emigrating countries. No state would start building an ethnically differentiated society through migration. Nevertheless, policies entailed by labour market, social relationships, public policies, national identities and international relations frequently lead to ethnical minorities to occur (Castles and Miller, 2008: 29).

With forced migrations, internal and external migrations for education are taking places in our era. Particularly the student exchange mobility (Erasmus, Farabi, Sokrates) in the context of universities are important examples in this regard. Notwithstanding, students who want to complete their bachelor or graduate education in a foreign country also bring about a mobility of migration. In Turkey, more than seventy two thousand foreign students¹ are studying in various universities, according to 2015 data. At this point, the subject of this study is the communication between Syrian students at Nigde University and the dominant culture in the context of cross-cultural communication.

Considering the subject of the study, we can see that there are nearly five thousand and six hundred² Syrian students educating at private and public universities in Turkey according to 2015 data. It should be taken naturally that Syrian students behave in accordance with their own norms and rules in the process of social interaction after coming to Turkey. It would be impossible to expect no difficulty will occur while educating in a geography of different culture and different language. It will also take time for students to encounter cultural differences and interpret and adopt these differences in the process of acculturation³. Moreover, it is also a possibility that individuals facing a new culture may experience a culture shock⁴. It is inescapable that Syrian students who educate distant from their cultural geography will face some problems in the process of meeting and giving meaning to a new culture and getting familiarized with it. In this context, the problem of this study was identified as “how is the communication between the dominant culture and Syrian students educating at Nigde University within the scope of intercultural communication.”

¹ This data was obtained from the report of student quantities in terms of nationality for the years 2014-2015 published at <http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr> by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK).

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³ Acculturation is a result of the permanent relation and interaction of two or more cultural groups, when one of these groups accepts and adopts the cultural elements of the other or when a new cultural composition emerges (Güvenç, 2015: 164).

⁴ Culture shock is a psychological disorder that stems from dissonance with the conditions of a cultural environment. The reason for this disorder is that most of the cultural differences experienced threatens (or seems to threaten) the individual to perceive the meaning of life (Barutçuoğlu, 2011: 35).

2. The Theoretical Approach of the Study

In this study, which focus on the communication between students educating at Nigde University and the dominant culture, utilizes the “Information Systems Theory” that Edward T. Hall based upon the differentiation of cultures, “Cultural Dimensions Theory” which reflects the dimensions to understand the cases occurring in intercultural encounters as proposed by Geert Hofstede and the components of the “Developmental Model of Intercultural Model” of Milton J. Bennett in which he points out the steps of “cultural adaptation” for the encounters and coexistences among people from different cultures. This section of the study lies upon the aforementioned approaches.

2.1. Information Systems Theory

This theory, which is developed by Edward T. Hall, emphasizes the non-verbal components of the communication process. In this context, Hall proposes ten principal message systems. The first of them is interaction and only this component includes language. The other nine components are non-verbal. These are: association, subsistence, bisexuality, territoriality, temporality, learning, play, defense and exploitation (use of materials) (Hall, 1959: 61-62). While explaining the primary message systems, Hall seeks answers for three questions: how human biology pervades each information system, how each system is examined by itself and how each system gears into the entire culture (Kartarı, 2014b: 76).

At the core of the interaction lie the irritability systems of all the living creatures since aliveness is necessary to interact with the environment. According to Hall, the most advanced form of interaction is language reinforced by tone of voice and gesture. Nonetheless, writing supported with symbols and specially developed forms is also a system of interaction. Interaction occurs in the dimensions of time and space. Teaching, learning, play and defense are also special types of interaction (Hall, 1959: 62). It takes time to learn a new language in a different culture and to interpret both cultural codes and linguistic codes. But in order to better construe a culture require learning the language of this culture to a certain extent. To learn the language which is the carrier of culture brings about the interpretation of that culture to a great extent. Language learning of Syrian students consist an important aspect of their interaction with the dominant culture.

Another important aspect consisting human culture besides language is social life. People live in communities but lead a life more complex than other creatures. Although social life is a common activity for all the people, it differs from culture to culture. Thus it is inevitable that different individuals have difficulty in adapting to social life when they meet a culture they don't know (Kartarı, 2014a: 48).

From its very first beginning, subsistence is a principal system that every creature has to know about. Every creature must know what to eat and how to transform a substance into food. Subsistence contains everything from eating habits to national economy. As each human might have different eating and drinking habits, the economy of each society also differs. For example, jobs requiring manual labour may be seen as undignified in some cultures while considered worthy in others. Such differences can cause difficulties in intercultural communication (Hall, 1959: 64; Kartarı, 2014b: 77-78). It is not hard to predict Syrian students encounter a different experience of social life and different eating and drinking habits from their own cultures when they come to Turkey. These two dimensions are substantially important to maintain an individual's life. That is because all individuals subsist in a certain social life and realize themselves. They take part in a certain subsistence system to survive.

Another non-verbal component that Hall deals with is “bisexuality”. Hall remarks that female or male behaviours or characteristics might be coded differently in every culture. In other words, different behaviour patterns associated with male or female are found in every society (Hall, 1959: 65-67). Syrian and Turkish cultures do also have specific behaviour patterns peculiar to females and males. In this context, while the two cultures may differ in terms of gender roles, it is also possible to say that there are similarities because these cultures are close to each other. Hall’s emphasize on the use of time and space is that every individual can have a different space of personality and dominance and each culture there is various behaviour patterns in every culture regarding the utilization of time (Kartarı, 2014b: 79-80). The use of time and space by individuals varies in accordance with culture. The individual space of individuals in Turkish culture is larger compared to Syrian culture. In this regard, the relations among persons are more remote considering Syrian culture.

Another component that Hall discusses is “learning”. In order to adapt to a culture, one must initially learn about that culture. Humans have a permanent inclination of learning from the very beginning of birth in order to maintain their lives. However, the forms and processes of learning vary from culture to culture such that the difference in the education systems of each culture is a significant proof of that. Nonetheless, learning isn’t only materialized with education. Personal experiences of individuals also play an important role in this process. Particularly the norms of behaviour and most cultural values are characteristics that are learned by experience and observance.

With regard to Syrian students, the component of play can be considered in terms of understanding the jokes and wits of individuals in the culture they are exposed to. At this point, Hall emphasizes that almost everything can be controlled when people’s sense of humour are learned and controlled (Hall, 1959: 75). Accordingly, to understand the jokes and wits of individuals are quite important to perform a healthy communication and learn the culture that one is exposed to.

One of Hall’s message systems is “defense”. All creatures defend themselves against external threats. For humans, defense is an instinctive state that occurs against threats that might derive from natural events, maladies or other persons and the environment. Considering intercultural sensitivity, Hall underlines the sensibilities of people in terms of threats that might occur especially about religion (Hall, 1959: 76). Syrian students do not face any threats with respect to their religious beliefs. Moreover, most of them have education in a Muslim country. However, Islamic life is more intense in Syria compared to Turkey; in other words, people conform more to Islamic necessities. It is possible that some differences in belief, which they encounter in Turkey, are perceived as threats by them. In this case, they would probable use defense mechanisms to preserve their own beliefs.

Defense is an important necessity in order to provide the maintenance of living creatures. However, living creatures also utilize substances in their environment to survive. Humans process the materials in their environment, produce and use new materials by combining their natural skills and knowledge. This wide range of materials including clothes, foods, architectures or any sort of things are artefacts of material culture and vary from culture to culture (Kartarı, 2014a: 55). Artefacts of material culture are also a part of the culture as well as abstract cultural artefacts such as beliefs, thoughts or traditions. Individuals who meet a different culture do also encounter the concrete characteristics of that culture while being exposed to its abstract characteristics. In this context, it is possible to evaluate the artefacts of material culture, which are easily distinguished than abstract cultural characteristics, as the very first characteristics of a culture to draw attention. Nonetheless, artefacts of material culture form a whole together with abstract cultural artefacts.

Hall's message systems are important in demonstrating all the components of a culture. However, each cultural dimension or cultural indicator must be examined in its own context and given meaning. With the examination of each culture in its own context, it can be said that cultural differences will be more easily interpreted and more easily adopted by people from different cultures. Except Hall, another theory developed to understand cultural differences and analyse them is the "Cultural Dimension Theory" of Geert Hofstede.

2.2. Cultural Dimensions Theory

Dutch scientist Geert Hofstede developed the "Cultural Dimensions Theory" as a result of his research on the employees of IBM in more than forty countries. According to Hofstede, it is the collective software of the mind that distinguishes the members of a group or human category. This software of the human mind is formed by human nature, symbols, heroes and rituals (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: 4-5).

In his study of cultural differences and to determine the way to settle these, Hofstede identifies five independent dimensions about these differences. These dimensions are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity and long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001: 29).

Power distance indicates the dimension of power, authority or dominance differences among the individuals constituting the society. Hofstede remarks that superior-subordinate relations among people are more equal in the countries where the power distance is small. For example, there is less dependence between boss and worker and emotional distance among persons is relatively small. There is significant dependence in superior-subordinate relations among people in the countries where the power distance is huge. Also the emotional distance between boss and worker is quite huge (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: 45-46).

With considerations based on Hofstede's statements, it is possible to conclude that there is a more egalitarian structure of relations among people in cultures with small power distance. In work life and personal life, relations are established among people regardless of status or age differences. In this regard, we see the Western countries as cultures with small power distance. We can say that there is a hierarchy among people not only in work environments but in personal life in the countries with huge power distance. For example, children are expected to abide by the decisions in a family while these decisions are taken by the mother and father. Syria is one of the countries with huge power distance in this context. There is a system of relations established in accordance with the hierarchical order among people. Although the power distance is generally also huge in the Turkish culture, it is seen that this distance is smaller in some regions or family structures.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension is related to the stress level caused by the uncertainty about the future. According to Hofstede, uncertainty avoidance is the level of feeling under threat of the members of a culture when they confront uncertainty or a situation they can't identify (Hofstede, 2001: 167). When confronting an uncertain situation, individuals can feel anxiety even in their own cultural environment until that uncertainty disappears. Yet confronting an uncertain situation in a different culture can even induce this level of anxiety to be higher.

The individualism-collectivism dimension is related to how individualism is accepted in a society. At this point, Hofstede (2005: 209) claims that individualism is approved in some cultures while it is seen as alienation in others. According to the Cultural Dimension Theory, the cultures that regard the interest of

society superior to the interest of the individual are “collectivist” and the cultures that regard the interest of the individual superior to the interest of the society are “individualist” cultures (Kartarı, 2014a: 64). In view of Turkish and Syrian cultures, it can be said that both cultures are collectivist cultures and that group interests take precedence of individual interests. Nonetheless, we can see that there are individualist tendencies in Turkish culture.

Another dimension underlying cultures, apart from individualism and collectivism, is the masculinity-femininity feature. Some cultures have a patriarchal structure. In such cultures, the male has the role of the one who are working more and earning the livelihood of the house while the female is in the position of providing the order of the house and childcare. For cultures in which female and male roles are not divided like this, both women and men are in the position to work and do the housekeeping together. To put it differently, there are no sharp distinctions between male roles and female roles. Turkish culture has a patriarchal structure but we see that, while this structure is still prevailing in some parts of the country, this structure is changing and the roles of men and women are more equal in other parts. This condition is also in direct proportion to the educational level of individuals. In regions with higher education levels, it is realized that male-female roles are in a more equal level. And Syrian culture has a more patriarchal structure in comparison with Turkish culture.

The last of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions is the long-term orientation. Hofstede distinguishes cultures as short-term and long-term orientation cultures. In his view, human behaviours, particularly tenacity and consistency, are determined with respect to future rewards in long-term orientation cultures. In other saying, individuals live by thinking of the future, not today or yesterday. In contrast, behaviours in short-term orientation cultures are shaped with respect to the past and present. Respect to traditions and fulfilling social responsibilities are highly important in these cultures (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: 210). In this context, it is possible to say examine Turkish and Syrian cultures as past-oriented and present-oriented cultures. Despite there are generation gaps in both cultures, it is remarkable there is a certain sensitivity to keep traditions alive. Thus it is possible at this point to say both cultures resemble each other.

It is crucial for the realization of a healthy communication that individuals from different cultures come together and understand and interpret each other cultural codes. At this point, we arrive at the concept of intercultural communication competence as well as intercultural sensitivity.

2.3. Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity is mainly related to the emotional domain as well as the cognitive, affective and behavioural orientations of interactive condition. In this context Chen and Starosta (1997: 5) identify intercultural sensitivity as a positive ability to develop emotions that enable proper and effective behaviours in terms of intercultural communication towards understanding and examining cultural differences. Hence intercultural sensitivity means that individuals from different cultures approach to each other with positive feelings and without prejudice. The development of this sensitivity occurs in a particular process. Milton Bennett presents that in a line from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

Denial ► Defence ► Minimization ► Acceptance ► Adaptation ► Integration

Ethnocentrism |—————|—————| Ethnorelativism

Figure 1: Intercultural adaption processes (Hammer, Bennett et. al., 2003: 424).

Ethnocentrism, as defined by Bennett, is the individuals' judgement of other people in line with their own standards and traditions. In contrast, ethnorelativism reflects the adaptation of individuals towards various standards and traditions. As seen in the table above, transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism takes place in a particular level. The process of denial indicates the situations in which individuals don't or hardly encounter a different culture. Individuals deny or ignore cultural differences during the process of denial. At the defence level, individuals make a distinction between "us" and "them". They tend to regard their own culture as advanced while other cultures are regarded primitive. In minimization, which is the last level of ethnocentrism, individuals accept that all people are basically the same (Bennett, 1998: 15-16).

The transitional level from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism starts with the process of acceptance. At this stage, individuals accept the differences of cultures and respect these differences. But the adaptation process is the level in which individuals develop their abilities towards interacting with different cultures. At the level of integration, individuals acknowledge that the world has a collective structure and they see themselves as a part of this structure (Hammer, Bennett et. al., 2003: 425; Bennett, 1998: 17). Considering the levels that Bennett dwells upon, it is witnessed that individuals go through specific stages in the process of adaptation to different cultures and that they don't adapt directly to a culture. Adaptation to a new culture requires going through specific processes and a period of familiarization.

3. The Methodology of the Study

This study examining the way of interaction between Syrian students and the dominant culture utilizes snowball sampling method and primarily the source person is reached. Participants are reached through the source person and the snowball samples are increased. Within this framework, a semi-structured in-depth interview is conducted with twelve Syrian students (six females, six males). In addition to twenty three predetermined questions, other questions are posed based on the participants' statements. The interviews are recording with the permission of the participants. The length of the interviews is 201 minutes in total. Due to the fact that private and delicate matters are mentioned in the study, identity information of the participants have not been used and males were coded as E1, E2, E3...; and females were coded as K1, K2, K3... The study is limited by the participants and is not eligible for generalization.

The data obtained from the interviews are classified thematically and interpreted. The themes specified in this context are "homeland and sense of belonging", "mother tongue", "elements regulating the social order", "the reflections of cultural difference and similarities on communication."

4. Findings and Interpretation

In this section of the study, the obtained data are interpreted in line with the specified themes. The goal is to present the interaction between Syrian students and the dominant culture.

4.1. *The Concept of Homeland and Sense of Belonging*

To the students who left their country and had to come to Turkey due to the war in Syria, it is asked “what the concept of homeland means to them” and different responses are given. In this context, some students regard Syria as their homeland whereas some indicated that they see Turkey as their homeland. Despite saying that they see Turkey as homeland, it is observed that all the participants got emotional while expressing what homeland means to them and responded with more difficulty comparing to the other questions and sometimes their voice quavered and eyes were to fill with tears. The students’ opinions and feelings about belonging were apparent again with the question of the concept of homeland. Therefore, the two themes are treated in conjunction.

Considering the interviews, participant E2 described the concept of homeland as mother and said: *“Homeland is mother. Homeland is everything for the human. No matter how beautiful a person is in another place than the homeland and how good the citizens are, it won’t be a place like the homeland. Let me give an example. A stepmother would never be like a birth mother. We can think it like that. Mother means hearth. The person who shows compassion, whom we go to in any case. Therefore, mother is everything for humans. Therefore, I compared it with mother.”* (E2, 22).

E4 told a story that he went to a hospital in Turkey and was registered as “stateless” and that this made him very upset, expressing it as *“In fact, we have been exiled.”* K4, who defined the concept of homeland as “my home”, told that she wants to use the education she takes in Turkey in a beneficial way in the process of rebuilding Syria, by saying that *“Turkey is very beautiful but you don’t see these beauties when you get out of your own country. I always think about my own city. Wherever you go, you’ll return your homeland at the end. I love my homeland very much. I went out for learning. It is currently very difficult to go to a university in my city. I want to give beautiful things to my homeland.”*

We can comprehend the participants’ longing for their country from their answers to the question “Are you planning to return to Syria after you finish your education?” In this context, only three of them indicated that they don’t want to return while the other students said they would go back to Syria in case the war is over. Some participants told they see Turkey as their homeland and don’t want to leave and even want to stay in Turkey if the war in Syria will be over some day. In this regard, E6 stated that he feels himself in his homeland in Turkey and told: *“Homeland is not only soil, and even not only persons. I was little when I left Syria. I didn’t understand well that time. But now I feel myself in my homeland. Certainly do I miss there but we have been together for a long time. We must also be together now. Perhaps we have been together from the seventh century until now. Yeah, maybe our race and language are different. We did not draw these boundaries. I don’t feel like a foreigner here.”* (E6, 19).

It is understood from the participants’ replies that they don’t feel themselves much alienated. We can say that the fact that the two cultures are close in terms of both geography and their manners and customs is influential on this feeling to occur. They might certainly have confronted with several difficulties after coming to Turkey. However, especially because both cultures are close to each other provided them to adapt

to the dominant culture more easily and reduced the effect of the culture shock they have experienced or will experience. Despite they expressed that they want to return to Syria after the war is over and they are still having several difficulties, the similarity between both cultures help them to keep these difficulties at minimum.

The answers given by the participants to the question “What kind of reactions do you receive when you say you are Syrian to someone in Turkey?” show the effect of these reactions on their feeling of whether they belong to Turkey or not. The participants told that they were welcomed by some people but were considered as “beggars of thieves” by others and pointed out that regardless of their country, all the people are not the same so that some bad events between the Turks and Syrians should not be attributed to all the Syrians. In this context, what E5 said is remarkable: “*Some says that if they were us they would not have escaped but fought. Then I say God save anyone from our situation. If we had not escaped from our place, we would not be alive.*” (E5, 23). Thus it is not a fair approach to blame Syrians because of leaving their country. Indeed the participants expressed their discomfort by saying “We didn’t start this war and lost our homeland because of events developing out of us.”

4.2. Mother Tongue

Most of the participants didn’t speak Turkish at all before coming to Turkey. Only one of the males stated that he could speak a bit Turkish because of being native Turkmen. Most of the participants initially came to the cities of “Antep, Hatay, Kilis or Urfa” which are close to the Syrian border. Due to the fact that the people living at these places could speak Arabic delayed the participants to confront with the language problem after coming to Turkey and provided them not to face the problems that might occur due to language differences. However, when they came to Nigde or went to another city of Turkey for education, the language problem complicated their communication. While having difficulties in expressing themselves in public spaces (bus, hospital etc.), the participants indicated that they only started to overcome these problem once they began to learn Turkish.

The students, who had one year education of Turkish before passing to their department of study, told they had much difficulty in learning Turkish because the grammar structures of Arabic and Turkish are quite different. However, they stated that their problems were alleviated after learning Turkish. Thus, “language” is a highly crucial fact for individuals to familiarize with a new culture and in the communication process. At this point, particularly attributing different meanings to words can be an obstacle for a healthy communication of individuals. Participant E4, for example, told that people shout at each other as “*hiş*” (like saying “hey!”) in Turkey while this is a voice for animals in Syria, so he first reacted to people shouting him “*hiş*” and later learned the meaning was different than in Syria despite being annoyed at first.

The participants said they got reactions when they spoke Arabic in public spaces or dormitories and emphasized that felt like foreigners in such situations. In this regard, K5 told an event she experienced as following: “*Last year we were sitting at the dining hall as a group. After hearing we spoke Arabic, a person came and slammed his fist on the table and said ‘you are in Turkey, you must speak Turkish’. And we have to be quiet. There will be a fight if we respond.*” (K5, 20). In addition to this, K3 and K5 stated that their Turkish friends are also disturbed when they speak Arabic in the dormitory room. It is evident that the language barrier is an important problem for the participants. Some participants told that they become friends especially with Turkish students and spend time with them so they try to improve their Turkish.

4.3. Elements Regulating Social Life

As elements which regulate social life, Syria's customs and manners, their similarities and differences with the dominant culture have been considered in this study. It can be concluded that Turkish and Syrian cultures resemble very much to each other. In spite of certain differences, particularly bairams (Muslim festivals) and weddings are quite similar.

Bairams in Turkey and Syria constitute the common cultural values. In other words, bairams are significant cultural activities for both countries. Generally in both cultures, elders are visited in the first day of the bairam and the youngsters are visited the other days for celebration. In addition, guests are served sweets during bairam in both cultures. It came out during the interviews that there are various kinds of things that are served in different regions of Syria. The cultural difference that almost all of the participants emphasized was the ritual of kissing the elders' hands. In Turkey, individuals kiss the hands of elder individuals, whether their relatives or not. The participants stated that only the closest relatives' hands are kissed in Syria, but the other old people are greeted or their hands are shaken. They also added that they found this behavioural pattern strange when they came to Turkey.

The participants describing Syrian weddings stated that women and men are separated in the weddings as different from those in Turkey and generally these lasted three days. They anyway said that they don't find it odd that Turkish weddings are held with women and men together. Participant K4 added that there is no "henna nights" in Syrian Muslims. Participant E2 mentioned that weddings in Syria only take place at nights as opposed to Turkey. It was found out that the music played in Syrian weddings is generally similar to the Turkish culture.

It was asked to the participants, "Can you maintain your own cultural features while living in Turkey?" and several answers were received. They stated that they couldn't maintain their bairam or wedding traditions because they are not living together as they did in Syria. Some participants told they don't want to maintain these traditions due to the sufferings they had because these doesn't make sense anymore and that they give them more pain. Participant K2 explained this situation as follows: "*Some things are heavy because of the war. I have an aunt, for example, her two sons became martyrs. Such things are very heavy for us. Many people were martyred. As if there is no bairam. I have never had a bairam after leaving my town.*" (K2, 23). Participant E2 said that they try to come together with his family insofar as they can but since all the family members are in different cities, they cannot come together in every bairam (E2, 22).

The participants gave different answers to the question "Do you think you are going to lose your own cultural values as long as you continue to live in Turkey?" Most of the participants told they don't think they will become distant to their own cultural values while E5 admitted they might experience some changes by saying "*For example, I have a younger sister. Her nephews don't want to veil themselves. In our country, they have to veil themselves when they start the first class. Therefore, they can maybe change here.*" (E5, 23). It is inferred from the answers to this question that the participants have undergone certain cultural changes during their lives in Turkey and adapted to the dominant culture. It can be said that the fact that they cannot live collectively in Turkey underlies these changes. It is understood that the students who seem to not having difficulties in adapting themselves to the dominant culture try to preserve their own cultural values, although it is difficult.

4.4. The Reflections of Cultural Differences and Similarities on Communication

The participants stated that the similarity between Turkish culture and Syrian culture provides convenience in their communication process and they adapted faster to live in Turkey. They expressed that they could study in Turkey because of the opportunities given to them and otherwise they would not be able to continue their education.

Most of the participants gave the same answers to the question, “Is there any cultural feature in Turkey that you find very different?” and said that they find odd that, in Turkey, women and men live in the same house before marriage or easily go to their houses. The participants who expressed that this is particularly a situation against religion stated that man-woman relationships are not that open in Syria and walking around together before engagement or marriage is not tolerated. They stated that this is the cultural feature in Turkey which they most find different but that this doesn’t cause any negative situation for them, and they respect people’s lifestyle although it is impossible for them to live in that manner.

Participant E2 explained an event that occurred due to cultural differences: “*Here it is not approved to put your hands in your pocket in the face of the teachers or doctors. It is not a problem to put your hands in your pocket in our country. I was in a hospital here. He asked ‘do you speak to the doctors like that in your country?’ Then I said ‘I am sorry, doctor, it is not a problem in our country, please don’t get me wrong’.*” (E2, 22). It is seen that it takes time to live in a different culture and act in accordance with the norms of that culture. It is possible to get familiarized with a different culture at once. Therefore, the participants faced with several cultural differences from the moment they came to Turkey and preferred to respect a situation instead of resisting it, even they find it wrong. It is understood that their attitude in this manner has facilitated their lives in Turkey.

It is evident from the participants’ statements that their biggest problem after coming to Turkey has been their incapability of expressing themselves because they can’t speak the language. Indeed the participants also confirmed that the root of the problems they experienced is originated in the fact that they don’t speak the language, and after learning Turkish, they began to have fewer problems and solved their problems more easily. At this point, Hall’s component of interaction including language must be emphasized with respect to its importance for individuals from different cultures to come together. It is possible to overcome all differences with a healthy communication.

5. Conclusion

In this study, which is about the interactions between Syrian students from Nigde University and Turkish culture, it was seen from the interviews with participants that Syrian and Turkish cultures are very similar to each other, although there are certain differences in some elements such as meals, traditions of weddings and bairams or other elements regulating social life. The only difference the Syrian students couldn’t get used to is the approach to man-woman relationships but they adapted to Turkish culture over time regarding other issues. By considering emphasizes on Hofstede’s masculinity-femininity component and Hall’s bisexuality component, this case shows that Syrian and Turkish cultures are different. In this context, although the roles attributed to men and women in both cultures coincide at some points, it is comprehended particularly in terms of religion that people are more devoted to religious principles in Syria compared to Turkey.

It is true that the affinity between Turkish and Syrian cultures has enabled the students to more easily pass Bennett's levels of cultural adaptation from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. So it can be suggested that the effects of the culture shock that might occur when close cultures meet might be less.

Although the participants are happy to be in Turkey and can continue their education and feel lucky because of being escaped somehow from the war, it was observed that in fact they necessarily didn't want to leave their country.

Evaluating the data of the study, it was seen that the most important element in intercultural communication is language. It is understood that the taboos of cultures to each other are broken as long as the language barrier is overcome. Certainly the participants still have some problems. As they pointed out during the interviews, there are various attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Turkey. The mutual problems that occur also prevent a possible healthy communication. A mutual tolerance is needed to overcome these problems. In this context, it is seen that the participants are able to establish better communication over time with Turkish people.

Turkey is a country where individuals from a variety of ethnic groups have lived together for centuries. Cultures have for centuries influenced and changed each other. Thus, individuals who come to Turkey from abroad find themselves in a cultural mosaic. It is quite natural that especially the individuals who necessarily left their country and are forced to live in another cultural geography defend themselves against the new culture they meet and resist to change and transformation. However, it is observed that the participants are open to a new culture, tolerate the differences they see and shortly adapt themselves to live in harmony with the dominant culture. The participants, who seemingly try to preserve their own cultural values while adapting to a new culture, consider the similarity between Syrian culture and Turkish culture as an advantage.

It is deduced from the study data that sharing the same cultural geography is effective on cultures to easily adapt to each other. Nonetheless, it is clear that the most substantial element for a healthy intercultural communication is language. To understand and interpret a culture become easier when the language spoken in that culture is learned. From the viewpoint of the participants, by virtue of the language education they received, they could learn Turkish faster in comparison with many other Syrians. Thus, the adaptation process to the culture was reduced in line with language learning. It has to be underlined that the study is not eligible for generalization. It is not possible to conclude that the interactions between all the Syrians living Turkey and the dominant culture are the same. On the basis of the participants, the study provides a point of view in relation to the interaction of Syrian students with the dominant culture and their experiences in Turkey.

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