

## **An International Student Learning Turkish Through Cultural Interaction: A Narrative Research**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to determine the relationship between cultural interaction and language in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and reveal its contribution to the learning process. Therefore, in this study, the cultural exchange of a Lebanese international student studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University was evaluated in the context of language learning performance. The narrative research design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. The primary purpose of narrative research is to examine individuals' lifestyles through the stories they produce. In this study, the student's social environment, school, and friendship relations were taken into account. His daily life's contributions to language skills, academic life, and social relations were tried to be measured. The target language has been observed in the cultural life experienced by the international student. Thus, through narrative research, the student's cultural world was entered as a language learning experience. In the study, the student's vocabulary learning, communication skills, and the ability to use language in academic life were emphasized. The semi-structured interview method was used as a data collection tool in the study. After deciphering each interview, attention was paid to ensure that the data obtained were sufficiently clear. The descriptive analysis method was applied to the collected data. As a result, it has been observed that international students who learn Turkish as a foreign language hugely benefits from cultural interaction in their foreign language proficiency, communication skills, and non-verbal behavior. It has been determined that international students behave pragmatically while communicating and classify words semantically in this process. It has been remarked that vocabulary learning, and pronunciation skills develop faster in cultural life, and their anxiety states decrease as they move away from the classroom setting. It was also understood in the study that different language families affect language acquisition. Besides, it has been determined that students who have difficulties comprehending language logic experience some degree of delay in their speaking skills.

**Keywords:** Culture, Communication, Narrative Research, Language Interaction, Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

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## Introduction

It is necessary to be familiar with its cultural aspects as well as to know the system and grammar structures of that language to learn a foreign language. As Göçer (2012) also stated, language gives society a way of life. It embodies society's thinking structures and value system and establishes a tight bond with the culture. It even becomes one of the most important transmitters of culture (Demir & Açıık, 2011). Therefore, it is almost impossible to consider language and culture separately in foreign language learning.

In order to be able to communicate effectively, it is necessary to know the language usage created by the culture. Language usage styles vary within the conditions of each country. A situation that is desired to be expressed is reflected in the language of speech in a way specific to the society. From this point of view, a foreign language learner must have a command of the particular situation of the environment in which language learning takes place to overcome the situations they will encounter in their daily lives, understand the speakers of that language entirely, and explain their problems (Tapan, 1990). And this means knowing the country's cultural elements well (Polat, 1990, p.69-70).

The most crucial aim of knowing cultural factors is to ensure healthy interaction between individuals from different cultures. As a matter of fact, individuals with different cultures, who are in contact with each other, can adapt to societies' life patterns, attitudes, and behaviors as long as they perceive the target language's communicative needs and can communicate smoothly. However, if the cultural elements cannot be conveyed sufficiently, the individuals speaking a foreign language will mean nothing but expressing the concepts they see in their own cultural environment with different symbols (Brooks, 1986, p.128). This can cause some misunderstandings and problems while speaking a language. Therefore, learning a foreign language also means mastering the perspectives, ways of thinking, and value judgments of different societies. For this reason, it is necessary to be able to use the correct words and behavior patterns in the target language to comprehend the language altogether. Language learners should know the culture of the person they interact with at least as much as their own culture (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 1991, p.342).

Individuals primarily try to comprehend the lives in the countries they visit through their experiences. Then they try to establish the relationship between the similar and different aspects of both cultures. This makes positive contributions to intercultural interaction. Therefore, learning a language only within specific rules and patterns may not be sufficient for communication. For this reason, individuals should be able to use the language they have learned as a communication tool. To achieve this, they need to acquire the culture of the target language and grammar rules (Ülker, 2007, p.32). As individuals comprehend the culture and mentality of the language they learn, they will understand the structure of the language better. For example, individuals will be able to make a better

sense of what is happening around them while expressing the Turkish language concepts when they approach the concepts with the Turkish culture's mindset, not with the mentality of their own culture.

However, as Lado stated, if individuals do not have consistent information about the target culture, it is impossible to compare the two cultures (İşcan et al., 2012). And this may cause some problems for foreign language learners. Thus when individuals from different cultures come together, they may have some disagreements due to their perspectives. For example, people in other cultures may be described as loud or quiet, depending on their perspective. They can even describe each other as rude and disrespectful and begin to act with unbreakable prejudices. This shows that in foreign language learning, cultural interactions are an essential element that enables one to view events from a broader perspective and think in a multidimensional way.

As we can see, foreign language learning should be done consciously. For this reason, to learn a foreign language fully requires knowing the logic and cultural thinking of the target language. Only theoretical knowledge, such as grammar and sentence structures, is often insufficient for foreign language learning. Therefore, individuals who learn foreign languages must have the necessary skills to communicate in the target language and the skills required to use them (Aktaş, 2004, p.46).

Ultimately, individuals trying to recognize the target language's culture, understand its differences, and approach cultural differences with respect enable them to adopt the target culture's differences. In this way, societies can approach each other with respect and tolerance in their relations with different cultures. This increases the individuals' attitudes and motivations towards language in foreign language learning. So, the language learning process can be carried out more successfully (Okur & Keskin, 2013, p.1624).

## **Method**

Narrative research design which is one of the qualitative research methods was used in this research.

### **The Model of the Research**

Narrative research examines people's experiences of a subject with stories they have lived (Büyüköztürk etc., 2012, p.275). The researcher compiles the stories told. Through narrative research, stories are extended to experiences, and these experiences are evaluated with different perspectives following the purpose of the study in the research analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007). In this process, the researcher is involved in exploring the participant's experiences. These experiences can be divided into two different types as social and individual (Saban & Ersoy, 2016). Social experiences emerge from the participant's interaction with other people, while individual experiences emerge from their experiences alone.

In the research, the social experiences of the participant on the subject were tried to be explored. In these experiences, Riessman's analysis process was followed. Riessman's (2005) analysis process takes place as follows:

1. The story told by the participant participating in the research. (narrative)
2. Interpretation of this story by the researcher (narrative of narrative)
3. The reader perceiving the story or reconstructing it in their own world (narrative of the narrative of narrative)

This narrative research below includes all these stages. The narrative is analyzed in the context of space, time, and interaction.

### **Working Group**

In the study, a Lebanese male student studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University in the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic year was interviewed. Narrative research is a research model that examines the life experiences of a single person or a very small number of people in great detail (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, detailed life experiences were tried to be revealed by interviewing a single person in the interview. The interview was conducted voluntarily. The participating student who came to Turkey in 2019 is acquainted with Turkish culture. At this stage of cultural interaction, the Turkish culture that the international student learns by experience has been observed in language learning. In this way, it has been tried to determine to what extent cultural life affects the language learning process.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The semi-structured interview method was used as a data collection tool. The semi-structured interview method was used among the types of interview methods. While this method facilitates the analysis of the researcher, it provides the interviewee the opportunity to express himself better (Büyüköztürk etc., 2012, p.154). In addition to the questions planned to be asked in this technique, some other questions that develop depending on the interview flow can also be added (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this study, two interviews were conducted on different days by recording the interview with the Lebanese international student. The international student was asked the description of cultural experiences he lived in Turkey. The questions directed to the interviewed student to obtain the data to be analyzed as follows:

1. What were the first words you started learning when you came to Turkey?
2. How did you begin to communicate with your environment when you first came to Turkey? How did you manage to meet your daily needs in Turkish?
3. What kind of problems did you encounter during the university registration process because you do not know Turkish? Have you ever had anxiety?

4. To what extent have you improved your listening, reading, and speaking skills while in social life? What types of social activities contributed to these skills?

5. What effects has your cultural life had on your academic life? Could you briefly explain?

6. How has your cultural life contributed to your spoken language? To what extent did these reflect on your body language? Could you briefly explain?

### **Analysis of Data**

In the narrative study, data analysis aims to reveal the meanings in experiences. For this reason, there is an effort to conceptualize the data and turn it into a fact (Liamputtong, 2009). For this reason, the content analysis method was used. The main goal of this method is to present the findings to the reader in a summarized and interpreted form (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). As a result of the analysis, two themes emerged: the international student's perspective on Turkish culture and cultural interaction contributions to language learning. Conclusions on these themes include direct quotations from the participant student's views, and these views have been interpreted based on the participant student's statements.

### **Findings and Comments**

This section presents the findings obtained from the interviews with the international student on the relationship between cultural interaction and learning Turkish as a foreign language.

#### ***1. What were the first words you started learning when you came to Turkey?***

*When I first came here, the first thing I learned was to say “good morning” as a necessity. But it took me 2-3 days to learn to say good morning. Because with my mouth structure, it was heavy and challenging to say. Because it is spoken only in the morning, I say it in the morning, and I would not use it again. For this, I forgot until the next day. The first word I learned in Turkish was “my eyes.” To come to Turkey with a scholarship, they asked me if I know any Turkish words during the interview. I said, “my eyes.” When they asked how I learned later, I said I learned from the Turkish TV series (Doctors).*

### **Vocabulary learning and pronunciation skills of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

Vocabulary learning in foreign language teaching is a situation that the student maintains continuously in the language acquisition process. This process, which develops and continues at every learning stage, creates a rich vocabulary if used effectively. However, as seen in the international student's case above, when the frequency of use of words decreases, some remembering difficulties are experienced. Words used only a few times a day, such as “good morning,” are easily forgotten and cause difficulty remembering. However, the increasing frequency of word use and word-learning strategies in the learning process significantly contributes to vocabulary learning achievement at the

expected level, contrary to the mentioned (Biçer & Polatcan, 2015, p.813). Besides, the difficulty of pronunciation that the student has experienced is a situation that happens because of the sounds that are found in Arabic but not found in Turkish and found in Turkish but not in Arabic (Aydın, 2010, p.331). Poor vocabulary, not having enough information about the subject, and not adjusting the tone well are among the problems that can be included in this pronunciation problem (Göçer, 2015, p. 24; Yaşar & Toprak, 2017).

***2. How did you begin to communicate with your environment when you first came to Turkey? How did you manage to meet your daily needs in Turkish?***

*I did not know any Turkish when I arrived in Turkey, and when I went outside, I was trying to express my first needs with gestures. When I went to the market, I was explaining what I wanted to buy in body language. That is why I did not remember the Turkish names of the things I bought because I met my needs in this way. But I had to go back and forth more than once when I went to the immigration administration and the police station to complete the university registration procedures. That's why I started to memorize the names of the documents requested from me. On the first day I arrived, I left the dormitory and tried to learn how to go to university. However, since I do not speak any Turkish, I did not know how to ask for directions. When I was in Lebanon, I only learned to name the university. I was trying to ask for directions with gestures by saying the university's name to those I came across. But then, I didn't even know how to say "where." So I felt the need to learn this word and first learned the word "where" and "Where is the university?" I started saying. Then I learned the word "street." Because while people were describing directions, I heard words like this street and that street. Apart from that, I started learning new words on the bus. Of course, I had to get a bus card first. And it was also with gestures. First, I told the buffet the word "bus" that I learned to get a card. Then I tried to show the shape of the card with a hand sign. The man understood me and gave me the card. Then I went to university.*

**The communicative utilitarian approach in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

As seen in the international student's situation, the primary goal for individuals who are just starting to learn the language is communicating. However, the main factor that accelerates language learning while communicating is determining interests and needs in order of importance. As can be understood from the narrative, the international student does not need to learn much the names of the things he can handle with body language. However, he tries to catch almost every word in university registration that is important to him. Therefore, in the early stages of language acquisition, students learn words in line with their interests and needs and determine their priorities according to their needs' functional characteristics (Apaydın, 2007). Besides, the student's effort to understand the

descriptions made, learning words such as street and bus cards quickly with the influence of the social environment, as stated by Biçer and Polatcan (2015), is learned faster with the effect of the environment.

***3. What kind of problems did you encounter during the university registration process because you do not know Turkish? Have you ever felt anxious?***

*Actually, I didn't think I'd have much trouble because I knew English and French. But on the contrary, I could not communicate with the authorities. Because they did not speak a foreign language, and I had a hard time getting the procedure done. There was no one around me to help. When I went to the attendant, the attendant gave me just one piece of paper (personal information form) and said, "fill it out." At that moment, I immediately understood what the word "to fill" was. Because I felt I had to understand. Otherwise, I would not be able to complete registration. But, I did not know how to fill it. Because I did not know how to write and read in Turkish, and there were long writings on paper.*

**Anxiety in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

As seen in the narrative example above, the international student's conflict in student affairs while learning a new language made him feel weak (Littlewood, 1984). This shows that people learning foreign languages experience communication difficulties when they feel insecure and anxious. However, considering that the student knows English and French as a foreign language, it is seen that the anxiety is not due to insecurity or fear of not being able to learn a language, but because of being exposed to too much language acquisition and feeling unsafe at the first stage of a new language learning.

***4. To what extent have you improved your listening, reading, and speaking skills while in social life? What types of social activities contributed to these skills?***

***Listening:*** *At first, I didn't understand most of the words I was listening to. That's why I first tried to understand what was discussed in general and in the conversations I heard. Although I did not know exactly what the other person was talking about, I was trying to understand what they were talking about. For example, while I was listening to the talks about the dormitory, I started to keep in mind the other frequently mentioned words about the dormitory. For example, when I heard words such as "bed, room, dining hall" during the talks about the dormitory, I understood that when these words were used together, even if the word dorm was not mentioned, there was something about the dormitory.*

### **A semantic classification of words in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

Many linguists consider listening to be one of the most important language skills (Pierce, 1988, p.13). At the same time, it is a process in which mental skills are actively used in intellectual abilities such as understanding, evaluating, and determining the relationship between what is being said (Eken, 2011). As seen in the narrative example above, although the international student cannot fully understand the speeches of the individuals he interacts with, he tries to receive and interpret the words effectively. Furthermore, trying to make sense of them by matching them with words such as “bed, room and dining hall” as seen in the example of dormitory shows that the dimension of meaning in thought is put forward.

*Reading: Apart from TOMER lessons, I learned many words from advertisements and signs while wandering outside. I learned even better by seeing things like “road closed, road open, employee-waiter wanted, discount, buy three, pay for one.” In the beginning, I was thinking of what “employee” means, what “wanted” mean. I saw these words, mostly in the shops. As time passed, I started combining the two. However, as a result of the lessons I took at TOMER and my experiences outside, I began to understand some things after two months. When I started to understand some things, I went and bought a book. While reading the book, I saw too many words I didn't know. But as I read those pages, I started to notice the words in the previous pages. Frequent words, of course, started to stay in my mind. I was also trying to memorize them. However, just trying to memorize this way was not enough. But when I heard these words in everyday conversation, I remembered them because I started to catch the words I read in discussions. I had a tough time reading at first. I could not fully understand the sentences. Therefore, I first tried to understand the main topics in the texts I read. After understanding the topics, I grouped the words that belong to that topic. So I was categorizing words according to meaning. For example, when talking about “sea”, I grouped the word about the sea when I went to the dormitory. However, this time I came across metaphorical meanings, like swimming (yüzmek), a hundred (yüz), and skinning (yüzmek). I did not know how to distinguish them from the beginning. But by living and experiencing, I began to understand. For example, I heard about swimming when I went to the sea. I saw it as numbers in mathematics, and I learned during lessons that butchers also peel the skin from animals.*

### **Reading skills and vocabulary learning in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

As seen in the narrative example above, new words and words that attract individuals' attention in books or daily life positively affect memory and comprehension skills. As can be



understood from the international student's situation, when individuals interact with texts or writings that are compatible with the cultural background they are in, their cultural achievements become easier. The signs in the narration, the articles in the shop windows, and the book's words are a practical indicator of this situation. The international student had difficulty reading the book in the early stages when he was not fully aware of the target language's cultural characteristics; however, he enriched his vocabulary in the later stages of his cultural interaction. This shows that the sociocultural knowledge that language acquirers have consist of many elements and contributes positively to reading activities (Aygüneş, 2007, p.78). Besides, the metaphorical use of the word face signifies that cultural life affects language, according to regionality. As a matter of fact, it is not possible for a student studying in a city in Turkey's west with a beach to be the same in terms of language acquisition as a student studying in a city of Central Anatolia with no beach. As seen in the narrative, while the student living on the seashore has the opportunity to hear and use the word swimming many times in the summer, the other's lack of such an opportunity will create a difference in terms of usage frequency and affect learning. Consequently, when such examples are taken into consideration, it will be seen that culture and geography make quite a difference in language teaching.

***Speaking and Grammar:** At first, I was trying to make short and unconventional speeches. Even though I tried to use conjunctions, I was misusing them. Making long sentences was very difficult. However, after six months, I started being able to make sentences. The things I had the most difficulty in saying were suffixes. Suffixes like “I, A, dA, dAn, tAn” were challenging to say. I started to use them correctly by hearing them more. I kept saying it wrong when I thought about where and what to add. In time, when I started to say whatever came to my mind, without hesitation, I started to say the right things. I also had a lot of trouble with conjunctions. I was confusing conjunctions like “However, therefore, though.” I did not know precisely when to say which one. I started translations to learn these words. However, I could not fully understand their meaning in daily life with translations. Therefore, after their translation, as I heard these words in speech, I started to track their use. I tried to form sentences with these words to test whether I was speaking correctly. Likewise, I learned the suffix “ip, ip” from listening to daily life. In the past, when I was going to say something, I used to make sentences one by one. “I went to BIM. I bought something. I came back to the dormitory.” But then I started to make sentences like “I went to BIM where I bought something and came back to the dormitory.” I learned this from my Turkish friends around me. While I was saying the same things at length, they expressed briefly with the conjunctions “come and go.” So I tried to learn these conjunctions by hearing more.*

*I also tried to use rules in social life that I learned in class but could not understand. For example, at first, I did not understand words like “if I did, if I were.” I've seen these*

*many times in the books. However, I also could not understand much from books. So I tried to make a sentence with these words to the manager of the dormitory. But it was wrong again. Then the dormitory manager corrected my mistake. After my errors were corrected in this way a few more times, I started using it correctly. Also, at first, I was trying to talk by thinking about the rules. I was thinking about where and what to use and saying so. However, this way, I was not catching up with the speeches and was running late. Even without being able to say anything, the topics were changing. I was hesitating whether what I said was wrong or true. I wasn't confident about speaking the right way. But now, I speak confidently without thinking. The reason I started talking without thinking was my self-confidence.*

### **Agglutinative language structure and pronunciation difficulties preventing speaking, and grammar in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

Speaking is one of the most effective means of establishing relationships with society and expressing oneself. The individual's physiological state, their emphasis in the narrative, the use of symbolic language and humor, his pronunciation, target-oriented speech attitude, and style are essential factors that determine the elements of speech (Telman & Ünsal, 2005, p.79). Therefore, individuals who learn Turkish as a foreign language have to achieve cultural life elements to communicate by pronouncing sounds accurately. Nevertheless, it is not easy to fulfill the requirements as there are some difficulties in pronouncing Turkish phonemes in multinational classes or societies formed by students from different language families (Tüm & Sarkaz, 2014). As seen in the narrative example above, individuals learning Turkish may experience anxiety and speech difficulties in this case. Also, according to Gregersen (2003), anxious students tend to make more mistakes.

In addition to those mentioned, another obstacle that triggers speech and grammar mistakes is that students whose mother tongue is not an agglutinative language have difficulty comprehending Turkish's linguistic logic, which is an agglutinative language (Tunçel, 2013, p.1113). In this context, the student who learns Turkish also makes grammar and speaking mistakes at the first stages because their language is Arabic. Even though he knows the grammar rules, in theory, he has grammar problems in adverbial-verbs, separation, presence, and expression suffixes. Similarly, Nunan (2003) attributes the reason why most students cannot use these rules correctly in communication, although they can define grammatical regulations because of their ineffectiveness in teaching grammar elements.

Besides, students 'attempting to express their misuse in different places and with different sentences is not an act of imitation, such as renewing the stereotype expressions heard in individuals' speech, as in Chomsky's view (Altınörs, 2012, p.81). On the contrary, it is carried out consciously as a

creative act. The student's attempt to make different sentences about the structure he learned by going to the dormitory manager shows that he has a creative mindset rather than imitation.

**5. What effects has your cultural life had on your academic life? Could you explain briefly?**

*Although I could understand many things, I still had difficulties when I switched to medical school after TOMER. Because the terms were complicated. So I had to come home and translate. For example, I could not understand things like “hücre, çekirdek, çekirdekcik” (cell, nucleus, spinal cord). At first, I thought of the “nucleus” (çekirdek) as the name of food. Also, the suffix “cik” reminded me of the child. I was confusing the “omurilik” (spinal cord) with “ömür” (life). I was trying to reason. I was thinking deeply about what life might have to do with the bone. That is why medical terms are far from everyday life. Although I did not have difficulty in daily conversations, I was having difficulties in lessons. Apart from these, I did not understand some of the different pronunciations in the lessons at first. For example, “Are you at the head of the computer?” they were telling me. Not “Are you using the computer?” I was thinking about how a person could be in the head of the computer. Because I didn't know where the head of the computer was. However, since I heard this a lot outside of school, I did not have any difficulties like other terms. In time, even when asked like that, I would even give answers like “Yes, I'm at the head” or “No, I'm not at the head of the computer.” But I still felt quite incomplete academically.*

**Academic success in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

As shown in the narrative example above, there are considerable differences between academic and daily terminology in teaching Turkish to foreigners. While individuals can meet their needs with the Turkish education they receive in daily life, they fall short in academic terms. Therefore, this means that individuals who learn Turkish need different skills academically. From this thought, it is understood that to master a foreign language, it is not enough to know only the language's grammar or words and know the idioms, unique formations, and terms in the language. As it can be understood from the narrative, the student initially perceives medical terms such as “nucleus, cell nucleus” as food names since he does not have full command of academic terms. Because the brain needs to illustrate the information and make it visible to be kept in memory (Özdemir, 2013). Therefore, the student tries to meet this requirement by matching the terms with the words he knows. However, he fails due to the lack of cultural life. Therefore, as can be seen in the narrative, idioms with words far from their real meanings and metaphorical features are among the most challenging elements to learn in foreign language learning (Güneş, 2009).

**6. How has your cultural life contributed to your spoken language? To what extent did these reflect on your body language? Could you briefly explain?**

*After coming to Turkey, I started to learn the rules of meeting someone. This place is different from Lebanon. Both in form and in speech. For example, when meeting someone here, we start asking where are you from. We do not hear about them just because we are international students. They also ask the same thing to a Turkish person. I don't usually ask questions like that either. However, since we are international students here, I necessarily ask, "Where are you from?" Just like Turks say to each other, "Where are you from, fellow?" We ask other international students, "Where are you from?" to find out if they are from anywhere near us. Moreover, when I ask a Turkish person where he is from, for example, if he says I come from Erzurum, I say, "it is too cold there." I have not been to Erzurum, but it is often said that because Erzurum is really cold. That's why I say it. I pretend to know.*

**Cultural harmony in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

As individuals and societies interact culturally with each other, a particular cultural exchange takes place between them. As a result, positive attitudes towards other cultures and languages begin to develop. Therefore, this brings about effective learning in language learning. The student knows how to behave when speaking with the other person and embrace the target language's culture. Indeed, as seen in the narrative example, the student asked, "Where are you from?" When he received the answer "I am from Erzurum" from a person he asked, by answering, "Oh, it is freezing there" is an indication that he has adapted to the mindset of Turkish culture. In other words, it is a sign that he has become competent in that language in terms of both language and cultural structures (Okur & Keskin, 2013, p.1626). This shows that language acquisition is useful to the extent that it is reflected in both behavior and cultural knowledge.

*Also, there is a head-tossing when Turkish people greet you. We greet each other by kissing on the cheeks. I just learned this here because we don't have a head-toss. This was very funny after I got to Lebanon. Because I habitually did the same there. They laughed at me because it did not make sense to them. I also learned to squeeze after hugging here. When I hug someone now, I squeeze them. "What are you doing?" is used a lot. When I first heard about this, I had no idea what to say. He both sees what I'm doing and asks, "What are you doing?" It sounded absurd. However, I later learned that when you are asked that, you will say, "I am fine." When asked, "What's up?" You will say, "Well, same." When it was said that way at first, I was saying, "What is up with yours?" My friends were laughing at me. My friends said that this is wrong. They said I should say, "How about you?" So I learned to use it in its correct form. I also thought a lot when I first heard about "What's up and what's not." I thought something like,*

*“What's up... what's not... there is not... there is something...” Then I pretended to understand. “Nothing, brother” I said.*

### **Body language in international students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

Every nation has a body language structure with its unique tones. This structure, which is characteristic of cultures, also includes the logic of that language. For this reason, intercultural approaches provide individuals with versatile thinking skills in terms of communication. As can be seen in the narrative example above, the most important of these are the greetings. While greeting by a kiss on the cheek on his own country, he started head tossing in Turkey. This means he learned the lifestyle, customs, and traditions, national and spiritual values along with the language (Alyılmaz & Er, 2016, p.1393). Besides, this situation, which means cultural awareness, prevents misunderstanding and confusion. In addition to these, students also have difficulty in interpreting some idioms in the language. That is why they try to get out of the difficult situation they are in by pretending to understand the idioms as in the example (Güneş, 2009).

*I also worked in a restaurant to learn Turkish faster. After a few days, I started getting used to it. I even started taking orders. But one day, one of the workers there told me, “My son, is trash standing outside?” and when I heard this, I felt as if he had never learned Turkish. (He meant is the garbage still there?) I just thought. How can trash stand? Or how can it go? I thought for a while, but when I didn't understand, I said, “No, it lies down.” I said. But when I learned its true meaning later, I realized that I was making fun of him. While working at the restaurant, customers ordered a spreading kebab. I froze. I said, okay. I was going downstairs to tell the chef. But I forgot the name until I arrived. So I went back to the customer and tried to learn his order's name again without revealing it. I said you mentioned a feature. The customer said, spreading once again. I said to the chef this time to spread it. I thought of spreading in my mind as a sauce. I felt more spice would be added. Then I took the kebabs to the customer. But the order was wrong again. Because I still don't understand, the customer said, “Don't you understand?” So I pretended to understand and switched kebabs place. Later, I went to the chef and learned what it was and how it was done. Another day, someone working there asked me for the mop. “What does a mop mean?” I thought. Then I went out. I looked around. There were cleaning supplies. But I didn't know which one. Then I came back to my coworker. “What's a mop?” I asked. My coworker laughed at me, then we went together and took the mop. Then I learned the mop. I also learned idioms and proverbs in the restaurant. For example, “Üzüm üzüme baka baka kararır.” It translates to, “Grape turns darker than the grape.” But it means, “If you lie down with dogs, you will rise up with fleas.” At first, I thought, how would the grape turn darker than the grape. I could not understand. I wondered why grape is mentioned in the restaurant. I*

*even thought that what we were talking about had nothing to do with grapes. But later I understood when the chef told me.*

### **Attitudes of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language towards metaphors**

One of the most important purposes of foreign language learning is to communicate smoothly. Because effective and appropriate communication in the target language prevents misunderstandings and raises sensitivity to cultural issues in daily life, however, as seen in the above narrative example, the student cannot grasp the coworker's purpose in using the sentence since he cannot yet perceive the metaphorical meanings as in the statement "Is the garbage standing?" Therefore, he experiences communication disruptions while communicating, as in the answer "No, it lies down." According to Abisamra (2002), individuals' difficulties in making sense of metaphors and idioms are due to their inability to fully absorb the other society's linguistic and cultural structure, ways of expression, traditions, and customs, aesthetic values, lifestyle and various features, semantic and cultural differences. Likewise, the student's inability to understand the spreading kebab while working at the restaurant is due to the food cultures' specific differences. For this reason, the student has to adjust his academic life and cultural life simultaneously. Otherwise, as it can be understood from the student's situation, it is possible to experience disconnections and misunderstandings in communication.

*One of the words I have learned so fondly in Turkey, "to buy" was the word. One of the words I have learned so fondly in Turkey was "ismarlamak" (to treat). I was constantly saying, "Let me buy you a tea, treat me with something." Another word is "atıştırmak" (having a snack). One day a teacher said, "Let's have a snack." But we did not understand. We said "okay" to hide what we did not understand. Then, when we went to the restaurant, and the food came, we realized that this is how to have a snack.*

*Apart from these, I learned to wave by saying, "Sen var yaaa.." (You are the man). I learned praise words like "You are a man, My lion" by hearing from my friends. One day, I was playing soccer. When I scored a goal, my friends ran and hugged me, saying, "You are my lion." Of course, when my other friend scored, I hugged him, saying the same.*

*I also learned new things on the bus. People were calling each other "hocam" (teacher). After hearing such things for a long time, I started to use the word "hocam" when I wanted to say something or ask them about something.*

*Besides, tea is essential to Turks. I actually realized this after a few days. That's why one of the first words I learned was "tea." I learned this word quickly, as tea is served everywhere I go. When I went somewhere, I was now asking for and drinking tea. I even memorized this phrase. "Can ne çay ister ne çayhane, can sobet ister çay bahane." (A very difficult to pronounce saying about tea) There are also jokes that don't make sense.*

*But everyone uses them. So I learned these things too. "Falan filan inter milan,"  
"Havaryu ne varyu" (Meaningless set of words like yada yada).*

### **Attitudes of international students learning Turkish as a foreign language towards metaphors**

Every society has some traditional phrases to say in certain situations. Used when greeting, thanking, on the bus, and while shopping (Erol, 2007, p.14). In this context, learning a foreign language also means recognizing society's behaviors speaking the target language, its reactions to events, its appeal to the other, and its behaviors. Therefore, by removing the cultural barriers in front of communication, the expressions identified with Turkish culture should be taught (Yılmaz & Şeref, 2013). As seen in the narrative example above, if these obstacles are removed, and mold expressions are taught, a wealth of communication is provided. For example, the student does not have any difficulty using the word "ısmarlamak" (to treat) in social situations because he often hears it. On the contrary, he himself often uses this word. However, despite being in Turkey for a year, since he has never heard the word "atıştırmak" (to have a snack) he experiences anxiety when he first hears it. Because of his previous experiences and his cultural and social knowledge, this situation does not affect him entirely as a failure. This is only one of the steps the student must take in order to be successful (Soyupek, 2007). Therefore, when the language is learned with its culture, the degree of failure and negative influence decreases. In fact, it is seen that together with ready-made expression patterns, it facilitates the development of understanding and expression skills (Yılmaz & Şeref, 2013). Waving his hand by saying "Sen var yaaaa..." (You are the man), calling people "hocam" showing his joy with expressions such as "aslanım benim" (You are my lion) are some of these skills.

### **Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions**

In the study, the process an international student from Lebanon followed while learning a language and his experiences through cultural interaction were examined. The experiences are revealed through the stories (narrative) produced by the student himself. The aim here is to show the extent to which the international student's cultural experiences affect language learning. As a matter of fact, the situations that the student encounters in daily life while learning a language have a significant place in showing the effect of culture in learning Turkish as a foreign language.

In this context, it was observed in the study that the international student improved his vocabulary learning and pronunciation skills with his experiences in Turkish culture, and he grasped metaphors, idioms, and phrases better by participating in daily life. As Vygotsky (1978) stated, individuals, can learn better within their social and cultural environment. One of the main factors in this is that individuals can better use mental processes such as language, culture, and causality in different social and cultural environments (Vygotsky, 1978).

The study determined that in addition to metaphors, idioms, and stereotypes, grammar rules were better reinforced through social interaction. In fact, the student's effort to use words one by one increased the frequency of using words side by side, which contributed to learning a series of grammar rules (De Landa, 1997). Therefore, students' efforts and trials to make sentences by putting words together like "I went to BIM where I bought something and came back to the dormitory." made him familiar with grammar rules. He started to say them together, forming longer and complex sentences. In this process, it was also determined that the student classified the words semantically in order to ensure sentence integrity. The student's making such a classification is based on activating his existing knowledge and associating previous knowledge with new information (Toms Bronows, 1982). This situation also shows that the student acts with a constructivist approach in the language learning process. As a matter of fact, the student makes an effort to learn Turkish by following the stages of "activating preliminary information, understanding new information, structuring in mind, applying and evaluating information" in the constructivist approach's learning-teaching process (Güneş, 2007).

In the study, it was understood that the student had difficulty applying the rules of pronunciation and grammar because he was in a different language family than the target language (Bölükbaş, 2011). The student's experience of this difficulty is due to the fact that Arab students generally have difficulty in vocalizing "â, ı, i, o, ö, u, ü" vowels and "c, ğ, h, y" consonants (Yılmaz & Şeref, 2015). Among the main factors of the difficulties experienced is the high level of anxiety of the classroom student. In the classroom setting, students feel as though they are in an insecure and anxious environment when they cannot pronounce the language they are just starting to learn accurately (İşcan, 2015).

In order to reduce anxiety in language learning, individuals should be included in sociocultural life. As can be seen in the narration, the student feels more secure in daily life. Therefore, efforts to learn foreign languages in sociocultural life make individuals feel safe and reduce their anxiety levels (Brown, 1994, p. 141). In this context, it is understood that the social universe and culture create an anxiety-free learning environment and make positive contributions to learning (Demirel & Mirici, 2002).

In the study, it was observed that the student could express the feelings and thoughts he wanted to convey better over time with body language. Thus, body language is an essential element that enables individuals to remember words and express themselves in spoken language (İzğören, 1999). Therefore, it is thought that cultural interaction provides a versatile perspective on the student's language acquisition.

In this study, the understanding that individuals who learn Turkish as a foreign language cannot communicate effectively when they think of the language only in terms of words is dominant.



It is clearly seen that he has a communication break in the face of questions such as “Is the garbage in standing?” and “Are you at the head of the computer?” In this context, some predictions were made based on the study's narrative to use Turkish effectively. These are;

- Suitable speaking environments can be created so that students can easily remember the words they need to learn in the early days. In this way, students can improve their vocabulary on the one hand and reduce their anxiety on the other, with the words they use frequently.
- Individual interests and needs are among the factors that accelerate language learning. Therefore, language teaching can be carried out by considering the interests and needs of the students.
- It is seen that students' anxiety decreased when they communicate with their social environment. Students can be given opportunities to express themselves by preparing activities outside of the classroom environment.
- Students who want to gain the ability to listen in the early stages of language education learn words more quickly when they classify words in terms of meaning while making sense of the subject. In environments where cultural interaction occurs, the learning process can be facilitated by presenting word groups with similar structures to students.
- Students can read texts about objects and concepts they see in their social environment to gain reading skills. In this way, the student can remember the words he sees in daily life more comfortably in the books and further accelerates reading skills.
- Since students generally encounter the words' primary meanings in the first stage of their language learning, they have difficulty comprehending these words' connotations when they move into academic life. They even confuse the words they hear in everyday life with some terms. Therefore, during the interaction, attention can be drawn to the differences between daily language and academic terms.
- For students to fully understand the target language's logic, it can be ensured that they participate in conversations that reflect the Turkish mentality and observe how the dialogues develop.

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