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A Study on Communication Breakdowns: Sources of Misunderstanding in a Cross-Cultural Setting*

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ABSTRACT

The Erasmus exchange program has a positive influence on students' intercultural awareness since they find the chance to meet other cultures. Despite high levels of proficiency, there may still be misunderstandings between students of different cultures. As a consequence, the Erasmus program might not achieve its pluriculturalism aim. **Purpose of the Study:** This study aimed to find out what kind of communicational problems -if any- stemmed from cultural differences in the interactions of Erasmus students with the Turkish students in an undergraduate education context. **Method**: The data was collected from 69 participants: 39 Turkish students attending three different universities in Turkey and 30 Erasmus students coming from seven different countries. **Findings:** The answers were clustered in three main themes; the quality of communication; common areas of misunderstanding; and perceptions of each other. Turkish students perceived a better quality of communication with the visiting students. The eye contact patterns of the visiting students and Turkish students caused misunderstanding. As for pragmatics, inviting and offering procedures w ere the main sources of misunderstanding. Visiting students perceived Turkish people as helpful and benevolent, sometimes to the point of being pushy or too protectionist. Turkish people, on the other hand, tended to describe visiting students as individualistic and "free-spirited" people. **Implications for Research and Practice:** University courses can help students engage in awareness raising activities, and provide more orientation at the onset of exchange terms. Further studies are needed to investigate other potential areas of miscommunication, and with a more representative sample of cultures.

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Introduction

The increasing intercultural communication over the last few decades has been one of the main reasons for integration of the cultural aspect to language teaching process (Novinger, 2001). It is a truism in the sense that English Language teaching should involve aspects of the target culture and also aspects of the global community in a way due to the "lingua-franca" status of English (Byram, 1997). This idea places a priority on L2 learners' need to comprehend L2 communication as a cultural development by recognizing their culturally determined behavior and that of others from different cultures (Baker, 2012). In Turkish educational context, international student exchange programmes are available to offer students the opportunity to experience real communication in many linguistically and culturally diverse environments. The Erasmus exchange programme is one of these programmes. In this study, communication difficulties which stem from cultural differences were explored between the Turkish students and the exchange students from different nationalities. If such communication difficulties exist, the Erasmus programme might not reach its plurilingualism aim (Council of Europe, 2001).

The Erasmus Programme

One of the most well-known international exchange programmes is Erasmus exchange programme set by the European Commission. It is a student exchange programme of the European Union, established in 1987. The process of Turkey's membership to the European Union education and youth programmes started back in 1999 with the candidacy in Helsinki Summit. On 1st April, 2004, after succeeding in the preparatory phase, Turkey became a participating country to the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, and Youth Programmes -as they were named back then. "During the full participation period of six consecutive academic years (2004-2010), Turkey has managed to send approximately 30,000 students abroad and received 9,000. Moreover they sent 6,500 teaching staff abroad, and received 4,300" (The Centre for UE Education and Youth Programmes, 2010, p.5).

The onset of Erasmus exchange programme seems to have a positive influence on students' intercultural awareness since they find the chance to communicate in English with students from other countries. How effectively they can communicate is unanswered, though. In the process of communication build-up, apart from communicational obstacles stemming from students' lack of linguistic competence in English, there might be problems stemming from the fact that they come from different cultural backgrounds (Gulbinskiene & Lasauskiene, 2014). This study aims to find out what kind of communication problems -if any- stem from cultural differences in the interactions of Erasmus students with the Turkish students. This knowledge might be used in developing new understandings and developing pro-active measures; for example in inserting some extra materials about cultural differences in the language courses of undergraduate curriculum.

What is a Communication Breakdown?

A "communication breakdown", from linguistic point of view, is a study of pragmatics, i.e. the study of language use in relation to language structure and context of use (Verma, 2013, p. 5). Crystal defined pragmatic competence as "…from the point of view of (language) users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication" (as cited in Ifantidou, 2013, p.94). As can be understood from the definition of Crystal, pragmatics is an essential part of a healthy communication. It includes areas such as complimenting, apologizing, requesting, inviting, offering; so, a lack of pragmatic competence may cause various problems including sociocultural and contextual issues. Therefore, communication between the interlocutors needs to meet both the linguistic and pragmatic criteria. According to Bayat (2013), language learners should not only learn the grammatical rules but should also be proficient in using the language in various contexts (p.219). Therefore, the field of pragmatics studies the linguistic signs and their usages in communicational contexts. If there occurs a problem in the line of communication, whether syntactic, semantic or pragmatic, it is called a "communication breakdown". The reasons for communication breakdowns are extensive; however, in a cross-cultural setting, most of the breakdowns stem from misunderstandings between the speakers.

What is Misunderstanding?

Successful communication was defined as the correct and complete transfer of information from the speaker to the hearer. In this view, meaning is something 'encoded' by the speaker (Olsina, 2002). In the constructionist definition, however, meaning does not only exist in the encoder's mind, but it is something negotiated, dynamically produced and jointly constructed by both the speaker and the hearer. Thus, successful communication is understood as a mutually acceptable outcome rather than the total match of participants' speaker meanings and listener interpretations (Olsina, 2002). When this acceptable outcome is not reached, we can talk about the existence of a communication difficulty. Olsina (2002) also mentions two types of communication difficulties; non-understandings and misunderstandings. Non-understandings are communication difficulties which are overtly identified and signaled by the parties in a conversation. Misunderstandings which are troubles of comprehension are not manifested interactionally. "That is the case, for example, when speaker and addressee interpret a given utterance differently but they remain unaware of it" (Olsina, 2002, p.40). The misunderstanding is identified only after it is realized at another point of the later stages of the relationship.

Misunderstandings can be classified according to their sources. Garand (2009) puts it under three categories. First, there are pragmatic misunderstandings in which interlocutors begin from preconceptions that determine their attitudes toward and expectations of one another. Second, there are semantic misunderstandings. These occur because of acoustic problems, and they are strictly linguistic in nature. Third, there are discursive misunderstandings and cognitive breaks. This type of

misunderstandings is more related with, for example, how an argument is carried out in discourse.

The intercultural encounters involve misunderstanding often. Fox (1997) presents a flowchart to show the levels of attempted intercultural action (p.94). When misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences remain unresolved, communication becomes systematically distorted. Where intentions and assumptions are less clear, or if there is a power imbalance between one participant and another, the whole question of systematic distortion arises; which is the third level of his model of intercultural communication. Systematic distortion can reduce the success of exchange programmes due to feelings of frustration and rejection on the part of the international students. It might be beneficial for us to investigate if there are any misunderstandings at this third level between the exchange students and the students of the host universities.

Causes for Intercultural Misunderstanding

Many frameworks were proposed for the causes of intercultural miscommunication. Chick (1989) identified five barriers to effective intercultural communication. First, language differences are a barrier for communication. For example, when one of the interlocutors is speaking in English and the other in Turkish, this makes up the first type of a barrier. This type of miscommunication is usually the least serious one among others since they are easy to recognize and hardly "mistaken for a deliberate attempt to mislead, confuse or convey negative attitude" (Chick, 1989, p.143). Second barrier involves different frames of reference. In the sentence "water went down the pipe", we refer to not a "smoking pipe" but a "water pipe" because we associate water and pipe in that way. But these associations may be different in each culture. Third, differences in listening behavior constitute a barrier to a healthy communication because the listening behavior is culturally marked. Fourth barrier is the difference in ways of regulating turn-taking. Finally, differences in politeness behavior are considered as the fifth barrier to communication. People can perceive someone of another culture as impolite, arrogant, or cold because of their politeness strategies.

Another framework is Qin's (2014) five-point framework to understand intercultural misunderstanding. Accordingly, misunderstanding can be due to different perceptions of roles in a situation. For example, the roles expected from a teacher might be different in different cultures. The second point that might cause misunderstanding is the patterns of time use. "According to Hall's (1973) observation, some cultures do not have the concept of past, some do not have clock time, some never make schedules, and some do not understand the concept of Sunday" (as cited in Qin, 2014, p. 6). Third, places that the situation takes place in are arguable for misunderstanding. Another point in the framework relates to the roles that the audience can get in a situation. In some cultures, some things cannot be negotiated in the presence of an audience. The last point is the scripts (utterances, gestures, facial expressions, etc). The same script can be understood in different ways in different cultures.

In another framework, we can talk about verbal and non-verbal differences that potentially impede communication. Novinger (2001) discusses the verbal aspects under the headings of Competency and Literacy/Orality. Competency includes accent, cadence, connotation, context, idiom, polite usage, silence, and style. Her list of non-verbal differences includes the subheadings of context, chronemics, kinesics, proxemics, immediacy, physical characteristics, and vocalics. In the present study, the focus is mostly on non-verbal differences since we expect fewer verbal differences because the participants were ELT students with high level of English proficiency.

Previous Research

Miscommunication has been subject to many studies. One example is the study of Hao and Zhang (2009) in which a survey was conducted to measure the present situation of Chinese students' intercultural literacy. Their survey consisted of three categories. The first category, intercultural awareness, had the subheadings of intercultural psychology, value system, ethnocentric attitude, collectivism/ individualism, behavior, and problem recognition. The second category, intercultural communicative competence, had subcategories of gifts acceptance and giving, dating and appointment, nonverbal communication, verbal communication, women priority, and paying a visit/receiving a guest/ table manners. And the third category, intercultural knowledge, consisted of subcategories of system of government, geography, literature, history, and race. They found that Chinese college students made mistakes which stemmed from lack of intercultural awareness despite the fact that they had been studying English for at least 12 years. They concluded that it is not easy to "cultivate intercultural awareness in a short time" and "educational institutes should make efforts to reform the structure of education" (Hao & Zhang, 2009, p.3). For example, they can assume a more discourse-based approach rather than a skill-based one, and they can make use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to expose students to multicultural encounters. Still another example is the work of Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti and Roussakis (2009) with pre-service teachers. In this study an Intercultural Sensitivity Scale consisting of five factors of interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness was used. Results indicated that Greek students' intercultural awareness was already high, but the students felt that the education they had got did not prepare them well enough for their future teaching which would require a high intercultural communicative competence. Another study belongs to Uckun and Buchanan (2009) in which they used interview technique to investigate cross-cultural communication between native English speaking lecturers and their students in Turkish tertiary education. They found cultural differences of varying degrees according to university, department and the individual teacher's classroom management style. Still, another example belongs to Yu and Chang (2009) who used a questionnaire to investigate the current situation of English majors' intercultural communicative competence. Their questionnaire consisted of items related to 'cultural knowledge', 'communication awareness and attitudes', and 'communication practice and strategies'. This format is somewhat similar to the structure of discussions in the interviews of this study.

Kaur (2011) did fine-grained conversation analyses on the interactions between students in a lingua franca situation. He found that misunderstandings occurred due to performance-related or language-related problems, ambiguous utterances, and gaps in world knowledge rather than cultural differences.

This review of literature revealed that most of the studies were carried out only on one side of the communication situation. This study is different in that the participants included both Turkish and visiting students. By this way, the comparison of answers was possible.

Method

Research Design

Phenomenological research design which belongs to qualitative methods was used in this research. "Qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals; and thus, the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38). "A researcher is concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved, or who were involved, with the issue that is being researched" (Groenwald, 2004, p.44). The Erasmus experience is a temporal and local experience, unique to each individual that cannot be generalized to every situation. In that respect, phenomenological research design was seen as more suitable to investigate this issue.

Research Sample

The data for this study was collected from 69 participants from three different universities in Turkey. 39 of them were Turkish students from the ELT departments of the universities, whereas 30 of the participants were Erasmus students coming from seven different countries: Hungary (n=5), Czech Republic (n=9), Poland (n=3), Austria (n=6), Germany (n=2), Romania (n=3), and Lithuania (n=2). The Erasmus students, coming from different departments, had attended some classes with Turkish students for one term. This study was conducted towards the end of the term when Turkish students and Erasmus students had known each other for at least three months.

Research Instruments and Procedures

The data for this study was collected through interviews. Dörnyei (2007) warns that qualitative data can become bulky easily. So the researcher must try to "focus the exploration" in order to avoid losing time unnecessarily (p.125). In an effort to focus the interview better on the issues of misunderstanding, the researchers reviewed the literature first, and then formulated five questions which could serve as a framework for the participants to provide accounts of misunderstanding during their Erasmus experience.

The five open-ended interview questions were delivered to visiting Erasmus students on a form (See Appendix A). The form was administered in a similar way to "group administered survey" (Bordens & Abbott, 2008, p.271). This convention is used

when the participants are available in groups at a particular place and time. The researcher and the participants met at a classroom. After explaining the study and its purpose, the researchers asked for volunteers. With the remaining volunteers, the first question was explained and discussed whereby the participants were allowed to ask questions or explain it to their peers in their mother tongue. This was done in order to eliminate the risk of misunderstanding. Then, the students were allotted a few minutes to write down their answers on the survey form. The same procedure was repeated for the second, third, fourth and fifth questions on the form. The same procedure was applied with the Turkish students.

Data Analysis

The researchers took an "interpretative" stance in the analysis of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.8). Although content analysis is often associated with quantification of the qualitatively collected data (Berg, 2001 p.241), we chose to take the interpretative stance considering the nature of the data in this research. We had asked the participants to tell about instances of misunderstandings with their fellows – if any. Therefore, not all participants had answers for all of the questions in the interview. Thus, presenting how many times a code appeared in the data could be misleading for the reader. As Berg (2001) put it "a researcher with a phenomenological bent will resist condensing data or framing data by various sorting or coding operations. A phenomenologically oriented researcher might, instead, attempt to uncover or capture the *telos* (essence) of an account" (p. 239). For the analysis of the data, firstly, each researcher read each question, and summarized the answers using critical extracts from the answers. In order to decide the best way to put down the results, the three researchers of this study met to discuss, and sorted the answers into clusters on the basis of five questions on the interview forms. After that, each researcher read the interview forms again to confirm the clusters. The Turkish students' answers were also analyzed in the same way. Then, the results from the two groups were compared to see if the reported misunderstandings matched.

Results

As a result of the data analysis, the answers fell in one of the three main thematic clusters; the quality of communication; common areas of misunderstanding such as cultural behavior, pragmatics, education, and other areas; and perceptions of each other.

How Well Visiting Erasmus Students and Turkish Students Communicate with Each Other

The visiting Erasmus students were asked how well they could communicate with Turkish people. They were given a continuum of 0% on one end signifying the most serious communication problems, and of 100% on the other end signifying the best quality communication. Students marked their situation on the appropriate place of the continuum. Figure 1 below shows an example from students' answers.

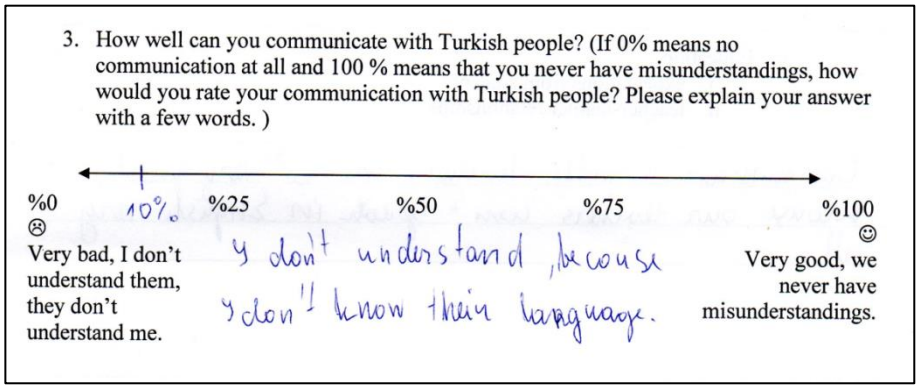

Figure 1. An Example Answer by A Lithuanian Female Student

Table 1 below depicts the opinions of visiting Erasmus students on how well they think they could communicate with Turkish students.

Table 1

How Well Visiting Erasmus Students Think They Could Communicate with Turkish Students

Rating	**Example Quote**	**n**	
		female	male
0%	-	-	-
0%-24%	*10% - I communicate mostly with my body language.*	2	1
25%-49%	*30% - The problem is that I don't speak the Turkish language that good, and the Turkish people do not speak English properly.*	7	2
50%	*Not very bad, but not very good, either.*	5	3
51%-75%	*75% - I think I have a good communication with Turkish people. Sometimes misunderstanding occurs, but often it is because of the language, not because of the Turks.*	1	1
76%-99%	*80% - Misunderstanding occurs only rarely. And we fix it immediately.*	6	2
100 %	-	-	-

Since the percentages were based on their subjective perceptions, the degrees attributed for a certain level of communication varied between participants. However, the positiveness or negativeness of the situation might still be meaningful; nobody marked 0%. They tended to see their communication positively. More than half of the students marked themselves above 50%. The problem seemed to be stemming from the language, and not other issues.

Turkish students also had positive perceptions. Most of them marked 75% and above. In addition, four students reported problem-free communication. They tended

to attribute their success less to body language but more to prejudices. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

How Well Turkish Students Think They Could Communicate with Visiting Erasmus Students

Rating	**Example Quote**	**n**	
		female	male
0%	*0% - I don't even bother to talk to them.*	2	-
0%-24%	*25% - We did not speak personally, but I had no difficulty in understanding their English in lessons.*	5	1
25%-49%	-	-	-
50%	*50% -Generally, I got on well with them but some cultural differences caused communication breakdowns.*	6	2
51%-75%	-	-	-
76%-99%	*90% - Despite occasional misunderstandings, we were able to communicate most of the time.*	11	8
100 %	*100% - We could communicate all the time. We never had misunderstandings.*	1	3

Common Areas of Misunderstanding Between Cultures

Cultural Behavior (body language, touching, emblems, eye contact, artifacts). When Erasmus students were asked about the differences of cultural behavior which caused problems, there was at least one person from all nationality groups who mentioned the touching patterns of Turkish people. They said Turkish people touched each other too much. Especially kissing and hugging between men were culturally inappropriate for them. It seemed like it was one area of problem for the Erasmus students initially, although they seemed to have overcome it. Another major theme was the eye contact habits of Turkish people. All of the male Erasmus students complained that Turkish people, especially females, rarely looked at the eyes of their interlocutors when they communicated. One area of misunderstanding was mentioned by females from Czech Republic, Austria and Germany; "When you keep eye contact for a long time, Turkish people think you want something from them". In addition to these, both of the Austrian females mentioned that it was hard to communicate unwillingness to Turkish people with body language. One female from Germany was irritated from people taking her arm when she wanted to leave. While explaining the topic of emblems to the Erasmus student group in one university, an example was given about head movements that show "no" in Turkish. The shaking of the heads sideways may mean "what did you say?" in Turkish. One German female said "That explains why they repeat their offer when you shake your head to say 'no'". In addition, the Turkish head gesture and accompanying fricative sound was considered rude. One student mentioned this saying "I didn't know that Turkish people use the sound with their

mouths instead of saying no, and in Austria this sound is really rude." In terms of artifacts, female students noticed that their way of dressing might cause communication problems.

Similar topics emerged from the interviews of Turkish students. Considering touching patterns, a male student mentioned that when he put his hand on the shoulder of a male friend, his visiting fellows laughed, and told him that this gesture was considered "gay". One male and 10 female students had noticed that visiting students rarely touched each other, while two females commented on the contrary mentioning that they were more comfortable with touching than Turks. In terms of body language, three female and six male students commented that the visiting students used their hands as they spoke more than Turks. In addition, there were two female Turkish students who had observed that the visiting students rarely used gestures of the head as they spoke. As for eye contact, five female and three male students thought that visiting students had better eye contact or used it more than Turkish people, whereas three female students reported on the contrary that they established less eye contact. There were eight students from Turkish group who mentioned that the visiting students cleaned their noses noisily, which was irritating for them. 17 female and six male students commented about the visiting students' clothing styles. Four females and a male said that the Erasmus students dressed light. Five females and a male said that the way visiting students dressed was too revealing. Finally, three females reported that they found the visiting students' clothing styles sloppy. In addition, three females and five males only said that visiting students' clothing styles were 'different' without making any further comments. Other comments came from two females, one of who said the visiting students always used backpacks, and the other stated that they used exaggerated accessories.

Pragmatics (complimenting, apologizing, requesting, inviting, offering). The differences in the pragmatics of the cultures may also cause problems. Pragmatic competence includes areas such as complimenting, apologizing, requesting, inviting, and offering (Brown, 2007). For the present study, the main theme in the discussions with all nationality groups in the Erasmus group was invitations and offers. Turkish people invited them out for a drink or a night out, and offered help in many situations. Nevertheless, the main area of miscommunication was refusals. They all complained about the difficulty of refusing offers and invitations coming from Turks. This pattern caused problems of losing face. For example, German females were invited to the house of Turkish girls. They didn't want to stay overnight, and things went sour. A female from Czech Republic commented "We always have to drink tea, it is almost impossible to refuse them." Two Czech females said "Turkish people think we cannot do anything alone." A German female agreed saying "They act as if we cannot take care of ourselves." Some females also mentioned that Turkish people complimented unusually often, and they were quick in disclosing feelings. One Austrian female said "Being outspoken is a problem. Turkish people think we are unfriendly." Another Australian female commented "Turkish men tell a girl what they think of her clearly. Sometimes I felt a little bit offended." In terms of inviting, refusing and complimenting, one male student from the Czech Republic commented that Turkish

girls acted like 12-13 year olds when it came to dating. Two participants contributed that Turkish people did not apologize much even when they were guilty. There was also one participant who pointed out that Turkish people sometimes asked too many personal questions.

Turkish participants were asked if there were any problematic areas stemming from complimenting, apologizing, requesting, inviting and offering patterns of visiting students. About the complimenting patterns of visiting students, five Turkish students made various comments. The comments did not represent the majority, and some of them were contradictory in nature. Some example quotations are given below.

They expect to be thanked in response to a compliment.	female
They like receiving compliments.	female
They do not ever compliment others.	female
They compliment to even those whom they do not know.	female
They sometimes say 'thank you' in response to a compliment, and sometimes they do not seem to care	male

Only three students mentioned the apologizing patterns of visiting students. One male student said that they rarely apologized, whereas one female said that they apologized more than Turks did. Another male student commented that visiting students apologized if they made a mistake. Turkish students further observed that they requested kindly and in a more formal way than Turks did.

Moreover, there have been contradicting reports about the inviting behaviors of Erasmus students as seen in the following examples:

They do not ever invite.	male
They like inviting.	female
They refuse invitations.	female
They accept invitations.	male

As the final issue about pragmatics, many students commented about the offering patterns. This issue seemed problematic for the Turkish students since most of the students commented on it. Two male and four female students generalized that the Erasmus students refused offers most of the time. Three females stated that they never thanked when they accepted offers. One female put down an anecdote about a time when she had to insist that the visiting student took a biscuit for each of the biscuits in the packet. Moreover, six females commented that the visiting students were not wise enough to make an offer. Two females mentioned that they did not insist while offering something.

When Turkish people were offered something by the visiting students, miscommunication occurred. One female from the Turkish group narrated: "*Although*

I don't drink alcohol, one of my friends ordered me a drink and I raised my glass but didn't drink. My friend was offended and I learned that I should not raise my glass if I will not drink."

Education (expectations from students, teacher-learner relationships). Considering issues related to education, visiting students mentioned that they were surprised by teacher-student relationships in Turkey. Four students mentioned that Turkish teachers built a more friendly relationship. However, two students found Turkish teachers cold and uncooperative. Many students complained that Turkish teachers had a lower English proficiency level than they had expected. The strictness in terms of written exams and attendance records were other problems for the visiting students. Two students mentioned that expectations from the Turkish students were really high.

Similar problems were also noticed by the Turkish students. One student said that visiting students had a performance-based educational system, and they were reluctant to take written exams. Another student pointed out that the visiting students were more dependent on books. As Turkish students relied on internet resources, the visiting students wanted to use the library more according to their observations.

Other areas. Students were asked to add if there were other issues that did not fit under any of the categories. Although few of the visiting students responded, the statements in this section comprised of complaints or negative evaluations entirely. One male from Poland added that he was surprised to find out the water at restaurants was not free of charge. He also complained that the people in the bazaar were too insistent. One Czech female mentioned the shopkeepers' and travel agents' charging them with higher prices. One Austrian female said "*In Turkey, men make the decisions and women seem to follow.*"

Ten students responded from the Turkish group. Two males observed that visiting students had exaggerated behaviors. One male and one female said that Polish students were more sincere. One female commented that males from Czech Republic could establish relationships faster. One male student pointed out that Germans were more withdrawn. Some other comments include "*They do not obey the rules, and make problems out of simple things*" by one male; "*They are here for only touristic purposes*" by one female; and "*Some behaviors which we consider inglorious are not so for them*" by one female student. Finally, one female said that the visiting students seemed to be friendly, but they were not sincere.

How Visiting Erasmus Students and Turkish Students Describe Each Other

Finally, visiting Erasmus students were asked to describe Turkish people. 20 visiting students used the adjective "*friendly*" in their answers. Other adjectives were "*helpful, kind, sincere, generous, open-minded and open-handed*". Six students implied Turkish people seized the day, and were relaxed against problems. In addition, two students said that Turkish people were stubborn.

The adjectives used by the Turkish participants to describe the visiting students were various. Most of the students used words with positive connotations such as "*adventurous, easy-going, friendly, kind, sincere, self-confident, composed, and disciplined*".

Only nine students used words with negative connotations such as "*cold, not approachable, and prejudiced*".

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

We are now living in a globalized world. "One consequence of globalization has been that through the increase in international communication, the differences among cultures have become smaller" (Barnett & Jiang, 2017, p.102). Therefore, most of the intercultural interactions are successful, and they do not reflect any problems. Yet, cultural differences are still evident in "the moments of interculturality" (Hartog, 2006). This study attempted to investigate communication breakdowns within intercultural dialogue during the Erasmus exchange programme. Both the visiting students and their Turkish classmates were asked about their experiences especially in terms of communication breakdowns.

When students were asked to mark themselves on the continuum, the visiting students tended to mark themselves at lower rates than the Turkish students who marked themselves at higher rates. 19 of the Turkish students marked themselves at 50 % and above. It can be concluded that Turkish students perceive the quality of their communication with visiting students better than the visiting students do. In Ciftci and Karaman's (2018) study, Turkish students were found to have positive expectations about their upcoming Erasmus exchange experiences.

Other questions included some common causes of misunderstanding such as cultural behavior and pragmatics. In terms of cultural behavior, one common area of misunderstanding seemed to stem from the eye contact patterns of the visiting and Turkish students. Visiting students stated that Turkish people interpreted a lengthy eye contact as a request. But when Turkish students were asked about it, only a few of them stated that visiting students could establish more or better eye contact. According to Bratanic (2007) "the misunderstandings rooted in nonverbal behavior generally stem from our implicit and unconscious assumption that nonverbal behavior functions universally, as well as our lack of recognition of culture-specific patterns in this area" (p. 85). Accordingly, the meaning of the length of eye contact can mean many things in Turkish culture and in other cultures. Other outstanding differences were visiting students' cleaning their nose noisily and Turkish boys' hugging and kissing each other as a sign of greeting. Turkish students also mentioned the way visiting students dressed up.

As for pragmatics, the main resource of miscommunication seemed to be the differences in inviting and offering procedures. Students from other countries complained that Turkish people would not accept "no" as an answer. This led to feelings of frustration and abasement. On the other hand, Turkish students reported feelings of rejection, disappointment and disregard. Turkish students had also attributed the Erasmus students' not offering very often to their rudeness or ignorance of social manners. This discrepancy seemed to be stemming from the different perceptions of the roles attributed to hosts and guests in different cultures (Qin, 2014).

Finally, both the visiting students and the Turkish students were asked to describe each other to spot stereotyping if there is any. Stereotyping might result in misleading expectations in terms of behavior. It seemed that visiting students described Turkish people as helpful and benevolent, sometimes to the point of being pushy or too protectionist. Turkish students, on the other hand, had a tendency to describe visiting students as individualistic and "free-spirited" people.

The findings of this study have some implications for teaching. "As intercultural knowledge is gained through experiences, it is likely to develop in a more implicit manner, in which learners are required to draw upon their comprehension and production skills" (Crowther & DeCosta, 2017). There seemed to be some areas where both the visiting and Turkish students failed to recognize as cultural difference. These areas of misunderstanding can be brought up as a subject of discussion in the lessons to make their implicit understanding explicit. For example, linguistic functions such as "offering, inviting and rejecting" can be examined from the point of view of different cultures. Students can be asked to do studies and presentations on these topics.

Arguably, such awareness of the connection between functions, notions and how they are realized in different cultures must become a part of the teacher education programs. As Walters et al. (2009) pointed out, "appreciation of diversity and difference can carry over to the teachers' classrooms when these individuals become teachers themselves" (p.154). Such appreciation is arguably even more essential for language teachers.

Another option can be scheduling an orientation course or a session for both Turkish and visiting Erasmus students. Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006) highlight the importance of preparing the participants for the exchange program. Keeping the gender-based reactions given to the cultural differences and the different answers from male and female students for the same question in mind, it can easily be said that gender factor played an important role in their interactions. Therefore, the appropriate behaviors for boys and girls in different cultures can be clarified during these orientation sessions. During the Erasmus programme, students come across with the host culture and also other cultures when meeting other Erasmus students. The capacity of recognizing the differences between cultures, and being able to act accordingly plays an important role in the formation of their European identity (Ieracitano, 2014). It can be concluded that the installation of an orientation element with intercultural awareness content at the onset of the Erasmus programme might facilitate the process.

This paper attempted to identify potential sources of misunderstanding in a cross-cultural setting. On the premise that these sources could inform educational practices to increase intercultural communicative competence, it seeked especially the moments of misunderstanding which the students thought stemmed from cultural difference.

There are a few limitations of this research. The data collection method can only yield Level 2 type of miscommunication (Fox, 1997). A longitudinal observation and record-keeping of interactions would provide a fuller picture of the situation. The

second limitation of this study is related to the scope and the participants. This study focused mainly on the misunderstandings related to cultural behavior and pragmatics, and excluded those stemming from other areas such as differences in word choice and sentence patterns. The participants of this study were not representatives of the cultures they came from. In other words, the intercultural misunderstandings they reported cannot be generalized to all citizens of a country. Moreover, the inconsistencies in the feedback from the Turkish students made us suspect that their responses were based on single events rather than general impressions. Further studies, therefore, are needed for the development of more valid and reliable data collection tools, for investigation of other potential areas of miscommunication, and with a more representative sample of cultures.

Albeit its limitations, this study has brought light to the potential sources of misunderstanding which stem from lack of cultural knowledge. It reminds us that perhaps the cultural elements in the language courses should go beyond reading texts about the target culture's history, geography and holidays. It urges us to think of ways to teach our students how to embrace difference, and function well in a pluricultural world.

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İletişim Bozuklukları Üzerine Bir Araştırma: Kültürlerarası Bir Ortamda Yanlış Anlama Kaynakları

Atıf:

Korkut, P., Dolmaci, M., & Karaca, B. (2018). A study on communication breakdowns: Sources of misunderstanding in a cross-cultural setting. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 78,* 139-158, DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2018.78.7

Özet

Problem durumu: Son yıllarda artan kültürler arası iletişim olgusu, kültürler arası iletişim kavramının dil öğretimi sürecine de katılması gerekliliğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu yüzden, özellikle İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümü öğrencilerinin, öğrenmekle ve gelecekte öğretmekle yükümlü oldukları dilin, evrensel ve toplumları birbirine bağlayan bir dil olduğu da göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, kültür ve küresel toplum konularında eğitilmesi gerektiği doğru bir düşünce olacaktır. Bu düşünce, ikinci dil öğrencilerinin ikinci dilde kurdukları iletişimlerin kültürel gelişimleri açısından değerlendirmelerini ön plana taşımaktadır. Türk eğitim sisteminde öğrencilere bu olanağı sunan değişim programları yer almaktadır. En önemlisi de Avrupa Birliği Komisyonunun sunduğu Erasmus Öğrenci Değişim Programıdır. Erasmus Değişim Programı'nın öğrencilerin başka kültürlerden öğrencilerle buluşmalarını sağlaması açısından uluslararası farkındalıklarına katkıda bulunduğu söylenebilir. İngilizcesi ileri derecede olan öğrenciler için bile farklı kültürlerden biriyle karşılaştığında, birçok kaynağa bağlı olarak, yanlış anlamalar söz konusu olabilir. Bunun sonucunda da Erasmus Değişim Programı çok kültürlülük hedefine ulaşamıyor olabilir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu çalışmanın amacı Erasmus Programı ile gelen ziyaretçi öğrenciler ile Türk sınıf arkadaşları arasında geçen iletişimlerde kültür farklılığından kaynaklanan iletişim problemlerini araştırmaktır. Bu problemlerin ortaya çıkarılması gerekli önlemlerin alınması ve Erasmus programına dahil olan öğrencilerin oryantasyon etkinliklerinde kullanılabilmesi açısından alan yazına katkı sunacaktır.

Araştırmanın Yöntemi: Bu araştırma, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik araştırma türündedir. Veriler toplam 69 katılımcıdan toplanmıştır. Bunların 39'u Türkiye'deki üç farklı üniversitede okumakta olan Türk üniversite öğrencileri iken 30 katılımcı da bu üniversitelerde Erasmus program ile ziyaretçi öğrenci statüsünde olan beş farklı ülkeden gelen öğrencilerdir.

Literatür taramasından elde edilen teorik bilgiler ışığında oluşturulan beş adet açık uçlu soru katılımcılara yöneltilmiştir. Veriler toplanırken soruların her biri katılımcılara açıklanmış ve tartışılmıştır. Daha sonra katılımcılara yanıtlarını kâğıda dökmeleri için zaman tanınmıştır. Bu şekilde özellikle ziyaretçi öğrencilerin birbirlerine anadillerinde sorulardan anladıklarını açıklamaları mümkün olmuş, oluşabilecek yanlış anlamaların önüne geçilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Elde edilen veriler, araştırmacılar tarafından içerik analizi ile incelenerek temalar ve alt temalar oluşturulmuştur. Öncelikle her araştırmacı kendi üniversitesinden gelen cevapları ayrı ayrı okumuş ve örnek alıntılar ile özetlemiştir. Daha sonra üç araştırmacı bir araya gelerek analizlerin örtüşen ve örtüşmeyen yönlerini tartışmışlardır. Araştırmacılar, literatürün ışığında temaları birlikte belirlemişlerdir. Daha sonra her araştırmacı verileri belirtilen temalar doğrultusunda okuyarak kontrol etmiştir.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Katılımcıların verdikleri cevaplar üç ana tema etrafında toplanmıştır: (1) iletişimin kalitesi (2) genel olarak yanlış anlamaların kaynakları – kültürel davranışlar, edimbilimsel unsurlar, eğitim ve diğer alanlar ve (3) birbirlerini algılayış biçimleri. Buna göre Türk öğrenciler ziyaretçi öğrenciler ile iletişimlerinin kalitesini onların algıladıklarından daha iyimser olarak değerlendirmektedirler. Örneğin Türk öğrenciler içinden iletişimini %100, yani mükemmel olarak değerlendiren 4 katılımcı olmasına rağmen ziyaretçi öğrenciler arasında mükemmel iletişimi olduğunu rapor eden katılımcı çıkmamıştır. Yanlış anlamalarda önemli kaynaklar genellikle göz teması kurma alışkanlıkları, davet etme ve davete iştirak alışkanlıkları olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ziyaretçi öğrenciler uzun göz teması kurduklarında Türk öğrencilerin kendilerinden bir şey istediğini düşündüklerini belirtmişlerdir. Davet ve davete iştirak konularında da Türk öğrencilerin hayır cevabını kolay kolay kabul etmediğini düşündüklerini, daha sonra Türk kültürünü tanıdıkça buna alıştıklarını anlatmışlardır. Benzer şekilde Türk katılımcılar da ziyaretçi öğrencilerin sıklıkla davet ve ikramda bulunmadıklarını ve davetlere karşılık vermediklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Eğitim konusunda Türk öğrenciler ziyaretçi öğrencilerin ders çalışma disiplinleri ve örneğin kütüphaneyi daha fazla kullanmaları gibi noktaları belirtmişler, bu özelliklerini de yurt dışındaki eğitim sisteminin farklı olmasına bağlamışlardır. Ziyaretçi öğrenciler için ise özellikle öğretim üyeleri ile aralarındaki iletişimdeki zorlukların genellikle onların İngilizce seviyelerinin daha yüksek olmasını beklemelerinden kaynaklandığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Birbirlerini nasıl gördükleri sorusuna da ziyaretçi öğrencilerin Türkleri yardımsever, iyi niyetli ama bazen sınırları aşma noktasında fazla korumacı olarak tarif ederken Türk öğrenciler de ziyaretçi öğrencileri daha bireysel ve özgür ruhlu kişiler olarak tarif etme eğilimindedirler.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Öneriler: Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre hem Türk öğrenciler, hem de ziyaretçi öğrencilerin iletişimlerinde birbirlerini yanlış anladıkları, ya da yanlış anlaşıldıklarını düşündükleri durumlar olmuştur. Bu yanlış anlaşılmalar çoğunlukla, iletişim kaynaklarının sahip olduğu kültürel farklılıklardan kaynaklanmaktadır. Bunlar, bilgilendirme ile kolayca üstesinden gelinebilecek, göz teması, davet ve davete iştirak gibi konulardır. Kolayca anlaşılmaktadır ki, hem ev sahibi hem de misafir öğrenciler, yeni karşılaştıkları kültürdeki sosyokültürel açıklarını, kendi sahip oldukları kültürün normları ile doldurmaya çalışarak iletişimsel bozukluklara ve yanlış anlaşılmalara sebebiyet vermiştir. Çalışma göstermektedir ki, sosyokültürel deneyim eksikliğinden kaynaklanan yanlışlar, öğrencilerin dilsel iletişim becerilerine de ket vurmaktadır. Bunun önüne geçebilmek için, üniversitelerde verilen dil eğitiminde ve öğrencileri Erasmus değişim programına hazırlama programlarında bu

çalışmanın sonuçları ışığında farkındalık etkinlikleri yürütülebilir. Daha fazla oryantasyon etkinlikleri ile öğrencilerin yaşadığı zorluklar ortadan kaldırılmaya çalışılabilir. Öğrencilerin, farklı kültürlere, kültürel farklılıklara karşı tutumlarını geliştirmeye, tolerans ve saygı göstermeye yönelik çalışmalar ve bilgilendirmeler yapılabilir. Özellikle Erasmus Değişim Programı kapsamında uzun dönem yurt dışında bulunacak öğrencilerin, kültürel bir şok yaşamaması ve tolerans geliştirmelerinin kolaylaştırılması açısından, yabancı öğrencilerle kısa dönemli görüşmelere ve etkinliklere katılmaları sağlanabilir. İleriki çalışmalarda daha farklı veri toplama süreçleri tasarlanarak daha fazla kültürün temsil edildiği çalışmalar yapılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürlerarası iletişim, iletişimsizlik, değişim öğrencileri, kültürel farklılıklar