Turkish language proficiency and cultural adaptation of American EFL teachers in Turkey

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Abstract

Researchers have long focused on the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar cultures. Language is seen as a way to gain access to another culture, bridging the gap between cultures (Charalambous, 2013), facilitating adaptation which can be understood as 'fitting in' to the host culture (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Turner (2013, p. 463) states that "what matters" for cultural studies these days very much depends on where you are'. The literature has commonly examined the cultural adaptation from several perspectives. However, lacking from the literature within the field of foreign language teaching is an examination of the adaptation processes of sojourner EFL teachers. Moving from Turner's insight on cultural studies, this study examines the sociocultural adaptation of 31 American EFL teachers working at different institutions in Turkey in terms of their Turkish language proficiency. A Turkish language proficiency test, a Sociocultural Adaptation Scale that was adapted from Ward and Kennedy (1999) and Wilson (2013), and follow-up interview questions were used to collect the data. To examine the effect of language on adaptation, participants were grouped into three categories according to their test scores. The results did not indicate significant differences between their language proficiency and sociocultural adaptation. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between sociocultural adaptation and the following variables: gender, age, education level, city of residence in Turkey, city of origin in the USA, length of stay in Turkey, teaching experience, and teaching certification. However, a significant negative correlation was found between previous experience abroad and successful sociocultural adaptation in Turkey. Qualitative data retrieved from the interview sessions also confirmed the quantitative data. Perhaps the most striking finding of this study is that there was no correlation between language proficiency and cultural adaptation, suggesting that knowledge of the host language may not assist in the process of sociocultural adaptation.

Key words: sociocultural adaptation; Turkish language proficiency; intercultural interaction; intercultural competence; unfamiliar cultures

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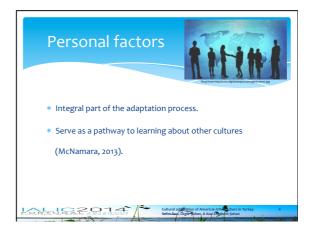
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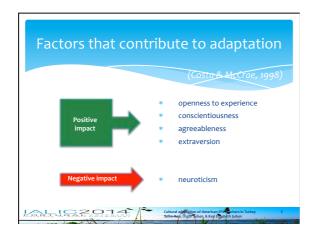
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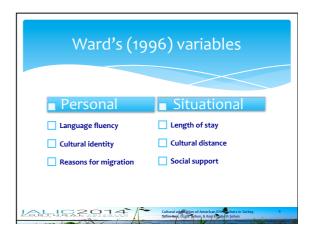




















* 29 Five-point Likert items

* Adapted from Ward & Kennedy (1999) and Wilson (2013)

* \alpha = .88

* 5 most important items in terms of cultural adaptation

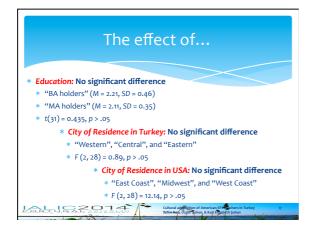


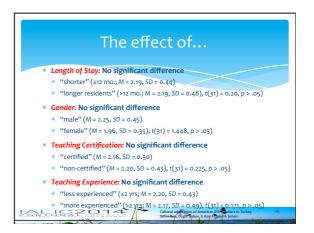


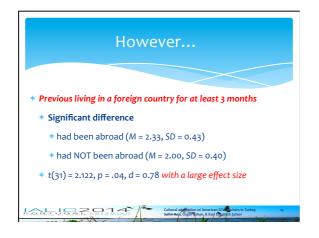




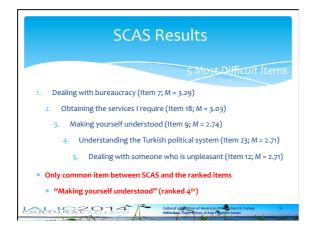










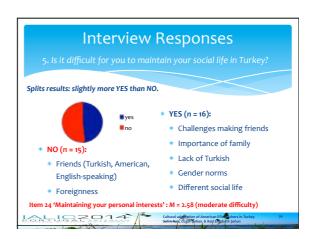








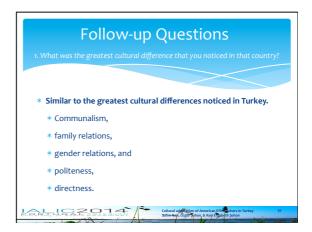


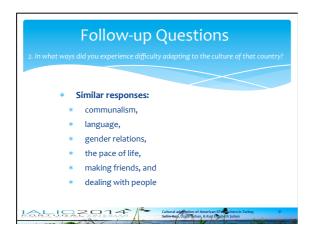








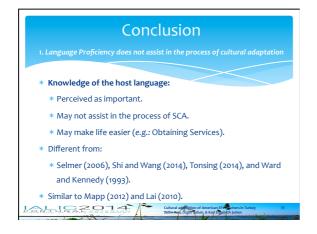














* Comclusion 3. Perceived knowledge vs. Actual knowledge * Comments regarding the Turkish Proficiency Test * Language acquisition vs. language learning * Acquirers may prefer oral exam (consider body language) * Learners may prefer written exam "I will confess to you that my aural language comprehension skills are pretty good, but my written ones are totally abysmal. This may be the only time I would have preferred to opt for an oral exam and not a written one." "When I started the Turkish evaluation test I got entirely discouraged. I feel like I'm making advances in my Turkish, but it is mostly verbal, so written Turkish is a very different thing-there's no context or situation for me to put it in."

* "Enough" oral skills to get by * If the goal is communication, are we assessing the right skills of language? * Consider the criticism against ELF by Capucho and Piedade Silva (2014).



