

Using the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters as a Framework to Write Narratives of Intercultural Experiences*

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a case study that is based on the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (Byram et al., 2009) published by the Council of Europe. The council published this document as a complementary tool that can help students reflect critically on specific intercultural encounters they had. The paper argues that the document can be used not only in its original question-answer format to critically analyze intercultural experiences, but also as a framework that would help students write narratives of their intercultural encounters. Therefore, intercultural experiences of students, such as study-abroad, can be written as reflective narratives by using this document. In this study, a Turkish student who returned from an Erasmus exchange program was asked to write a narrative of one of her intercultural encounters. Then, the student wrote her answers to the questions in AIE about the same experience. By using AIE as a framework, she reviewed her first narrative and wrote its final version by adding more details that she thought would be appropriate. Content analysis of the two narratives and the student's AIE revealed that the final version of the narrative that was written based on AIE was more critical in its perspective and detailed than the first narrative. The interview that was conducted to find out the student's opinions of this writing experience also showed that the student found writing a narrative based on AIE beneficial both for herself and the readers. The study suggests that using AIE as a framework to write narratives of intercultural encounters would be especially useful for English language learners who use English as a lingua franca in intercultural communication situations. By reading such collected narratives, students can increase their awareness about intercultural conflict situations and develop their intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: Autobiography, intercultural encounters, intercultural competence, narrative, critical thinking.

Kültürlerarası İletişim Deneyimlerini Yazmada Kültürlerarası Deneyim Otobiyografisi'ni Kullanma

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Avrupa Konseyi tarafından yayımlanmış olan Kültürlerarası Deneyim Otobiyografisi (KDO) (Byram et al., 2009) ile ilgili bir vaka çalışmasının bulgularını sunmaktadır. Konsey, bu belgeyi öğrencilerin başlarından geçen bir kültürlerarası iletişim deneyimini eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirmekte kullanabilecekleri tamamlayıcı bir araç olarak yayımlamıştır. Çalışma, bu belgenin sadece özgün halindeki soru-cevap biçimi ile değil, aynı zamanda öğrencilerin yaşadıkları bu deneyimleri eleştirel bir anlatı olarak yazmalarını sağlayacak bir taslak olarak da kullanılabilirliğini öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu belge yardımıyla öğrencilerin önemli buldukları kültürlerarası iletişim deneyimleri, örneğin yurt dışı eğitimi sırasında başlarından geçen olaylar, eleştirel anlatılar olarak yazılabilecektir. Bu çalışmada önce Erasmus değişim programından dönmüş olan bir öğrenciden bir kültürlerarası iletişim deneyimini yazması istenmiştir. Daha sonra öğrenci KDO'da sorulan soruları aynı deneyimiyle ilgili olarak cevaplamıştır. Son olarak, öğrenciden ilk yazdığı anlatıyı tekrar okuması ve KDO'daki soru ve cevapları göz önüne alarak istediği ve uygun bulduğu bilgileri ilk yazdığı anlatıya eklemesi istenmiştir. İki ayrı anlatıya ve KDO'ya uygulanan içerik analizi, KDO esas alınarak yazılan en son anlatının ilkinde göre daha eleştirel ve detaylı olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğrenci, bu yazma deneyimi ile ilgili görüşlerini öğrenmek için yapılan görüşmede KDO'dan faydalanarak anlatı yazmayı hem kendisi hem de okuyucular için yararlı bulduğunu belirtmiştir. Çalışma, KDO taslağını kullanarak anlatı yazmanın özellikle kültürlerarası iletişimde İngilizce'yi lingua franca olarak kullanan İngilizce öğrencileri için faydalı olacağını göstermektedir. Bu tür anlatıları okuyarak öğrenciler kültürlerarası iletişimde sorun yaratabilecek durumlar ile ilgili duyarlılıklarını artıracaklar ve kültürlerarası iletişim yetilerini geliştireceklerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Otobiyografi, kültürlerarası iletişim deneyimi, kültürlerarası yeti, anlatı, eleştirel düşünme.

I. Introduction

Development of intercultural communicative competence is a significant part of foreign language learning and being critical is one of the skills of the language learner who has intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). As part of this skill, the foreign language learner should be able to write a narrative about an intercultural encounter with a critical perspective. The language learners need to be guided to write such narratives by using materials that refer to the key elements of intercultural communication and help them view their experiences with the perspective of an intercultural speaker.

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Although templates that can be used as a guide for this purpose have been developed by researchers (Spencer-Oatey & Davidson, 2013), they are still limited in number and not detailed in their format. *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE), a tool that has been developed by researchers of intercultural competence with the recommendation of the Council of Europe, allows learners to answer a set of questions about their intercultural experience in a detailed way. This study argues that AIE can be used not only in its original version of question-answer format, but also as a framework for learners to write a critical narrative of an intercultural encounter. While studies have been conducted to examine the use of AIE in its original version, there are no studies that examine its suitability to be used as a framework to write a critical personal narrative. This study aims to fill this gap and contribute to the field of English language teaching by suggesting AIE as a framework for English language learners to write critical narratives of their intercultural encounters. In this way, both the writers of the narratives and their readers, especially language learners who aim to develop their intercultural competence, would benefit from writing and reading reflections of intercultural encounters. Also, students can be guided and encouraged to address important concepts of intercultural communication such as tolerance for ambiguity, respect for otherness and empathy.

1.1. Importance of Narratives for Developing Intercultural Competence

Personal narratives of real-life stories are valuable as it is through stories that people make sense of their lives. That is why analysis of narratives is increasingly used as a method in various disciplines including education. As stated by Webster and Mertova (2007, 1):

Narrative records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories; it is well-suited to addressing issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness because of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been of most influence on us. Such issues play a significant role in many areas of human activity.

Thus, analysis of narratives also allows for an examination of the role culture plays in the construction of personal stories (Bruner, 2002). According to Kilińska-Przybyło (2012, 124), the three major functions of narratives are helping people to structure and understand their experiences; enabling discussion and sharing of ideas; and serving as mediators between the past and future. In the classroom context, the narratives of the students can be used to open a discussion on various topics including issues related to intercultural communication. That is why narratives are valuable sources of exploration for developing intercultural competence. Regardless of the positive or negative nature of the experiences, positive outcomes can eventually be achieved through narratives by the reflection they promote (Kilińska-Przybyło; 2012, 124).

Individuals need to think critically and reflectively in order to understand the behaviours, values and assumptions of oneself and others in an intercultural encounter. Autobiographies of an intercultural encounter can be seen as “stories of discomfort and failure, of an interculturality conceived more broadly in terms of nationality, language, religion, sex and sexuality, class, age” (Thurlow, 2004; cited in Méndez García, 2017, 91). These stories can also include ambiguity and negative feelings that can be caused by unpredictable and unexpected behaviours of others. According to Méndez García (2017, 92), this is another opportunity for individuals to “reconsider themselves in the light of feelings since introspective accounts are characterised by an emotional undercurrent.”

1.2 Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

As explained by Méndez García (2017, 93), “an intercultural encounter occurs when individuals meet somebody different from them in terms of religion, language, ethnicity and other similar distinctions.” AIE was developed with the suggestion of Council of Europe’s *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (2008) as a tool to enable learners to reflect critically on their experiences with other cultures. AIE requires its user to think about one personal intercultural experience which was meaningful for him/her. Based on Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural competence, AIE is designed as a group of questions to be

answered by the users. As an addition to the original version of this model, AIE also has the component of action-taking. The following are the components of the intercultural competence model that AIE is based on as stated in the accompanying document of AIE, *Notes for facilitators* (Byram et al., 2009).

Attitudes and Feelings

- Acknowledging the identities of others
- Respecting otherness
- Having empathy
- Identifying positive and negative emotions and relating them to attitudes and knowledge
- Tolerance for ambiguity

Behaviour

- Being flexible
- Being sensitive to ways of communicating

Knowledge and Skills

- Having knowledge about other people
- Discovering knowledge
- Interpreting and relating things by comparing them to familiar aspects in one's own environment
- Being critical
- Becoming aware of one's own assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices

Action Orientation

- Taking action as a consequence of all the rest

1.3 Components of AIE

Below is adapted from AIE and its accompanying document *Notes for facilitators* (Byram et al., 2009) which shows the components of AIE and the main questions the learners are required to answer for each component.*

1. *Who I Am* (Optional)

How would you define yourself?

2. *The Encounter*: Title, description, time, location and importance of the encounter.

What happened when you met this person?

When did it happen?

Where did it happen? What were you doing there?

Why have you chosen this experience?

3. *The Other Person or People*

Who else was involved? (*Acknowledgement of Identities*)

What was the first thing you noticed about them?

4. *Your Feelings*

How did you feel at the time?

What did you do when you had this feeling? For example, did you change the topic, etc. ?

5. *The Other Person's Feelings*

How do you think the other people felt in the situation at the time? (*Tolerance for Ambiguity, Respect for Otherness*)

* The words written in parenthesis and italics refer to the theoretical indicators in AIE.

6. Same and Different

Were you aware at the time of any similarities and differences between how you thought and felt about the situation and how the other person thought and felt? (*Empathy*)

Are you aware now of such similarities and differences?

How do you see your thoughts, feelings and actions now?

7. Talking to Each Other

When you think about how you spoke to or communicated with the other people, do you remember that you made adjustments in how you talked or wrote to them? (*Communicative Awareness*)

Did you already have any knowledge or previous experience which helped you to communicate better? (*Knowledge*)

8. Finding Out More

Was there anything in the experience which puzzled you and which made you find out more at the time? If you tried to find out more, how did you do it? (*Knowledge Discovery*)

9. Using Comparisons to Understand

Did you compare things about the other culture with similar things in your own culture? Did it help you to understand what was happening? (*Interpreting and Relating*)

10. Thinking Back and Looking Forward

What conclusions do you draw about the experience? (*Critical Cultural Awareness*)

Do you think other people around you would have the same opinions as you?

Did the experience change you? How? (*Action Orientation*)

Did you decide to do something as a result of this experience? What did you do?

Will you decide to do something as a result of doing this Autobiography?

Studies have been conducted on investigating the influence of writing one's accounts of intercultural encounters and their development of intercultural communicative competence. Jackson (2005) found that using first-person introspective accounts, especially reflective diary entries, were beneficial for short term sojourners' intercultural learning. Kilianska-Przybylo's (2012) study based on an analysis of the students' narratives on intercultural encounters revealed that students' reflections display intercultural development on many aspects of intercultural competence including action-taking. Studies have also been carried out which analyze the AIE of learners. In Koyama, Matsumoto and Ohno's (2012) study, the analysis of 60 Japanese students' AIEs provided insight into their ways of dealing with communication problems in English. Méndez Garcia (2017) conducted a case study of three students' AIEs. Completing AIE was a requirement of one of their courses named Intercultural Approach in English Language Teaching. The findings of the study show that AIE fosters reflection and it increases intercultural communicative competence as well as self-awareness.

As a summary of previous research, it can be stated that writing narratives of intercultural encounters foster reflection and learning in many aspects. AIE is a useful tool to analyze the experiences of students' reflections. However, there are no studies that deal with writing narratives by using AIE. In order to contribute to the previous research, this study investigated the use of AIE as a framework to write narratives of intercultural encounters.

II. Method

Content analysis was performed through a case study of one student's written personal narratives and her AIE about a specific intercultural encounter. By analyzing one student's narratives and AIE, it was attempted to provide an in-depth analysis and understanding of her reflection. Instead of finding out the themes that emerge during the analysis, the components of AIE were determined as codes that the content analysis was based on. In this way, it was possible to find out which components of AIE already existed in the original version of the narrative and which were added after the completion of AIE. After the completion of AIE and writing the final version of the narrative, a semi-structured interview was conducted to find out the opinions of the student about her writing experience based on AIE.

2.1 Research Questions

Based on the components of AIE, the two versions of the student's narratives and the AIE document that was filled by the student were analyzed to find out:

1. What are the components of the AIE that already take place in the original version of the narrative?
2. What are the components of the AIE that the student wrote about in AIE?
3. What are the components of the AIE that the student wanted to add to the original version of the narrative to form its final version?

2.2 Participant

The participant of the study was a fourth year undergraduate Turkish student majoring in English Language and Literature at a state university in Turkey. She was 21 years old at the time of the study. She had been studying English as a foreign language for twelve years at the time data were collected and it was her first foreign language. The only other foreign language the student knew was Spanish at the beginner level.

The student was asked to write a narrative of an intercultural encounter she experienced which was significant for her. She experienced the incident when she was in Spain for the Erasmus internship programme. The incident took place in October, 2017 and the student wrote the narrative about this encounter two months later. She had been abroad several times before this study was carried out. The countries she had been to were the United States, Malesia, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia and Portuguese. She had stayed in United States with the Work and Travel Programme for three months; in Malesia with the Mevlana Exchange Programme† for three months; in Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia and Portuguese as a tourist for a maximum period of one week. She did not take any courses related to intercultural communication before the study.

2.3 Data Collection

The student who had returned from an Erasmus mobility programme was asked to write a narrative of a specific intercultural encounter that was significant for her. At this stage, no information was provided about the AIE document. The narrative submitted to the researcher consisted of eight paragraphs and around 1200 words. The participant was also asked to fill in a questionnaire about her background such as her age, the languages she knew, the countries she had visited and the lengths and purposes of her stay abroad.

After the student wrote and submitted her narrative, she was asked to fill in the questions in the AIE document. Then, she was asked to use the AIE document as a framework to review her first narrative and write its final version by adding more details which she thought were necessary and important to know for the readers. The final version of her narrative involved sixteen paragraphs and approximately 2150 words. The first and final versions of the narratives as well as the AIE document were written in Turkish because the student felt more comfortable about expressing her thoughts and feelings in her native language.

2.4 Procedure

1. The student first wrote her experience as a narrative.
2. A few days later, she filled in the AIE document by answering the questions about the same experience. The researcher was the facilitator of AIE at this stage.
3. The next day she read her first narrative again and added more details which she thought were missing and important to the narrative.

† This exchange programme aims the exchange of students and academic staff between the Turkish higher education institutions and higher education institutions of other countries. It includes all higher education institutions in the world regardless of their region.

4. The student shared her feelings and thoughts about using the AIE in the interview conducted after two days. Three main questions were asked in the semi-structured interview. The last question was asked to supplement a contextual analysis as suggested by Pavlenko (2007) and Méndez García (2017):

1. What are your thoughts and feelings about using the AIE as a framework to write a narrative?
2. What kind of action-taking does this experience of writing a narrative foster for you?
3. What is the significance of this specific intercultural encounter as an Erasmus exchange student?

The consent of the student was taken to analyze her narrative for research purposes. In order to assure confidentiality, which is an important issue for facilitators to consider when using AIE (Byram et. al., 2009), the names of the characters are changed in the study. With the same purpose, the nationality of the main character and the topic of the conversation that caused the conflict in the encounter are not stated in this study. In order to ensure reliability, a second researcher was also involved in reading the narratives and identifying the themes. The translation of the narrative was made by the researcher from Turkish to English for this study. After completion of the analysis, the student read the study and stated that she agreed with the findings. She also found the translation appropriate for reflecting her thoughts and feelings.

III. Findings

The content analysis of the student's narratives and her AIE revealed the following findings.

1. Who I Am

This section is an optional component of AIE. In the first version of the student's narrative, this component was not present. It was added to the final version of the narrative as the first paragraph. It is the part of the narrative where the student, Esra, introduces herself. This background information provides an opportunity for the reader to relate to the writer, to see the similarities and differences in how they view themselves.

Before I start telling my encounter, I would like to talk about myself, where I live and tell you why I chose this experience of mine. I study English Language and Literature and I am at my fourth year at university. I am 21 years old. I can say that I am a curious, sensitive and emotional person. I live with my family at the city where I go to university... The first time I decided to travel abroad was because of the need I felt for broadening my worldview.

In this part of the narrative, Esra briefly explains that the city where she was grown up is not very open to different points of view. Having spent most of her life in this city might have influenced her views to explore the world. Her remarks that she decided to travel abroad to broaden her worldview shows a willingness to face difference, which is one of the components of intercultural competence. In AIE, Esra writes more about her sensitive personality by giving information about her grandmother who was very sensitive like her and who used to pay great care in order not to hurt anyone. The student did not want to include this detailed information on her sensitivity in the final version of the narrative because she thought it might be boring for the readers. This emphasized sensitivity can be claimed to play a role in the encounter that she talks about in her narrative. The 'Who I Am' section added to the final version of the narrative goes on with providing brief information about her stays abroad. The countries she had been to before Spain were United States, Malesia, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia and Portuguese. This section appears to provide contextual clues that are useful for making a contextual analysis of the narrative and which is necessary to complement the content analysis as suggested by Pavlenko (2007). It gives the reader an understanding that the student had many intercultural encounters before and that such encounters are very likely to have contributed to her intercultural awareness and competence.

2. The Encounter

In the first version of the narrative, it was seen that the components of 'The Encounter' that were already stated were the title, description and location. Time and importance of the encounter was not stated in the original version. The student added them after answering the questions in AIE. The title of

the narrative is ‘Can A(n) ... (nationality of the main character in the narrative) Be Good?’ There are two paragraphs about the importance of the encounter.

Why have I chosen this experience? It is very difficult to break prejudices. I chose this experience as it broke one of my prejudices and I thought it can also break the prejudice of someone else. Before this encounter, I had the chance to meet people with various nationalities, but I had never met someone from... (nationality of Michael). We had to stay at the same place for four hours and communicate. Everyone was in the queue and no one would leave his/her place in the queue as they were waiting for this opportunity to buy tickets for days, even months. It was as if everything was planned for us and Michael to meet. I know that this is an encounter that neither us (me and my Turkish friend) nor Michael will forget in our lives, too. That is why I chose this experience.

The above words of Esra emphasize the importance of the nationality of Michael for the student which is also reflected in the title. In this section, the readers learn the name of the main character in the experience. The fact that intercultural encounters, although they can be negative, can eventually foster positive outcomes is acknowledged by the student in this paragraph. It seems that the title of the narrative reflects the prejudice that Esra had before the encounter. The other reason that the student chose this story is explained in the next paragraph of the narrative as part of the importance of the encounter. The paragraph starts with these sentences: *“The second reason that I chose this story is because of how I felt after I came back from East Asia and traveled to Europe only after one month. I can say that I felt not as if I was in another continent but in another world.”*

These remarks of Esra continue with how she was welcomed so warmly by the people she met in East Asia. She talks about how the historical relations between the Ottoman Empire and Indonesia had an influence on this positive attitude. The above words prepare the readers for the rest of the encounter which is negative in nature and which is also related to the historical relations of Turkey and, this time, the country of the main character. As Esra states in the interview, she thinks that this specific encounter is related to the general negative attitude towards her identity that she had to face in Europe. The first version of the narrative goes on with the description and location of the encounter.

That day we went to what they call the ‘Pearl of Andalusia’ in Spain. The Palace of Alhambra. Unfortunately, everyone knows a fact about the palace of Alhambra. It attracts so many tourists every day that the queue for buying entry tickets are formed in the first hours of the morning and still it is not guaranteed that you will find tickets. It was our last day in Granada and we did not want to leave without seeing the palace which is in the UNESCO World Heritage List and which is very well-known for its Islamic architecture. The ticket office would open at eight in the morning. We did not sleep that night. We left our hotel at half past three at midnight. We walked through the narrow and steep ways leading to the hill where the palace is located. There were other people on the way climbing up with us without giving a break. They just wanted to get a place in the queue. We were there at four o’clock. There were tents set up at the start of the queue, people waiting for the morning while sleeping and the rest of those who were standing up in rows of two people next to each other. So there was already a queue. We were wondering how we would pass those four hours.

3. The Other Person or People

The people involved in the experience are stated in the first version of the narrative as follows:

My friend Pinar and I wanted to get to know the other people waiting in the queue on the back of us. They said they were Italian but living in Portugal. The lady in front of us was from China. The person next to the Chinese lady looked like us (a Turk) and was always talking to people around him. We heard him saying that he came the previous morning at six o’clock and could get a ticket only for the garden of the palace. There was no ticket left for inside the palace. That’s why, he said, he came that day two hours earlier in order to get a ticket for the palace however he was not sure he would find one. We realized that if we had arrived later than four o’clock, our chances of finding a ticket would have been less.

This part of the narrative shows the characters involved in the encounter: Esra (the writer of the narrative), Pinar (Esra’s Turkish friend), two Italian people, the Chinese lady and Michael who is the main character of the encounter. After answering the questions in AIE, Esra added more details to the above section by describing how the people in the encounter were dressed and anything that was important about them. About the first things she realized about Michael, Esra added this information to the first version of the narrative: *“My first impression of Michael was that he was very talkative and that he was speaking English very well. The next impression I had was that he looked like a Turk in appearance and was very friendly.”*

How they started to speak to Michael is narrated as follows:

I was curious about where this person who was chatting with people in a friendly way was from and asked him. He said he was from...I said we are from Turkey. I don't know why, but there was a short silence after I said this. Pinar broke the silence by asking his name. He said it was Michael. So we all got to know each other. Then, Michael said that he had Turkish friends that he liked very much and he wanted to visit Turkey. He went on saying "but..."

In the narrative, at this point, a negative remark is stated by Michael about Esra's country. This remark is related to the historical relations of the two countries.

4. Your Feelings

Esra goes on as: "*When I heard this, I was shocked and furious. Upto that day, I did not have any ... (nationality of Michael) friends and I did not have to take part in such kind of a discussion about my country. I did not know what to say.*" As seen in these words in the narrative, the student immediately found herself in the position to defend her country. She had mixed feelings of frustration, sadness and confusion about how to react at the time, which was an intercultural experience she did not have before. This can be claimed to be another importance of the encounter. 'Acknowledgement of identities' is an important component of AIE. The narrative shows that soon after the encounter with Michael, despite the good impressions she had about him, the nationality of Michael became his most important identity for Esra. With the unexpected involvement of other people in the conversation, the situation gets more tense for Esra and her Turkish friend Pinar as stated in the first version of the narrative.

How could I let him continue talking like that, accusing my ancestors so harshly? I requested him to stop talking like that. This time Michael said 'OK, this is my opinion'. The Italian man had also heard us talking. He said 'Whether you accept it or not, this took place in history. This is not a point of view, it's a fact'. Pinar said to me 'God! We are surrounded by enemies' in Turkish. I did not know whether to laugh or cry. I decided to change the subject.

The narrative goes on with the attempts of Esra to change the subject. With this purpose, she asks him a question about a news item she had read recently about his country. When Michael is answering the question, this time the Chinese lady joins the conversation by saying positive comments about Michael's country. It is a difficult situation for Pinar and Esra.

Although Pinar tried to make a joke and said to me again in Turkish 'Esra, now we are surrounded by more enemies', the atmosphere was tense. It was the responsibility of all of us in the encounter to come to a resolution. Also, as Turkish people, we were representing our country. I mean we did not want the other people in the queue to say 'we met Turkish people before, and they were not so nice'. Pinar and I ended the conversation with a universal message by saying "whatever might have happened in history, we do not support any actions against humans' lives". After this, we felt as if we did something good for our country.

The above words of the student show that the feeling of being a representative of her country had put extra pressure for her and her friend Pinar, and when the topic was finally changed they felt great relief. It can be claimed that the attempts of the student to change the topic with a positive remark or a universal message is a feature of an intercultural speaker.

5. The Other Person's Feelings

The first version of Esra's narrative does not contain information about the other people's, especially Michael's, feelings at the time of the conflict. It only mentions her Turkish friend Pinar's similar feelings to her when the conflict in communication occurred. After the tense discussion on the historical issue between the two countries ends, the conversation goes on in a friendly way and the narrative shows that everyone is happy to finish the encounter in a positive way.

The four hours had passed quickly. Finally, the box office was opened. We were very excited. When it was our turn, we were able to get tickets for the other sections apart from the building of the palace. All the tickets were sold out in thirty minutes. Michael was there just for the palace and he had already seen the outside areas, so he did not want to buy a ticket and left. We all said goodbye to each other in a friendly way, making good wishes and exchanging our addresses.

After answering the questions in AIE about how she imagined other people in the encounter felt at the time of the conflict, the student added the following to her first narrative:

I felt that they were angry with me as the topic was on a sensitive issue and they saw me as the representator of my country. It was as if they were giving responses not to Esra as a person, but to a Turk. They were angry and cruel. Later, when we met in Sevilla, Michael told me that he wanted to change the topic when he saw that we felt bad. He said he realized I was about to cry and my voice started trembling. But then he could not stop the Italian person's remarks. There was indeed a psychological pressure on us at the time and if I say we were struggling to protect ourselves, it would not be an exaggeration.

The above words of the student show that for the other people involved in the incident, nationality of Esra and her friend was their most important identity. She reflects on how Michael later talks about the encounter by showing empathy that it was not an easy situation to be faced with more than one people who say negative remarks about her country. This is almost a justification of Esra that she was being objective and the other's behaviours were not fair. These students, due to their nationality (being Turks), felt that "the us and them attitude [was] prevalent" (Kalpaklı; 2015, 1215) in their stay in the queue and being also "non-Christians, they are perceived as the other" (Kalpaklı; 2015, 1215) by some people waiting in the queue.

Respect for otherness, an important dimension in Byram's model of ICC, is seen in Esra's following words that she wrote in AIE when reflecting on what she thinks other people were thinking at the time. This information was not included in the narrative: "*I do not think Italians found our conversation strange because both Portugal, where they lived, and their country Italy attract many tourists. So I guess they must be experiencing such kinds of incidents frequently. In the incident, they did not hesitate to say what they believed and so they preserved their self-respect.*"

On the other hand, her reflection in AIE about what Michael thought at the time is different. This was not written in both forms of the narratives either.

Michael, in his country, was raised with hostility towards Turks. Our encounter was a strange coincidence for him. His eyes were filled with tears when we were about to say goodbye in Sevilla. He was very sincere when he said he was very glad that we met and hoped to meet us again. I don't mean to say that he was hostile when we first met, but I am sure he has a more positive attitude towards Turks now.

Her reflections in AIE on noticing people's feelings and thoughts in the encounter go on with the following words.

Michael, when we first said that we were Turkish, seemed to hide his real feelings for us. Because there was a short silence and then he said "Oh, really, I'd like to visit Turkey". He did not want to cause tension at first. Once we stopped talking about history, then, our differences about nationality and religion disappeared. We became just human beings.

6. Same and Different

Rather than the similarities and differences between how they thought and felt at the time, information is provided in the original version of the narrative about the similarities that were discussed on their second meeting and, hence, which she was aware of at the time of the study. It is stated that Esra, Pinar and Michael had the chance to meet again in Sevilla after a few days. This meeting seems to have a positive influence for Esra as the similarities of the two cultures and their people was the main topic of the discussion this time.

A few days later I was in Sevilla, the place where I lived. It seems Michael happened to be there. He called us and we had coffee at the famous Alameda Square. Michael said: "I feel that Turks are very similar to us. I've been in Europe for a month and I could not see the sincerity of my country's people in anyone. However, I don't see you as a foreigner, you are like one of us". Indeed, when I first saw Michael, both the way he talked and his physical appearance were very familiar to me, too. If he had introduced himself as a Turk, I would have believed him.

We see that the positive remarks of Michael on how he finds himself close to Turks helps to form a friendship. While Esra does not give more information in the original version of the narrative about their discussion in Sevilla, after answering the questions in AIE, she adds two paragraphs to the narrative. These paragraphs are about the content of their conversation which seems to be mainly about comparing their cultures. The following is part of the conversation in the narrative.

I asked Michael about his cultural traditions related to marriage. I wanted to know about this because generally in Turkey there is a misconception as Christians do not give importance to marriage. I guess some films and TV series have influence on this. Michael said 'for example I am at the age of marriage'. He was 24 years old. He said "I graduated from university, I have a job and now people are expecting me to get married." It was so similar to our culture.

The above words of Esra show that getting the chance to meet again was an opportunity to get to know the two cultures and to build friendship between Esra, Pinar and Michael. Empathy, a significant component of intercultural communicative competence, was established by focusing on the similarities rather than differences. In AIE, related to her reflection on her actions Esra states: “*When I think about my thoughts, feelings and actions now, I see that I have a more objective perspective. I know that feelings of hostility and hatred aren't useful for anyone. If I had reacted aggressively, I would have reinforced the negative attitudes of people against Turks.*”

7. Talking to Each Other

In the original version of the narrative, Esra did not refer to the issues about talking to each other. The narrated encounter took place in English. As all of the people in the encounter were non-native speakers of English, English was used as a lingua franca. In AIE, she comments on how her proficiency in English helped her in the incident.

We spoke in English. Generally, most of the Chinese people that I had met in Turkey before did not know English. That is why I was surprised to see that the Chinese lady next to me was speaking English very well. Michael was also very good at speaking English. If I had not known English, I would not have been able to express my thoughts on the subject. I would have felt very bad as I would not have been able to break the prejudice of the people.

The above remarks of the student once again show her feelings of being a representative of her country and the importance she gives on breaking the negative views of people about her country and culture. The use of English as a lingua franca shows that learners of English need to have the necessary skills of dealing with conflict in intercultural communication situations (Baker, 2015). This fact is underlined by Esra in the final version of the narrative with this added information: “*Unfortunately, my friend Pinar had limited English. Although she wanted to support me when the conversation got tense, she couldn't. That is why I had to make explanations to four people on my own and it was very difficult.*”

8. Finding Out More

No information was provided both in the original version of the narrative and in the AIE about this dimension. Therefore, at the time of the encounter, Esra did not need to find out more about things that puzzled her or that she did not understand. However, she stated in the interview that she felt the need to read about the written documents that were written on the topic of their conversation after the encounter.

9. Using Comparisons to Understand

In the first version of the narrative, Esra does not give information about whether she used any comparisons with other cultures in this specific encounter to understand what was happening. In AIE, she provides information about the people who she finds close to her culture, based on her prior intercultural experience.

I can compare European and Asian countries. Asian people are more friendly than European people. For example, offering the food that you are eating to someone is something I have rarely seen in Europe, but the Chinese lady that I met in the encounter did so. Also, Pinar and I were friendly in the encounter. We greeted the people around us and smiled once we were in the queue. If the people in the encounter would have been from the northern part of Europe, they would not be so friendly. I think this is due to the influence of the climate in their country.

This ability to compare and contrast cultures, related to the ‘interpreting and relating’ dimension of Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) might have helped Esra in the encounter. It seems that there was no one in the encounter whom she found difficult to relate to.

10. Thinking Back and Looking Forward

Esra’s last paragraph in the first version of the narrative is a reflection of what she thinks when she looks back.

I told this experience of mine to one of my friends from high school. I said “I met someone from.... (Michael’s country). He was a very good person.” My friend laughed and said “How could a(n) ... (nationality of Michael) be good?” This is

what I think: ...(nationality of Michael) people can be good people. As long as he/she is a human being, everyone can be good. I even think that human beings are not different depending on their race, religion and gender. I believe that there are only two types of human beings: those who are good and those who are bad.

On the other hand, the responses of the student to the interview questions were as follows.

1. What are your thoughts and feelings about using the AIE as a framework to write a narrative?

I found AIE useful. First of all, it helped me to remember some details of the encounter which I had not included in my first narrative and the questions in AIE helped me to look at the encounter from different perspectives. I wanted to add more details to my first narrative after I remembered these details. I also realized that when I was writing the first version of my narrative, I avoided writing some negative aspects of the encounter. However, I saw in AIE that the negative incidents were as important as the positive ones. So I answered the questions freely. The questions helped me to analyze the situation and view what happened critically. I believe that my narrative will be understood better with the added details. The readers will have a better idea about the things that they might wonder and question after reading the first narrative. My narrative is about an encounter that really affected me deeply. So I will also be able to read it again and again in the future when I want to remember the details of the encounter.

The student's views on the benefits of AIE show that the document is helpful for enabling critical reflection on an intercultural encounter, which is the main purpose of AIE. Focusing on the positive sides of an intercultural encounter and avoiding the negative ones is an understandable concern for learners as it can be offensive for the potential reader. However, all the questions in AIE are formed based on theories of intercultural communication and answering them gives a bigger picture of the situation which the learner may not be able to see at first. The above words of the student show a realization and awareness of the student about intercultural communication concepts. The student also developed an awareness that it is not only others who will benefit from reading her encounters but also herself. While it may be difficult to face negative encounters, after having enough time to evaluate the situation more objectively, positive outcomes of the experience can be realized by the learners. This was also the case for one of the participants in Mendez Garcia's (2017) study who was eventually able to reflect on the learning potential of her encounter despite its negative nature.

2. What kind of action-taking does this experience of writing a narrative foster for you?

This writing experience gave me motivation to write more intercultural encounters of mine. In this way, I can help my friends who would like to apply for student exchange programmes to feel more courageous because I know that having the chance to experience an intercultural environment seems to be too far and impossible at first. By having intercultural experiences abroad, first of all, you learn to believe in yourself. It changes your worldview, and even a short time abroad can change your plans for the future. It will also be useful for me because I will read my narratives whenever I feel that I need more confidence.

"Seeking opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own" is a component of the action-taking dimension of intercultural communicative competence (Barrett et al., 2014, 21). The above remarks of the student show that the main action that this writing experience fosters for the student is to help her friends to seek such opportunities. Increasing one's self-confidence is emphasized by the student as an outcome of both the intercultural encounters she had and writing about them. This appears to be a confidence gained by the ability to express her views for breaking prejudices which is also revealed in her answer for the last question of the interview. Such kind of confidence is also likely to have a positive influence on learners' self-efficacy as they need to be efficient to deal with the forthcoming situations properly (Ercan Demirel, 2017).

As an action that was fostered by the encounter, the student added the following in the interview:

I would have preferred to have read a book on the historical issue between my and Michael's countries before the encounter occurred. I had some information on the issue but it was not based on a written document like a book. I believe that I behaved like a mediator in this specific incident. If I had read a book beforehand, I would have behaved as a mediator again, but I would have felt more confident of what I was saying.

The student's words emphasize the importance of having mediation skills and acting as a mediator which are components of intercultural communicative competence (Barrett et al., 2014). Having knowledge about "the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries", is another component of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, 60). The student's intention of using this knowledge for being a mediator can also be claimed to be a characteristic of an intercultural speaker.

3. What is the significance of this specific intercultural encounter as an Erasmus exchange student?

I would like to say that being a Turk is a big advantage if you want to travel to Asian countries. Asian people like Turkish people very much. I stayed in Malaysia for three months as an exchange student and everyone was saying positive comments about us. When it comes to Erasmus, I must say that being in Europe as an Erasmus student from Turkey is very difficult. People have lots of prejudices and stereotypes about us. I definitely believe that this specific encounter that I wrote about is related to such kind of negative attitudes against Turkish people. Although I was not rude to them (the people in the encounter) at all, they did not hesitate to be against me. They were all on the side of Michael and supported him with their words.

The comments of the student show the strong feeling of the student that the encounter she writes about in her narrative is part of the general negative attitudes she had to face about her identity in Europe. This appears to be an issue that she felt she had to be prepared for. The student's sensitive personality, her feeling alone in the encounter (due to the limited English of her Turkish friend), and the totally different attitude of people in Europe compared to Asia appear to have forced her to use mediation skills which she had not needed that much before. This can also be claimed to be a positive outcome of the encounter despite its negative nature.

IV. Discussion

The analysis of the student's AIE confirms previous research that AIE is helpful in facilitating reflection on an intercultural encounter and enabling a critical perspective in such reflection. Different from studies which used AIE on its own, this study aimed to find out whether AIE can also be used as a framework to guide learners in writing a critical personal narrative on an intercultural encounter. The analysis of the first and final narratives of the student shows that, when compared to the first, the final narrative of the student is much richer in terms of addressing the key elements of intercultural communication such as critical cultural awareness, empathy and action orientation. The fact that the researcher, as the facilitator of AIE, had very little influence in the production of the final version of the narrative shows that AIE can be easily used by the learners themselves as a guide in writing a personal narrative of an intercultural encounter.

The components of AIE that were already stated in the first version of the student's narrative were: 1. The title, description and location of the encounter, 2. The other person or people, 3. Your feelings, 4. Same and different, and 5. Thinking back and looking forward. When the student was asked to answer the questions in AIE, she completed all the sections except for the section named Finding Out More. The components of AIE that were missing in the first version of the narrative and which the student wanted to add afterwards were: 1. Who I am, 2. The time and importance of the encounter, 3. More details on the other person or people, 4. Other person's feelings, and 5. Talking to each other. The components of AIE that were answered in AIE but which the student did not want to include in the final version of her narrative were: 1. More details on the other person's feelings, 2. More details on talking to each other, and

3. Using comparisons to understand. In the interview, the student stated that she did not want to include them in the narrative because they were either not necessary for the reader to know, or they were about the negative sides of the encounter which the student did not want to emphasize.

On the whole, especially the components of AIE that require critical thinking skills were missing in the first version of the narrative. Hence, the student was encouraged to be critical by using the AIE as a framework. The 'Who I am' section of the narrative portrays a person who was able to be courageous enough to get out of one's borders and explore the world. This self-reflection appears to display how the student acknowledges her self-awareness. Especially the importance of the encounter was explained in a detailed way in the final version of the narrative. In this section, the student says that the encounter changed her in a positive sense by breaking one of her prejudices. This critical reflection about the encounter shows that the student gives the most importance to the positive outcome of the experience. It is a sign of action orientation and also critical cultural awareness. By giving readers information about how she was welcomed positively in East Asia, the student indirectly emphasizes the contrast of attitudes she faced in Europe. Therefore, although not stated explicitly, it can be claimed that the component of 'using comparisons to understand' is actually included in the narrative while talking about the importance of the experience. This also shows that, depending on each person's encounter, some components of AIE can overlap when writing a narrative.

The student's feelings of being a representator of her country appears to have a major influence in the encounter that is repeated in different components of AIE. This feeling has a significant influence on how she reacted at the time of the encounter as well as her reflection on the experience afterwards. As the conversation got tense, the main reference of identity for both Esra and Michael became their nationalities. This is an issue that is confirmed by previous research on Erasmus mobility that there is a "common perception of culture as national stereotype" (IEREST, 2015, 5).

Although there are templates available for enabling learners to write experiences of their intercultural encounters, they are not as detailed as the AIE (Spencer-Oatey and Davidson, 2013; Berardo and Deardoff, 2012). The final version of the narrative shows that the student was able to add many details that were not present in the first version. As expressed by the student in the interview, the detailed questions in AIE were very helpful to remember and write some important details that might have remained unnoticed in the encounter.

Méndez Garcia (2017) points out that it may be disturbing for some students to fill in AIE especially when the encounter is about a negative incident. In this study, it was seen that the student did not want to include all the details of her AIE document in her narrative. This was due to the concern of the student not to emphasize the negative sides of the encounter but to try to focus on the positive outcomes. If the readers would read the student's AIE instead of her narrative, they would have more information about the details of the encounter. The study shows that writing a narrative requires additional effort and sensitivity for the writer in terms of what to include and what to avoid stating explicitly. Hence, although the student was not disturbed about writing her negative experience in AIE, she wanted to be more cautious about directly stating her views in the narrative. Also, as she stated in the interview, when writing the final version of her narrative, the student felt the need to be careful about the organization of the narrative. If all of the details in AIE were added to the narrative, this would prevent the smooth flow of ideas. This is one of the things that the facilitators of AIE need to take into consideration while guiding their students to write narratives based on AIE framework.

Rather than starting with filling out the AIE document first, in this study the student was first asked to write her experience in the form of a narrative. The reason for this was that the researcher thought the student would feel more relaxed in writing without being concerned about addressing the dimensions in the framework. Also, it was possible to see how critical the student was before and after using AIE as a framework.

As Méndez Garcia (2017, 109) claims "action-taking is a fundamental dimension of the experience at the time of the encounter because the outcome of the story or mishap recounted largely depends on it". The narrative shows that Esra was able to take action which is a component of intercultural communicative competence (Barrett et al., 2014). When she was faced with a negative remark about her

country, she tried to express her opinions effectively and respectfully. In order to prevent further conflict in the encounter, she used the strategy of changing the topic of conversation. Hence, AIE appears to enable the analysis of such kind of strategies used to avoid conflict in an intercultural encounter.

V. Conclusion

The study shows that AIE can be used as a framework for writing narratives of intercultural encounters. Especially foreign language learners can benefit from AIE as it fosters the development of intercultural competence. Activities can be developed by foreign language teachers to use the AIE as a material in the classroom. In this study, while writing her narrative, the student's audience in mind was English language learners who would like to read about her intercultural communication experiences in a study abroad context. The study also displays the use of English as a lingua franca in an intercultural communication situation. This also shows the importance of collecting narratives of intercultural encounters where English is used as a lingua franca. In this way, motivation of English language learners who would like to apply for study abroad programs can be increased by enabling them to read about such narratives. In similar studies in the future, depending on the aim of the study, the facilitator may wish to follow the same procedure in this study or prefer starting the writing process by filling in AIE instead. Narratives written by using AIE as a framework can be collected from more students and the influence of reading such narratives on English language learners' motivations to engage in intercultural interactions can be investigated.

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