

Building Intercultural Communication Competence in Translator Training: A Metacognitive Approach

Çeviri Eğitiminde Kültürlerarası İletişim Edinci Geliştirme: Üstbilişsel bir Yaklaşım

Research/Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communication competence and skills have become increasingly essential for translators to succeed in the global language industry. While some university translation programs offer a specific course explicitly covering intercultural communication, others teach it implicitly, embedding it in other practical courses. The main aim of the study is to shed light on the ways of adapting intercultural communication courses for translation and interpreting students by uncovering student perceptions of the relationship between intercultural awareness and translation and discussing the role of cross-cultural interaction-oriented assignments with a metacognitive approach, giving impetus to the aspiration of self-improvement and life-long learning. For this purpose, we conducted this research at a state university in Turkey during a 14-week Intercultural Communication course in the 2021/2022 spring semester. Our data-gathering method is based on focus group discussions and qualitative content analysis on student assignments using MAXQDA 2020. Following the analysis, three main themes have been identified: *experiencing intercultural interaction, building intercultural awareness, and developing intercultural competence and skills*. The results of the study show that an interpersonal and practical assignment contributes to translation students' intercultural competence in several aspects: gaining self-confidence, improving their intercultural sensitivity and mindfulness, noticing cultural stereotypes, and reflecting on cultural similarities and differences. Furthermore, benefiting from a self-reflexive approach, students realized that being aware of the effects of

cultural differences, as well as commonalities in mindset, language, and certain behaviors is a necessary skill for future translators.

Keywords: intercultural communication, translator training, intercultural communication competence, cultural sensitivity, self-reflexivity.

ÖZET

Kültürlerarası iletişim edinci ve becerileri, çevirmenlerin küresel dil endüstrisinde başarılı olabilmeleri için giderek daha gerekli hale gelmektedir. Bazı üniversiteler çeviri programlarının müfredatlarına kültürlerarası iletişim adıyla ayrı bir ders eklerken, bazıları ise bu konuyu diğer uygulamalı derslerin içine yerleştirerek örtük bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Mevcut çalışmanın temel amaçları kültürlerarası farkındalık ve çeviri arasındaki ilişkiye dair öğrenci algılarını ortaya koymak, üstbilişsel bir yaklaşımla kültürlerarası etkileşim odaklı ödevlerin kültürlerarası iletişim eğitimdeki rolünü tartışmak, kendini geliştirme ve yaşam boyu öğrenme arzusu odağında kültürlerarası iletişim derslerinin mütercim tercümanlık bölümü öğrencileri için nasıl uyarlanabileceğine ışık tutmaktır. Araştırma bu kapsamda Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde 2021/2022 bahar döneminde 14 haftalık bir Kültürlerarası İletişim dersi sırasında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veri toplama yöntemi, odak grup görüşmelerine ve öğrenci ödevleri üzerinden MAXQDA 2020 programı kullanılarak yapılan nitel içerik analizine dayanmaktadır. Analizler sonucunda üç ana tema belirlenmiştir: *kültürlerarası etkileşimi deneyimlemek, kültürlerarası farkındalığı inşa etmek ve kültürlerarası iletişim edinci ile becerilerini geliştirmek*. Çalışmanın sonuçları, kişilerarası ve uygulamalı bir ödevin çeviri öğrencilerinin kültürlerarası iletişim edinçlerine çeşitli açılardan katkıda bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Bunlar özgüven kazanma, kültürlerarası duyarlılık ve farkındalıklarını geliştirme, kültürel kalıp yargıları fark etme ve kültürel benzerlik ve farklılıklar üzerine derinlemesine düşünme olarak sıralanabilir. Ayrıca özdüşünümsel bir yaklaşımla öğrenciler, kültürel farklılıkların iletişim üzerindeki etkilerini deneyimlemenin ve düşünce yapısı, dil ve davranış ortaklıkların farkında olmanın geleceğin çevirmenleri için gerekli birer beceri olduğunu fark etmişlerdir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kültürlerarası iletişim, çeviri eğitimi, kültürlerarası iletişim edinci, kültürel duyarlılık, özdüşünümsellik.

1. Introduction

In today's complex industrial relations, the workplace demands a global mindset, intercultural competence, and cultural awareness (Velten & Dodd, 2016). The global language services industry comprised of a wide range of stakeholders is estimated to have reached \$60 billion by 2022 and still growing. A staggering 23% of the market value is dominated solely by localization services¹. This has caused translators and interpreters to find themselves in a precarious position in which they need to adapt to the new demands of the sector. The immense growth of the sector is somewhat double-edged for them. While they can receive a growing share of the pie, they need to keep up with the current demands and developments, obtaining new skills and competences on the

¹See <https://www.factmr.com/report/language-services-market>

go. In this respect, intercultural communication competence and skills that address the awareness of culture-specific items for translators come to the forefront.

According to Localization Industry Standard Association (LISA) localization “involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (LISA, 2003, p. 13). As can be inferred from this definition, there is a special emphasis on culture within the context of localization. To help translation students become competitive actors in the sector, university programs should offer various courses that address cultural theories and practices as an indispensable part of the localization, translation, and interpreting processes. Among these subjects, intercultural communication, which is also one of the most necessary translation sub-competences, comes to the center stage.

In that case, how intercultural communication education should be designed theoretically and implemented practically to address the unique challenges of today's globalised world? (McConachy, 2018) As stressed by Dervin and Jacobsson (2021, p. 27) intercultural communication education research primarily focuses on cultural differences, communication experiences, and teaching methodology. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the translation students' perceptions and experiences towards an intercultural communication course which is a combination of theoretical and practical educational design, focusing on interpersonal interactions. The idea behind this study is to reflect on designing an intercultural communication course dedicated to fostering and improving translation trainees' intercultural competence and strengthening their intercultural sensitivity.

Moreover, the increasingly complex nature of the world language services industry has been pressuring translator trainers to design curricula to cover the ever-changing demands and expectations of the sector. This puts immense pressure on the university programs, as they need to follow the developments and absorb them in their curricula in order to compete with similar programs offering translation-related diplomas whose number is on the rise in Turkey. According to 2022 data obtained from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK Atlas)², there are a total of 93 undergraduate departments offering translation degrees in 9 different languages, approximately half of which are in English (55 = %51). This shows that hundreds of young people in Turkey aspire to partake in the global language services sector, forerun by localization.

This study focuses on the intercultural communication course (elective) offered in a 4-year undergraduate English Translation and Interpreting program at a state university in Turkey. The main aim of the study is to shed light on the ways of adapting intercultural communication courses for translation and interpreting students by uncovering student perceptions of the relationship between intercultural awareness and translation and discussing the role of cross-cultural interaction-oriented assignments for course design.

² See <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/lisans-anasayfa.php>

The main research questions of the study are as follows:

1. How can a practical and interpersonal communication assignment contribute to the intercultural communication competence of translation students?
2. What are the main outcomes and benefits of an intercommunication course designed with a metacognitive and self-reflexive approach for translation students?

The following theoretical chapters will elaborate on the basics of intercultural communication education and the importance of improving intercultural competence for translators.

2. Intercultural Communication Education

Historically, intercultural communication education courses tend to focus on developing awareness of cultural differences for students and showing them clues on how to interact in diverse societies effectively and respectfully (Allen, 2021, p. 214). They are designed for various undergraduate and graduate programs such as communication and media, cultural studies, linguistics, translation studies, and business management. According to Gudykunst et al. (1991), the scope of intercultural communication research should not be limited to the interaction between people from national cultures. The communication between different subcultures, ethnicities, and groups with distinctive identities can be discussed within the intercultural communication field. Thus, one can avoid overlapping national and cultural boundaries. Using knowledge about different cultures synonymously with knowledge about different nations can often lead to inflaming stereotypes while overlooking the complexity of intercultural situations (Dervin & Tournebise, 2013).

According to Dervin and Jacobsson (2021) tolerance, respect for others, justice and democracy are essential for intercultural communication education. Furthermore, educators need to establish a balance among cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of intercultural learning when designing their course content (Gudykunst et al., 1991). In this respect, specifying the course material, encouraging cultural encounters in class and university, elaborating on the barriers to intercultural communication (stereotyping, otherization, etc.), and providing a theoretical framework should be equally important (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021). Educators can also problematize the tendency to solely focus on cultural differences when designing their course, taking into consideration possible similarities stemming from global and shared cultural values.

Bringing in intercultural competence is another crucial concept for intercultural communication education. For Jokikokko (2005), intercultural competence is a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions that improve intercultural communication, as well as a philosophy encompassing intercultural sensitivity and dialogue. Limiting intercultural competence to a knowledge of different cultures and adjustment of one's behaviors accordingly is an outdated approach. Moreover, an intercultural

communication education solely based on knowledge of “other cultures” and technical skills fails to satisfy the needs of today’s complex cultural relations constructed in dynamic, global, and mediated settings (Virkama, 2010). The key lies in fostering students to develop sensitivity to the potential influence of cultural differences and assumptions on the act of communication (Koutlaki & Eslami, 2018), as well as the act of translation.

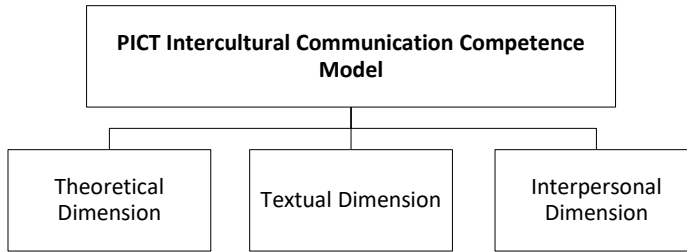
3. Translator Training Context: An Intercultural communication sub-competence

The main aspect of the translation competence concept with which most scholars agree is that it is not easy to draw a clear frame around it. The PACTE group (2005) (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) defines translation competence as the specialized knowledge and capabilities to be attained by the translator. They signify six sub-competences which are complementary parts of translation competence as a whole: (1) bilingual sub-competence, (2) instrumental sub-competence, (3) strategic sub-competence, (5) extralinguistic sub-competence, (4) knowledge of translation and (6) psycho-physiological components. While this categorization does not include an “intercultural sub-competence”, the PACTE group included this topic in the extralinguistic sub-competence encompassing knowledge about the source and target cultures and the specialized field. However, some scholars point out the fact that the intercultural communication aspect of translation competence should be underlined and further clarified (Cranmer, 2015; Katan, 2009; Tomozeiu, Koskinen & D’Arcangelo, 2016; Tomozeiu & Kumpulainen, 2016; Yarosh, 2015).

A comprehensive study was conducted in the context of an Erasmus project entitled “Promoting Intercultural Competence in Translators (PICT)” across six EU countries (Bulgaria, France Finland, Poland, Italy, and the United Kingdom) between 2012-2016. According to the findings of the survey in which 399 postgraduate translation students and 63 academics participated, intercultural communication education should be offered in translation departments in a more explicit manner encompassing its theoretical, textual, and interpersonal dimensions (Tomozeiu & Kumpulainen, 2016). As it is built upon an empirical study, we set the PICT model as the basis of our curriculum design, focusing on the interpersonal dimension. Therefore, it will be beneficial to look into this model in more detail:

Figure 1

PICT Intercultural Communication Competence Model (Tomozeiu and Kumpulainen, 2016)



The theoretical dimension is concerned with the concepts and conceptual tools of intercultural communication theories. It also includes the knowledge of cultural aspects of translation as a profession, as well as the relationship between intercultural communication theory and translation studies. The textual dimension involves the comparative analysis of source texts and target texts in terms of culture-specific items for recognizing problems arising from non-equivalence and then finding solutions. The interpersonal dimension involves cultural sensitivity, awareness, and social positioning. It provides tools for predicting conflict in intercultural communication and making conscious decisions during the translation process (Cranmer, 2015).

The reason why we focus on the interpersonal dimension is that evoking empathy and curiosity in students about other cultures is beneficial also in creating an impetus for them to be enthused to learn and search for more. Becoming a culturally sensitive person, as well as a professional translator, will equip them with the necessary tools to overcome conflicts and offer creative solutions in their working life. Also, as translators are expected to be life-long learners, this approach will enable the students to unlock their metacognition and meditate on how to effectively extend this competence to new domains (Pietrzak, 2022).

In his study, Haldan (2021) stated that the theoretical and methodological aspects of translation studies should be emphasized based on the intercultural communication dimension of translation. According to Karavin Yüce (2018), translator training should be designed to encourage future translators to be interested in and sensitive to both their own and foreign cultures. In Witte’s (2000) work, translation-specific cultural competence is described as the “ability to relate both cultures to each other, to compare them with the aim of purposeful and situation-adequate reception and production of behavior” (p. 163). This includes noticing cultural barriers and culture-specific daily life differences, often combined with linguistic barriers in intercultural communication (Schäffner, 2003, p. 90). In sum, one of the main aims of translation training is the development of intercultural competence, through conceptual knowledge and reflecting on intercultural out-of-class assignments, to meet the demands of the global professional translation market (Schäffner, 2003).

4. Metacognitive Translator Training: A Literature Review

As the global language services sector pushes the limits of translators with its ever-expanding scope and never-ending demands, translators who fall behind current developments in the market will be left behind. Therefore, they need to obtain flexible competences to expand their expertise and skills in order to stay in the game in the long term. That is why life-long learning is vital for professional translators.

Recently, the complexity of the translation market has attracted translation scholars to study the effects of the metacognitive approach on translator trainees. Echeverri (2015) suggests that metacognitive awareness enhances trainee translators' ability to monitor their translation process, evaluate their decisions, and make adjustments accordingly. Echeverri proposes incorporating metacognitive training techniques into translator education programs to cultivate these skills. Zhu (2018) proposes a framework that combines metacognitive strategies with traditional translation exercises, aiming to foster trainee translators' metacognitive awareness and control. Zhu argues that this integrated approach enhances trainees' ability to reflect on their translation processes and make informed decisions. Whyatt and Naranowicz (2020) highlight the benefits of metacognitive activities in transferring their skillset to intralingual paraphrasing. The study suggests that metacognitive training can improve communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, but these skills are transferable only for highly developed translators. Mellinger (2019) argues that metacognition allows translators to become more conscious of their decision-making processes and helps them identify and overcome potential pitfalls. Mellinger suggests that metacognitive approaches, combined with deliberate practice, can contribute to the acquisition of translation competence and the development of expertise in the field.

Hu, Zheng and Wang (2021) introduce a specific metacognitive training program aimed at improving trainee translators' metacognitive awareness and self-regulation skills. The research findings demonstrate that metacognitive training positively impacts translation quality, as trainees become more aware of their decision-making processes and learn to optimize their strategies accordingly. Berthaud and Mason (2018) delve into the challenges of integrating metacognitive approaches into translator training curricula. The study highlights the need for proper training and support for trainers to effectively implement metacognitive strategies in the classroom, suggesting the need for further research on the effectiveness of different metacognitive training techniques, the integration of metacognition in technology-enhanced translator training, and the assessment of metacognitive skills in translator education programs. The authors also encourage interdisciplinary collaborations to advance our understanding of metacognitive approaches in translator training.

In Turkey, Doğan, Arumí Ribas, and Mora-Rubio (2009) explore the impact of metacognitive strategies on developing interpreters' metacognitive awareness and self-regulation skills. The authors propose the integration of metacognitive tools, such as self-reflection diaries and self-assessment rubrics, into interpreting courses to enhance students' ability to monitor and regulate their cognitive processes. Hastürkoğlu (2019) examines the integration of situated learning through Model United Nations (MUN)

simulations in translator and interpreter training. The study explores the benefits of MUN simulations in developing students' language and cultural competence, negotiation skills, and metacognitive strategies. The author argues that the interactive and context-based nature of MUN simulations provides trainee translators and interpreters with valuable opportunities to apply metacognitive strategies in real-world scenarios. Hastürkoğlu and Bayraktar Özer (2020) focus on students' perspectives and experiences with project-based learning, which encourages active engagement, problem-solving, and critical thinking. The authors argue that this approach enhances students' metacognitive skills by promoting self-directed learning, reflection on translation strategies, and collaborative problem-solving.

According to Paulina Pietrzak, the author of *Metacognitive Translator Training: Focus on the Personal Resources* (2022), the aim of the metacognitive approach to translator training is the “activation of students’ personal resources” and “promoting autonomous and agentic learning” (pp. 2-3). Leaving behind the traditional teacher-centered approach, metacognitive translator training encourages students’ self-reflexive thinking and develops creative problem-solving skills. Questioning their own decision-making process, aspiring to discover new cultural and linguistic elements, and thus becoming self-aware and self-conscious are the main outcomes of such an approach (Pietrzak, 2022). As we aim to train self-adequate professional translators who are ready to take up the sector’s multi-faceted challenges, this study is designed with a metacognitive approach.

5. Methodology

Qualitative research is suitable for attaining an in-depth understanding of phenomena such as society, cultures, and institutions. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers implement various types of data-collecting tools, such as documents, one-on-one interviews, or focus group interviews (p. 45). Then, they try to make sense of the data by focusing on certain themes. Afterward, the researchers’ “complex reasoning skills” come to the fore for inductive and deductive reasoning, which offers multiple perspectives to the reader (p. 45). Researchers who embark upon a qualitative study should be prepared also to assume a self-reflexive perspective so that they can put their personal feelings and ideology within “brackets”, which will increase the reliability of a qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013, p. 78).

One of the qualitative research approaches classified as a methodology by Creswell (2013) is the case study research which “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 97). In the context of our case study, we collected data from focus group interviews and written assignments. Within the focus group interviewing method, we held three guided group discussions with 3-12 interviewees. According to Sarah J. Tracy (2019), focus group interviews are less time-consuming compared to one-on-one interviewing and tend to create a more welcoming and sharing environment for the participants (p. 167). She also

stresses that focus group discussions provide a constructive space for participants to widen their horizons on the topic by learning from each other (Tracy, 2019, p. 168), which confirms our choice of method for this particular case study with students.

For the analysis of the student assignments, we utilized the method of qualitative content analysis (QCA), which is a “systematic”, “flexible” method that “reduces data”, guiding the researcher to focus on the relevant parts of the material (Schreier, 2012, p. 8). After the formation of research questions and the selection of the material, a coding frame is prepared and re-adjusted to the material following the expert opinion about the coding frame. As the qualitative data can be overwhelming as it may contain hours of transcribed dialogue, QCA helps reduce the data to be analyzed in the form of a coding frame, approved by other experts. Here, the context takes the central stage as the codes may be suspended in a vacuum without the necessary context of the material (Schreier, 2012).

A contemporary way to prepare and apply the coding frame, using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as NVIVO and MAXQDA. These software offer researchers a medium to gather all the related data in one place to analyze, code and reconfigure. The collected data can be processed in several formats including audio, video, photo, and document. After the coding, CAQDAS can create some ready-to-use visual aids such as code or word maps and diagrams.

5.1. Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted the research at a state university in Turkey during a 14-week Intercultural Communication course for English Translation and Interpreting students in the 2021/2022 spring semester. Our data-gathering method was based on focus group discussions and qualitative content analysis on student assignments. The research is approved by the university institutional ethics committee of the authors [2022/43111].

The course was planned to both include the theoretical aspects of intercultural communication and an assignment designed to encourage students to experience an interpersonal intercultural encounter and to reflect on their experience. The 14-week course included the theoretical subjects of various aspects of culture, cultural values, cultural differences, the construction of the “Other”, nonverbal communication, intercultural communication competences for translators, and the main barriers to intercultural communication. 31 students were enrolled in the Intercultural Communication course and given an assignment designed to test and improve their intercultural communication and interaction skills. They were instructed to meet someone (online or face-to-face) other than their culture/nationality and interview them about their cultural practices and intercultural awareness. The instructor of the course -also one of the authors (Çömlekçi)- provided them with a set of exemplary interview questions such as “How important is the hierarchy in your culture?”, “Do you come across any stereotypes about your culture?”, “Can you name culture-specific items about your culture?”, “Does architecture have identifiable features?”, etc. Students were not limited to these sample questions provided by the instructor and could add or exclude questions depending on the flow of their conversation and their intercultural

communication experience. As previously stressed by Diaz and Moore (2018), experiential tasks based on intercultural interactions can highlight the subjective nature of the intercultural learning process and critically engage students with diversity in intercultural communication (p. 89).

After the interview/conversation, the students were expected to write an essay of at least 1.000 words, which formed 50% of their assignment score. The essay was required to consist of (a) the student's emotional, cognitive, and linguistic experience while interviewing a member of a different culture than theirs, (b) the interviewee's social and cultural practices, based on the student's interview questions, (c) major differences and similarities between their cultural practices and cultural practices of their interviewee. Furthermore, students were expected to report back to the class in the form of a brief presentation about what they learned and experienced, which formed the other %50 of the assignment score. In general, this assignment aimed for translation students to get to know another cultural identity and experience intercultural interaction/communication with them. In addition to this, they were asked to prepare in-class presentations, which made it possible to share their intercultural experiences with the rest of the class.

In the second phase of the research, we conducted three focus group discussions with a total of 31 students enrolled in the Intercultural Communication course with the presence of both authors. Focus group sessions were recorded after acquiring the consent of the participants and transcribed by the authors. Discussions were conducted in Turkish and translated into English. During the focus group discussions, we wanted students to elaborate on their cognitive, emotional, and linguistic experiences concerning the intercultural interpersonal communication assignment.

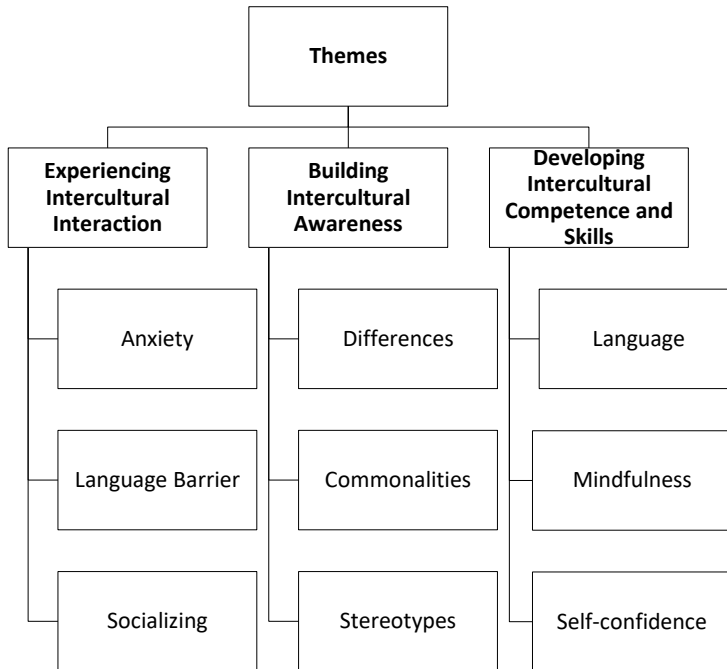
Following the transcription phase, we used MAXQDA (version 2020) to analyze the data collected via focus groups and written student assignments. Each author went through the entire transcriptions and coded the data on MAXQDA. Then, we consulted two experts about the accuracy of the codes and made improvements to the classification and wording of the themes. Finally, we agreed on three main themes: (1) experiencing intercultural interaction, (2) building intercultural awareness, and (3) developing intercultural competence and skills. The main themes and sub-themes will be discussed in detail in the following section.

6. Findings

Through this section, the themes are explained with extracts from student responses. The quotes are coded to protect the identity of the participants as follows: Focus Group 1 (FG1), Focus Group 2 (FG2), Focus Group 3 (FG3), and Student Assignments (SA and a number from 1 to 31). The general layout of the themes is given in Figure 2:

Figure 2

General Layout of Themes



6.1. Experiencing Intercultural Interaction: Anxiety, Language Barrier and Socializing

Focusing on the interpersonal aspect of intercultural communication requires theoretical knowledge, while for translation students that knowledge could be tested in the flow of intercultural interactions. As Gudykunst et al. (1991) pointed out, interpersonal assignments can help students integrate conceptual knowledge and experiential learning. In this sense, the idea behind the assignment was to foster the intercultural competence of the students by encouraging them to meet and interview a person from a *different* and/or *foreign* culture. Most of the students felt anxious and experienced the difficulty of meeting and interviewing a person coming from a different culture.

Language and anxiety of initial contact can become too much of a barrier. I experienced this with the African students I tried to meet in the dormitory. Even if we both know English, our accents are different. It makes it difficult. The first meeting was tough for me. I was shy to start a conversation. But then I opened up, and gained self-confidence. (FG1)

Students also experienced the effects of the language barrier and cultural differences during intercultural communication. As stressed by Derwin and Jacobsson

(2021), interculturality in a globalized world leads to increasing interactions of people “who speak different languages and coming from different places are intermingled in social processes” (p. 4). A translator is most likely to encounter multi-national and culturally diverse work settings which require them to overcome the anxiety of speaking in a foreign language and/or corresponding with a colleague or an employer from a different culture/nation. Furthermore, the mediating role of the English language should not be ignored. People from all around the world use English as a foreign language in order to communicate in the business setting. Therefore, translators of the English language face another challenge: They not only transfer the message and information but also decipher the content as one or both parties may be non-native English speakers. Our practical assignment provided a simulation of intercultural communication that is indispensable for today’s culturally intermingled social settings.

Even though the ability to use different languages is an obvious advantage for interculturality, it should be combined with intercultural tolerance and awareness of barriers to healthy intercultural communication, such as ethnocentrism and cultural prejudices. Being open-minded, willing to interact with people from all walks of life, and gaining intercultural competence is not a direct consequence of speaking a foreign language (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021, p. 146)

My anxiety about being accidentally offensive was the biggest obstacle for me during the interview. I made over-explanations every time to avoid misunderstandings but this behavior of mine was the thing that bothered him a lot. I realized that sometimes being over-sensitive can be an annoying thing in a conversation... After all, that interview was a great opportunity for me to discover a lot of things to pay attention to while having a conversation and how to approach people. In my opinion, prejudices are unavoidable, but the important thing is not to be afraid to attempt to learn about them without judging. (SA12)

The assignment provided an opportunity for students to utilize a self-reflective approach to their intercultural encounters. They could reflect on the abstract concepts of prejudice, intercultural tolerance, and awareness by rethinking the scene of their intercultural encounter thoroughly. Experiencing the anxiety of communicating outside of their linguistic and cultural bubble was an invaluable step forward to adapting to various possible future intercultural encounters. When the debilitating first encounter was put aside, some students had the chance to socialize with international students, learn about a distant culture, practice their foreign language, and establish language-based partnerships.

The interview took place on a website named "Interpals." Interpals is a website for people to find pen-pals from all over the world. People can rearrange their profiles on this website by adding photos and writing their interests, favorite quotes, and books. While interviewing the relevant interviewees, I felt excited and curious because the more I thought about communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, the more interesting it was for me. (SA3)

Student feedback shows that the assignment encouraged them to learn and use mobile applications that are online meeting places for people from different nations,

when she told me about her own aunt, and they had the term "spinster" just like us. When she reached a certain age, she was pressured to start a family. In the TV series, they are portrayed as extremely comfortable, free, and individualistic. It seemed like they do not attach importance to the institution of marriage, but in the community of the person I spoke to, I saw that they attach significant importance to it. I saw that the stereotypes about the US culture do not apply in this community. The assignment provided me with this cultural awareness. (FG3)

As elaborated by Holliday (2018), we encounter individuals and their practices in new and different cultural environments, and we discover not only the differences but the commonalities, as being interlocutors of struggles of daily life and working places. According to Dervin and Tournebise (2013), for instance, one can find more similarities between people from the same age but of different cultural environments, than between two people from different generations in the same country/culture.

I've constantly been exposed to American culture through TV shows, movies, and social media, so I thought I had an adequate understanding of it. However, during my conversation with Daiyon, I realized that I just knew the tip of the iceberg. When I asked him the interview questions, he repeatedly gave two answers, one for "Blacks" and one for "Americans." I knew that White people and people of color in America had some differences in their life, but according to Daiyon, they have entirely two different cultures. (SA22)

Drawing on the student comments, global media productions gave us a glance at the knowledge of different cultures and create a global culture that is shared by the same generations of different nations or cultures. However, the image of a specific culture that is mostly constructed by the fictional productions of mass culture sometimes refers to stereotypes and shortcuts about the complex and sophisticated nature of cultures. Referring to the previous student quotes, face-to-face encounters may help to overcome clichés, stereotypes, and prejudices about a specific culture by gaining first-hand insight based on intercultural interaction.

All that people who are prejudiced against different cultures need to do is take a step to confront the culture they are prejudiced against and give them a chance to get to know it. In this way, people will eliminate the obstacles they have created in their minds and create opportunities to improve themselves. (SA19)

Another important aspect of intercultural communication education is about discerning and tackling all forms of cultural prejudice, inequality, and discrimination (Räsänen, 2009). Thanks to the assignment, students reflected on these forms of barriers to intercultural communication and experienced via human interaction the importance of cultural open-mindedness and tolerance as a catalyzer of healthy and unprejudiced intercultural dialogue.

6.3. Developing Intercultural Competence and Skills: Language, Mindfulness and Self-confidence

Generally, intercultural communication education focuses on developing the intercultural communication competence and skills of the students. The behavioral

aspect of intercultural competence is designed to furnish students with the necessary skills to communicate more effectively in diverse cultural settings (Gudykunst et al., 1991). In parallel with this aim, practical intercultural and interpersonal communication assignments for translation students can be regarded as a cognitive and performative exercise.

We are translation students, but we do not have much contact with people from diverse cultures unless we must, as happened with the assignment. Our mindset is shaped according to the rules of the society we live in, the elements of our language, and culture. When I talk to my classmate, I can easily determine in my head how I should speak because we both share similar cultural values. But when I was talking to someone from another culture, it made me question how I should behave, improved my intercultural awareness, and I questioned how open-minded I should be, and how I should approach that person. (FG1)

(...)Then I noticed that I am studying English translation yet I had never talked with someone just to know and understand her/his culture before. This was a huge void for me. That is the assignment that made me realize that void. In short, there were only communicational challenges for me, as understood. (SA30)

Langer (1989) pointed out that “becoming mindful” is one of the most important skills that need to be addressed in intercultural communication courses. As put forward in the quotes, students emphasized being open to new cultural information and perspectives as core elements of improving intercultural awareness. Benefiting a self-reflexive approach, students realized that being aware of the effects of cultural differences on mindset, language, and certain behaviors is a necessary skill for translators. Here, the metacognitive translator training approach comes to the fore, giving impetus to the aspiration of self-improvement and life-long learning. As a translator cannot be an expert in every single domain and setting, this approach equips the translator trainees with the necessary tools to analyze their strong and weak skills and determine ways to improve them on their own. With this assignment, the students have become aware that a four-year university degree cannot make a person a translator. Instead, translators continue learning new skills and information to adapt to the ever-changing language services industry. Otherwise, they know that they will be left behind by the competition in the market.

Experiencing communicative challenges during an intercultural exchange can be an illuminating moment for translation students to design their future career path, which is most likely to involve culturally diverse settings.

I found it useful because as interpreters we will not always be dealing with native English speakers who speak English very well. We will encounter people from diverse cultures. (FG1)

Again, the English language translators in their daily working environments incessantly face the fact that English is a *lingua franca*, and their clients may not be native English speakers. Apart from linguistic problems, this causes translators to encounter a wide range of cultures, not necessarily Anglo-Saxon countries. As is the case in this assignment, our students had to have a purposeful conversation with people from

Asian, African, European, and American nations and shared their experiences by presenting them in front of the whole classroom, which was another challenge for them.

We met people from many diverse cultures. Also, we delivered a presentation for the first time in face-to-face education, and it was fun. In addition, we introduced knowledge of diverse cultures to each other in the classroom. Their cuisine, nonverbal communication habits, daily lives, and so on. Because when we translate, we will need to have cultural awareness and knowledge. (FG3)

It should be kept in mind that due to the pandemic, Turkey closed all educational institutions and introduced distance learning in March 2020. Therefore, some of the students participating in this study never had the chance to make a presentation in class. With this assignment, they experienced what it means to speak in front of the public and deal with stage fright and social anxiety, which helped them gain self-confidence. These skills are also a *sine qua non* for translators, and especially for interpreters, as they are expected to behave as dependable and trustworthy professionals who are also experts in a given business environment.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

According to Holliday (2010), we need to drift apart from the fixed descriptions of “other” cultures by seeking a broader picture and looking for what is beneath the surface and unexpressed in intercultural encounters. Othering can lead to hierarchizing the world and acknowledging the given unequal relations of power (Dervin, 2016). Speaking of intercultural communication courses, this could be possible by encouraging intercultural encounters in the form of practical assignments and making room for a discussion among students about their recent experiences. The more sensitive and aware they become of their own intercultural experience, the more they could be ready to accept that the “others” are more complex than assumed. In this sense, renewed interculturality aims to prepare students for the flexible and ever-changing nature of intercultural encounters (Simpson et al., 2022).

For translation students, moving beyond their ethnocentric dispositions and reaching a point from which they can view the world in an open-minded and self-reflexive manner is a vital skill in the global market. In the same vein, gaining confidence through one-on-one interaction, as well as public speaking practice can be considered an added value for future interpreters. Moreover, as localization takes up more than 20% of all language services, it will be unavoidable for translator trainees to assume a role in a localization project in their professional lives. Therefore, an intercultural communication course with a focus on personal interaction will be an indispensable tool in the translator’s toolbox. Intercultural communication educators have a task to enhance the intercultural engagement and interaction of the translation students (Velten & Dodd, 2016).

The results of the study showed that some of the students discovered new ways of socializing with people from diverse cultures through bonding with international students, establishing language tandem partnerships, and using mobile applications for

intercultural interaction. Furthermore, we concluded that an interpersonal and practical assignment based on renewed interculturality contributed to translator students' intercultural competence in several aspects: gaining self-confidence, reducing the anxiety stemming from cultural differences, improving their intercultural sensitivity and mindfulness, noticing cultural stereotypes, and reflecting on cultural differences, as well as commonalities. As Simpson et al. (2022) put it, renewed and performative interculturality has the potential to break down the borders between similarity and difference, by taking both into account in examining intercultural encounters.

We observed that an interpersonal and intercultural communication assignment helps students to reflect on their theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication competence. They become accustomed to culture-specific behaviors and culture-specific items and gain self-reflexivity about their implications for intercultural communication and translation practice. When they first recognize and experience cultural and linguistic barriers and then reflect on them with their classmates in light of theoretical knowledge about intercultural communication, this can positively affect the cultural knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity of future translators. Thus, intercultural encounters can constitute valuable opportunities for translation students to think outside of the box and improve their intercultural sensitivity.

As the complexity of the language services industry grows and the demand for highly competent, multi-skilled language professionals increase, translator training methods and curricula struggle to keep pace. Needless to say, studying undergraduate programs can be insufficient by itself to become a translator. Therefore, implementing a metacognitive approach, we encouraged the translator trainees to reflect on their interpersonal intercultural communication competence to develop their self-regulatory and self-reflexive self-learning skills.

Future studies can analyze translators' workplace issues stemming from the level of intercultural communication competence and thus, supply data for translator trainers to design a more sector-related course or curriculum. The results of this research can be utilized to compare course outputs for which intercultural communication is taught implicitly and explicitly. Finally, our study can offer a first step for translator trainers and scholars in Turkey to bring intercultural communication competence into the spotlight and open the current curricula for discussion.

Yazar Katkıları

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