

## Willingness of Syrians Who Are Learning Turkish as Second/Foreign Language in Terms of Communicating in Arabic and Turkish

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### ABSTRACT

Affective variables in the second/foreign language learning process affect success and proficiency in the target language. Being willing, one of these variables, draws attention as a factor affecting both academic and social success. The importance given to “communication” by the reference frames, programs and guidelines offered for language learning necessitates turning it into a skill. Skill can be developed to the extent of willingness. In this context, determining whether or not Turkish learners as a second/foreign language are willing to communicate or at what level they are willing will eliminate the problems by revealing the deficiencies and obstacles in communication skills. Moreover, it is of vital importance for the revision and reorganization of the language teaching process and practices. The aim of the study is to determine the level of willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish among Syrians learning Turkish in Turkey. A quantitative descriptive approach was adopted in the research. Among the non-random sampling methods, convenience sampling was preferred. The data were collected from 102 Syrian students, 35 females and 67 males, who were studying at university and registered with the Aydın Governorship Provincial Directorate of Migration Management. The Willingness to Communicate Inside and Outside the Classroom Scales developed in six-point Likert type, adapted by Al-Murtadha (2020) from McCroskey and Baer (1985) and Cao and Philp (2006), were used. Parametric methods were used in statistical analysis. The dependent groups t-test method was used to compare two different scale scores in a single group, and the independent groups t-test method was used to compare a single score in two different groups. As a result of the analysis; it has been determined that students’ willingness to communicate is especially high in their mother tongue, Arabic. It was determined that there was a significant difference in favor of Arabic inside and outside the classroom. There was no statistically significant difference between men and women for Turkish and Arabic.

**Key words:** Willingness to Communicate, Syrians Learning Turkish, Turkish as Second/Foreign Language, Voluntariness to Communicate

### INTRODUCTION

The individual may stay away from communicating for some reasons such as not wanting to open herself/himself, being criticized, blamed, etc. while communicating. On the contrary, s/he can volunteer and make an effort to initiate communication; that is, they may be willing to communicate. Willingness to communicate is defined as the possibility of initiating communication when individuals are given the opportunity and right to choose (MacIntyre, 2007), or in a similar way, the possibility of individuals to initiate communication when they are free (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Öz et al. (2015) define willingness to communicate as a versatile structure that integrates affective, social-psychological, linguistic and communicative variables and can describe and explain the communicative behaviors of

language learners. As it can be understood from this definition, the individual’s willingness to communicate will be affected by affective variables (attitude, motivation, anxiety, introversion, self-efficacy perception, self-confidence, etc.) and can be characterized as a personality trait, and it can also be affected by situational variables and even by culture. Al-Murtadha’s (2020) research can be cited as an example of the effect of culture on willingness to communicate.

There are many studies on the willingness to communicate, especially focusing on affective variables. One of these studies was executed by McCroskey (1992). McCroskey (1992) focused on affective variables such as stage fright, speaking anxiety, communication anxiety, shyness, silence, reluctance to communicate, willingness to communicate, talkativeness, verbal activity in his research. Yashima (2002)

also examined the relationship between second language learning and communication in second language by using the variables of the relationship between attitude, motivation and achievement in willingness to communicate as a framework. With his research, MacIntyre (2007) showed that individual variables such as anxiety, motivation, attitude, interest, etc. and social variables such as ethno-linguistic vitality and linguistic communication can be an increasing or decreasing factor on the willingness to communicate. Moreover, cyclical willingness to communicate can also contribute to information literacy in the target language, as it can increase motivation by reducing communication anxiety and improving perceived positive emotions.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) explained the factors affecting willingness to communicate in their study with a pyramid consisting of six layers. At the bottom layer is the social and individual context. As you go to the top of the pyramid, there are affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, behavioral intention, namely the willingness to communicate, respectively. At the top of the pyramid is communication behavior. As it can be understood from the pyramid that focuses on communication in the second language at both individuality and situational level, a willingness to communicate with other conditions in other layers must be formed for the realization of communication behavior, that is, for the development of this skill. In the same study, researchers determined various linguistic, social and affective variables such as personality, in-group climate, in-group attitude, communication competence, group motivation, and self-confidence that may have an impact on the willingness to communicate. Similar to the result of this research, Alyılmaz and Polatcan's (2018) research states that a positive attitude towards the culture of the target language increases the willingness to communicate and internal motivation, which is an important element of this willingness.

Ahmadi et al. (2015), in their study on EFL learners in Iran from a sociocultural perspective, examined the willingness to communicate within the framework of social competence, social solidarity, literacy and extroversion. As a result of the research, it has been determined that literacy and cultural competence are the best predictors of willingness to communicate.

In addition to the mentioned studies, there are many studies investigating the effects of variables on willingness to communicate with cause-effect relationships and examining these relationships and variables in the context of second/foreign language (Afghori & Sadeghi, 2012; Cao & Philp, 2006; Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Öz, 2014; Özaslan, 2017; Peng, 2007, 2012). These studies agree that willingness to communicate influences language learning. They further explored barriers to willingness to communicate and potential factors in communicating in the target language.

It is stated that having high communication proficiency does not guarantee the willingness to communicate in a second/foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005; Öz, Demirezen & Pourfeiz, 2015). On the other hand, MacIntyre (2007, p. 567) states that "willingness to communicate integrates motivational processes with communication competencies and perceived self-confidence". Individuals who are willing to communicate

can be more successful in education and business life, making friends, sharing within the family, and social life (Karadağ et al., 2016, p. 103). In this context, it can be said that the education-teaching process of individuals, and more specifically the second/foreign language learning process, is affected by their willingness to communicate. Regarding the subject, Clément et al. (2003) stated that willingness to communicate has an effect on second language use. Valadi et al. (2015) stated that the higher the willingness of learners to communicate, the more successful they are in learning a second language, and they concluded that learners with a high willingness to communicate are more competent in communication skills. Dörnyei (2005) also thinks that being willing to communicate is effective in learning and using a second language. Al-Murtadha (2020) similarly stated that encouraging willingness to communicate is a valid goal of language teaching. In their research, MacIntyre et al. (1998) suggest willingness to communicate as the primary goal of language teaching.

Therefore, determining whether or not the individuals who learn a second/foreign language are willing to communicate or at what level they are willing will reveal the obstacles and deficiencies in the development of communication skills, and overcome these obstacles and eliminate the deficiencies. However, when the studies on the willingness to communicate in a second/foreign language are compared with the studies on the willingness to communicate in Turkish as a second/foreign language, it is seen that the number is not sufficient. Among the available resources, the researches of Alyılmaz and Polatcan (2018), Boz (2020), Karadağ et al., (2016); Polatcan (2018), Varışoğlu (2020), and Yayla (2018) have been revealed to be in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners.

Although there are many studies in the literature on the language teaching of Syrians learning Turkish, which is the subject of this research, search engines and databases such as Google Scholar, Dergipark, Sobiad and Eric, national thesis center were scanned and no research was found on Turkish learning Syrians' willingness to communicate. However, according to the current statistical data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Directorate of Migration Management, the number of Syrians who migrated from Syria to Turkey due to the civil war in their country and are under short-term residence permit and temporary protection has increased in the last 11 years <https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izinleri>, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>). Therefore, it has become important for them to learn Turkish both in order to adapt to Turkey socially and to be included in the education-teaching process, and there has been an increase in the number of Syrians learning Turkish in this direction. Their ability to adapt to society in every aspect and to benefit from educational activities effectively depends on their language skills. It is important to determine the willingness of Syrians to communicate, considering that skill can also develop to the extent of willingness and the effect of willingness to communicate on second/foreign language learning has been proven in many studies. Determining and comparing the willingness to communicate both in their mother tongue and in the language they are learning will guide those concerned in reviewing and reorganizing the language teaching process and its practices, completing the deficiencies

and eliminating the obstacles. Therefore, the aim of the study is to determine the level of willingness of Syrians who learn Turkish as a second/foreign language in Turkey to communicate in Arabic and Turkish.

In the studies conducted in the national and international literature, there is information that there are many factors inside and outside the classroom that will help second/foreign language learners to communicate in the target language and affect their willingness to communicate. On the subject, Peters et al. (2019) and Denies et al. (2015) stated that exposure to the target language and gender in the second/foreign language learning process are important variables for language learning. Under the guidance of those stated and in line with the aim of the research, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Is there a significant difference between the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic and Turkish?
2. Is there a significant difference between the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic and Turkish inside and outside the classroom?
3. Is there a significant gender difference in the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish among Syrians learning Turkish?

**METHOD**

**Research Model/Pattern**

In this study, a quantitative descriptive approach was adopted due to the situation determination regarding the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate. Descriptive research, which is one of the quantitative research types, “describes an existing situation or phenomenon fully and carefully” (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010, p.21). The data obtained from the research are presented with frequency values and percentages, and determinations are made regarding the variables, if any.

**Table 1.** Cronbach’s alpha reliability results

Language	Alpha	n
Inside the Classroom		
Arabic	0.927	15
Turkish	0.952	15
Outside the Classroom		
Arabic	0.909	12
Turkish	0.938	12

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics on scale scores

Scale Scores	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Stan. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Arabic Outside Class	2.75	6.5	5.11	0.67	-0.802	1.947
Turkish Outside Class	1.42	5.5	3.44	0.76	0.124	-0.05
Arabic Inside Class	2	5.47	3.26	0.74	0.63	0.179
Turkish Inside Class	2.8	6	4.48	0.65	-0.037	-0.33
Arabic	3.82	5.82	4.79	0.43	0.248	-0.17
Turkish	2.38	5.48	3.35	0.53	0.94	1.148

**Sample of the Research**

Convenience sampling, one of the non-random sampling methods, was used in the study. The reason for choosing this type of sampling is that the sample group is accessible to researchers. This method provides speed and practicality to the research and offers a low cost to researchers compared to other methods (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this direction, 106 Syrian university students registered with Aydın Governorship Provincial Directorate of Migration Management were reached in the research. The students were included in the research within the framework of their voluntary consent. The data collected in August, 2021 were examined, and the forms of 4 students were not evaluated due to incomplete information. Therefore, the research was carried out with data collected from a total of 102 Syrian students, 35 females and 67 males, studying at university in different branches.

**Data Collection**

In the study, the data were collected in Willingness to Communicate Inside and Outside the Classroom Scale developed in a six-point likert type (1- not willing at all and 6- extremely willing) adapted from McCroskey and Baer (1985) and Cao and Philp (2006) by Al-Murtadha (2020). There are 20 items in both scales. However, Al-Murtadha, in his research, determined 5 items for the willingness to communicate inside the classroom and 8 items for the scale of willingness to communicate outside the classroom as distractors and did not included in the analysis. In order to determine these items, Al-Murtadha was interviewed one-on-one and the information about which items were distractors was learned from the author himself. After this interview, the 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> items for the scale of willingness to communicate inside the classroom; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> items for the scale of willingness to communicate outside the classroom were found out to be the distractors. In this study, distractor items were not included in the analysis. On the other hand, Al-Murtadha used the scales in Arabic and English in his research. The students presented data on their willingness to communicate in English and Arabic. In this study, the scales were presented to the students in Arabic and Turkish by making changes on the basis of words.

The reliability of the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish was examined with the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Table 1 contains information about reliability.

As can be seen from the table, the willingness to communicate in Arabic is 0.927 for inside the classroom and 0.909

for outside the classroom. The willingness to communicate in Turkish was determined as 952 for inside the classroom and 938 for outside the classroom. These results reveal that the scales are reliable.

Syrian students, who were reached on a voluntary basis, were first presented with the L1 (Arabic) willingness to communicate form, and then the L2 (Turkish) willingness to communicate form. It took an average of 15-20 minutes to complete the applied data collection tools.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was done with SPSS 22 program. The coefficients of kurtosis and skewness were checked for the distribution of scale scores, and if these values are between  $\pm 2$ , it is stated that the distribution of scores is normal (George & Mallery, 2010). Parametric methods were used in statistical analyses since the assumption of normality regarding the score distributions was provided (Table 2).

Parametric methods were utilized in statistical analyses since the assumption of normality regarding the score distributions was provided. The dependent (paired) groups t-test method was used to compare two different scale scores in a single group, and the independent (unpaired) groups t-test method was used to compare a single score in two different groups. For significant results, effect size was also calculated and eta square was used in this study. It ranges between 0 and 1. If eta square is equal 0.01, it shows small effect; if it is equal 0.05 it shows moderate effect and if it is equal 0.14, it shows large effect (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Statistical analyses were conducted at the  $p < .05$  significance level.

## RESULTS

In order to determine the normality of the distribution of Syrian students' willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish scale scores, kurtosis and skewness values (coefficients) were calculated (Table 2).

The basic assumptions of parametric methods were analyzed according to normality, skewness and kurtosis values, and since these values are between  $\pm 2$  for all scores, the score distribution is normal.

**Table 3.** Comparison between participants' scores of willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish

Scores	M	ss	t	p	Eta Square
Arabic	4.79	0.43	24.177	0.000	0.85
Turkish	3.35	0.53			

**Table 4.** Dependent groups T-Test table for willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish in and outside the classroom scores

Classroom	Scores	M	ss	t	sd	p	Eta Square
Inside the Classroom	Arabic	4.48	0.65	14.268	101	0.000	0.67
	Turkish	3.26	0.74				
Outside the Classroom	Arabic	5.11	0.67	20.645	101	0.000	0.81
	Turkish	3.44	0.76				

The results regarding whether there is a significant difference between the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic and Turkish are given in Table 3:

Whether there is a difference between the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish among Syrians learning Turkish was analyzed with the dependent groups t-test. There is a significant difference between the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish among Syrians learning Turkish ( $t(101)=24.177, p < .05$ ). The mean score of willingness to communicate in Arabic ( $M=4.79$ ) of Syrians learning Turkish is higher than their mean score of willingness to communicate in Turkish ( $M=3.35$ ). According to the effect size, it shows a large effect.

The results regarding whether there is a significant difference in the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic and Turkish, inside and outside the classroom are given in Table 4:

Whether there is a difference between the scores of willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish in and out of the classroom of Syrians learning Turkish was analyzed with the dependent groups t-test. There is a significant difference between the scores of willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish inside the classroom among the Syrians learning Turkish ( $t(101)=14.268, p < .05$ ). The mean score of willingness to communicate in Arabic inside the classroom ( $M=4.48$ ) among the Syrians learning Turkish is higher than the mean score of willingness to communicate in Turkish ( $M=3.26$ ). In addition, there is a significant difference between the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish outside the classroom among the Syrians learning Turkish ( $t(101)=20.645, p < .05$ ). The mean score of willingness to communicate in Arabic outside the classroom ( $M=5.11$ ) among the Syrians learning Turkish is higher than the mean score of willingness to communicate in Turkish ( $M=3.44$ ). It shows large effect for both inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

The results regarding whether there is a significant gender difference in the willingness of Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic and Turkish are given in Table 5:

The independent groups t-test was used to analyze whether there was a difference between the willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish according to the gender among the Syrians learning Turkish. There is no significant difference between the willingness to communicate in Turkish according to the gender of the Syrians learning Turkish ( $t(100)=.973, p > .05$ ). In other words, the willingness of Syrian women and men learning Turkish to communicate in Turkish is at a similar level. There is no significant difference between the willingness to communicate in Arabic

**Table 5.** Independent groups t-test table for willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish by gender

Scores	Scores	n	M	ss	t	sd	p
Turkish	Female	35	3.42	.42	.973	100	.333
	Male	67	3.31	.58			
Arabic	Female	35	4.84	.42	.805	100	.423
	Male	67	4.77	.43			

according to the gender of that Syrians learning Turkish ( $t(100)=.805, p>.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

With the current descriptive research, the Syrian students' willingness to communicate was investigated in three dimensions: 1. General levels willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish, 2. Levels of willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish inside and outside the classroom, 3. The effect of gender variable on willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish. According to the findings obtained from the research, the willingness of the Syrians learning Turkish to communicate in Arabic has been found out to be higher than their willingness to communicate in Turkish. In addition to this, there is a significant difference in favor of Arabic in both inside and outside the classroom. Mass migrations to Turkey since 2011 due to the civil war in Syria means that there are sufficient number of individual/s to communicate in Arabic in the environments where Syrian students study and maintain their social lives. This can be explained by the fact that Syrian students emphasize their mother tongue speaking with the effect of their desire to maintain/preserve their belonging. It is known that the attitude towards intercultural or international interest is effective on L2 performance. Individuals with a high international orientation will also have a high willingness to communicate in L2 (Bektaş, 2007; Yashima, 2002). Öz (2014) states that there is a high correlation between extroverted, sociable, adaptable personality types and willingness to communicate in L2. In this context, although the opportunities for exposure to Turkish are quite high, it can be thought that the international orientation of the Syrian students, who are the data sources of the research, is weak and their personality types are mostly not suitable for the willingness to communicate in L2. However, it is expected that opportunities for practice increase willingness to use L2 (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

On the other hand, this result may indicate that they are not psychologically ready to initiate communication in a context other than their mother tongue, or it may vary according to different L2 contexts (on the axis of personal and situational factors) (Çetin & Kılıçkaya, 2019). As a matter of fact, affective components are effective on communicating in L1 and L2 (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Academically standardized proficiency scales and psychological factors in face-to-face interactions may not be consistent for L2 use (Yashima, 2002). As well as the effect of anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence on willingness to communicate (Kang,

2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Yashima, 2002) there are studies that reveal the effect of classroom climate (Öksüz Zerey & Cephe, 2020; Peng, 2012; Riasati, 2012) with variables such as the size of the group dealt with, familiarity with the ones spoken to, participation of the ones spoken to, familiarity with the subject, communication environment and cultural background (Cao & Philip, 2006). Moreover, it is stated that communicating less or choosing not to communicate affects the willingness to communicate (Çetin & Kılıçkaya, 2019). The university students included in this study also prioritized communication with individuals from their own countries, thus supporting the conclusion that they prefer to communicate with their friends rather than foreigners, which was revealed in the research of Fahim and Dhamotharan (2016).

When Turkish learning Syrians' willingness to communicate in Arabic and Turkish was evaluated in terms of gender, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between men and women for both languages. This result is parallel with the research of Boz (2020) and Yayla (2018) on learners of Turkish as a foreign language. In Polatcan's (2018) research, it is seen that women's willingness to communicate is higher, therefore it does not overlap with this research. In most of the studies on willingness to communicate in English (Afghari & Sadeghi, 2012; Hişmanoğlu & Özüdoğru, 2017; Özaslan, 2017; Valadi et al., 2015), gender was not found to be a determinant, while it was determined that there was a significant difference in some studies (Fahim & Dhamotharan, 2016; Gholami, 2015) in favor of men; and in some (Öksüz Zerey & Cephe, 2020) in favor of women.

The results of the research showed that, although not statistically significant, the mean scores of women inside and outside the classroom were higher than men. Willingness to communicate is closely related to the cultural context (Al-Murtadha, 2020; Pattapong, 2015; Peng, 2007). One of the main factors in the formation of cultural differences, "masculinity and femininity" refers to the distribution of roles between men and women in society (Hofstede et al., 2010). In this context, it is noteworthy that Syrian female students are expected to be less willing to communicate, while the average value shows a small difference compared to males, given that the gender gap is evident in Syria.

## CONCLUSUION

The current research aims to investigate how willing Syrian students studying at university in Turkey to communicate in Arabic and Turkish both inside and outside the classroom, and whether the gender variable has an effect on this issue. Accordingly, quantitative data were collected and inferences were tried to be made on the axis of the findings. It has been observed that students' willingness to communicate is high especially in their mother tongue (Arabic). This is because the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is very high. Although there are many opportunities for exposure to communication in Turkish, their priority has been Arabic. Although it is a very complex process, communication is the primary goal of language learning. Meaningful and authentic communication inside and outside the classroom is extremely important

in second/foreign language learning. This study reveals that affective factors in language use should be taken into account. For this reason, it may be a good option to focus on the affective stimuli of communication in teaching Turkish as a second/foreign language.

It is clear that Turkish teaching should be designed in a way that develops international attitude and intercultural stance, increases interest, and encourages language use. In this direction, intercultural attitudes and willingness to communicate can be investigated correlatively. The relationship between literacy in the target language and willingness to communicate can be revealed. In addition, longitudinal studies based on qualitative and long-term observations can be given weight.

Although it was concluded in the research that gender is not a determining factor for willingness to communicate, there are differences in the literature. This indicates that one should be careful while making generalizations about gender.

This research focused on students who represent a small cross section who learned Turkish. Conducting future studies with larger samples may be valuable in terms of making the results more generalizable. Measurements of willingness to communicate can be made on other basic language skills other than speaking.

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