

MELTING IN THE MELTING POT: THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF THE AHISKA TURKS IN THE US

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Abstract: This study investigates the acculturation levels of the Ahıska Turks living in the US. The sample of the survey consisted of 124 Ahıska Turks ($n_{\text{female}} = 61$ and $n_{\text{male}} = 63$). The Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS-ZABB) was employed to measure the significance of age, marital status, education, employment, length of stay, and language competence in the acculturation process. The findings revealed that, similar to literature data, age, marital status, and language competence were significant, but education, employment, and length of stay were not significant among the Ahıska Turks in contrast with the literature data. The findings were discussed within the framework of the existing literature and suggestions for future research were put forward.

Keywords: acculturation, adaptation, Ahıska Turks, integration, migration

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the total number of the international migrants rose to 243 million, from 84 million in 1970 all over the world (McAuliffe & Ruhs 2018). People migrate for many reasons; however, it is not only people that migrate but also their languages, life styles, behaviors and, indeed, their culture. This is the reason why and how languages and cultures contact and intermingle. The contact of cultures as a result of migration leads to acculturation. "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield & Linton & Herskovits 1936: 149). However, acculturation does not result only from migration, but also from globalization (Arnett 2002; Chen & Benet-Martínez & Bond 2008; Berry 2008). Globalization, as defined by James & Steger (2014:

418), “mediates and frames how we understand our increasingly interconnected world”. As a consequence of the interconnection, it is possible to see cultural changes also in people who are not migrants (Ozer & Schwartz 2016: 2). Popular culture through the media makes up a big part of the globalization-based acculturation (Ferguson & Bornstein 2015; Sakallı 2014).

It is not surprising that individuals and communities are influenced by one another as they interact and, as a result, cultural changes occur. “Although these changes can take place as a result of almost any intercultural contact acculturation is most often studied in individuals living in countries or regions other than where they were born” (Schwartz et al. 2010). This research also studies acculturation in individuals, the Ahıska Turks, who live in the US, and most of whom were born outside the US. The Ahıska Turks, one of the minority groups in the US, seem to have adapted to the way of life in America and the American, that is, the host culture, as well as maintain their own Turkish culture. Their acculturation process is largely affected, both positively and negatively, by their previous experience in Russia and other countries.

Adaptation to the new culture may vary in individuals. Berry (1992) categorizes what he calls acculturation options into four groups: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Each one is a reaction to acculturation, and these options are adopted on an individual or communal level. The Ahıska Turks could be included in Berry’s integration category as they seem to have adapted to the American culture and maintained their own culture alike (Sakallı & Özcan 2016).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AHISKA TURKS IN THE US

The Ahıska Turks, also known as the Meskhetian Turks, got their name from the geography they used to live in. The region, in present-day Georgia, is called Ahıska or Meskhetia. The region was a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1829, when it became a part of Russia, and then the former Soviet Union. The Ahıska Turks lived in Ahıska until 1944, when they were deported to the countries of Central Asia by order of Stalin. Though there has been no conclusive evidence as to the motive of the deportation, Khazanov (1992: 3) states that Stalin was planning to invade Turkey and he wanted to clear the region of Ahıska Turks, who, although they were on the other side of the border, still felt as part of Turkey. Approximately 100,000 Ahıska Turks (though the number varies in different sources) were removed from their homes by force by the Soviet troops, “confiscating their belongings and placing them in cattle cars destined for the Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. ... Many thousands

of Meskhetian Turks perished during the initial deportation to Central Asia, while more died from cold or hunger in their first years of displacement. Within 4 years after the deportation, the Meskhetian Turks had lost between 15% to 20% of their total population” (Aydingün et al. 2006: 6).

The conditions that the Ahıska Turks endured in these countries and especially in Uzbekistan were much worse than what they experienced on the one-month journey. They had to work under inhumane conditions on the cotton fields or in the factories as they had to meet the needs of the war. There was hardly any food and many of them died as a result of starvation and workload (Ray 2000). After so many tragedies, following World War II and liberalization in the post-Stalin period, the Ahıska Turks were able to lead normal lives until 1989, when a pogrom started in Uzbekistan and many Ahıska Turks had to be evacuated to different parts of Russia, Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan (Veyselöđlu 1999; Zeyrek 2001; Taşdemir 2005; Buntürk 2007; Aydingün & Aydingün 2014; Sakallı 2016).

The problems did not cease for the Ahıska Turks who settled in Krasnodar Krai of Russia after fleeing Uzbekistan. They faced discrimination and were not given their *propıska*, a residence permit, without which the Ahıska Turks were deprived of nearly all the basic rights from accessing education and health services as well as employment and retirement services, and so on (Osipov 2007). “As of 2002, their legal status has been defined as stateless people and temporary residents” (Koriouchkina 2009: 41). Since the repatriation demands of the Ahıska Turks were not met by Georgia and the situation in Krasnodar Krai was getting worse, a third option – third-country resettlement – was the solution (Swerdlow 2006: 1831). Therefore, for the fiscal year 2004, the Ahıska Turks were added to the P-2 category, groups of special humanitarian concern, to be resettled in the US (see State.gov). Today, more than 12,000 Ahıska Turks live in different states across the US. Since they arrived in the US, some 14 years ago, the Ahıska Turks have done well at integrating to the American society. As they are well-versed in adjusting to different living conditions, they seem to have adapted to the life in the US in many ways. Linguistically, they have all learned English, although the level of proficiency varies; socio-culturally they have learned the social norms and cultural values which they respect and have adapted to in varying degrees. Meanwhile, they have maintained their own linguistic and cultural values; that is, they have taught their language and culture to the new generation.

METHOD

This article aims to determine Turkish-American acculturation levels and to establish the differences and effects between sub-dimensions of acculturation and some demographic variables. To this end, the below hypotheses were tested:

H1: The gender is significant for all sub-dimensions of the scale.

H2: The marital status is significant for all sub-dimensions of the scale.

H3: The American acculturation among those who work is significant as compared to those who do not work.

H4: The level of education is significant for all the sub-dimensions of the acculturation scale.

H5: The age is significant for all the sub-dimensions of the acculturation scale.

H6: The relations between all the sub-dimensions of American acculturation and all the sub-dimensions of Turkish acculturation are significant.

H7: The language competence exerts influence on acculturation.

The hypotheses were determined after a comprehensive examination of the literature on acculturation. For example, Tang and Dion (1999), Archuleta (2015), Gorman, Read and Krueger (2010), and Kulis et al. (2007) studied gender, gender roles, and gender differences in terms of acculturation. Similarly, Tharp et al. (1968), Spiegler, Leyendecker and Kohl (2015), and Im, Lee and Lee (2014) studied such topics as acculturation, marital status, and marriage roles. There have been studies that investigate the different dimensions of acculturation. Therefore, the hypotheses of this article were meant to be similar to those of previous studies so that we could compare and contrast the findings.

The Ahıska Turks living in Dayton, Ohio, form the core of the present survey. Though in many parts of the US, there is an Ahıska Turkish population with varying numbers, the largest population of the Ahıska Turks live in Dayton. Therefore, the survey was conducted in Dayton. There is no database to present the exact population of the Ahıska Turks there; however, according to Mr. Islom Shakhbandarov, the CEO of the Ahıska Turkish American Community Center, there are about 800 Ahıska Turkish families in Dayton. In order to carry out the survey, I met with Mr. Shakhbandarov and asked for his support and permission to get in contact with the Ahıska Turkish population. The respondents were met through appointments in their homes, their workplaces, or at the community center together with personnel from the center. The sample of the survey was determined using the purposive sampling because according to Fraenkel and

Wallen (2006 [1990]: 100) “based on previous knowledge of a population and the specific purpose of the research, investigators use personal judgement to select a sample. Researchers assume they can use their knowledge of the population to judge whether or not a particular sample will be representative”. As I have previous knowledge about the population and the CEO of the Ahıska Turkish American Community Center gave a detailed picture of it, purposive sampling was thought to be the most appropriate sampling method. 124 Ahıska Turks ($n_{\text{female}} = 61$ and $n_{\text{male}} = 63$) make up the sample of the survey.

The necessary meetings and preliminary studies were made in October 2018 and the surveys were implemented in February-June 2019. For this study a quantitative research technique was used. I informed the respondents about the confidentiality and the scientific value of the study. The respondents answered the questions on the scale on a voluntary and one-to-one basis.

The respondents were, first of all, asked demographic questions to find out their ages, marital status, gender, level of education, and employment.

Acculturation has been studied intensively as a result of increasing migrating population, and so many models and measurement instruments have been proposed and developed (Kang 2006; Celenk & Van de Vijver 2011). For this study, the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS-ZABB), a bilinear and multidimensional one, developed by Zea et al. (2003) was used. There are 42 items with 4-point Likert type, 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘not at all’, while 4 means ‘strongly agree’ or ‘extremely well’. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions: cultural identity, language competence, and cultural competence. As the original language of the instrument was English, I translated it into Turkish. The Turkish translation was checked by a linguist and meanwhile the instrument was reverse translated into English by another linguist. Only item 5, “I have a strong sense of being U.S.-American”, and item 11, “I have a strong sense of being (culture of origin)”, had to be discussed and the sentence which was decided on was put in the Turkish version. However, in the Turkish version of the scale the statement ‘culture of origin’ was changed to ‘Turkish’ as all the respondents were from one culture of origin.

The data were obtained from 124 questionnaires and analyzed using the SPSS 23.0. First of all, reliability analyses for each dimension were conducted. Later, the averages of the sub-dimensions were found and the mean, standard deviation, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov values were determined. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Scale	No. of items	Mean	St. dv.	Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic	P (df:124)	α
Cultural identity US	6	2.31	0.592	.107	.001	.905
Language competence English	9	2.94	0.846	.218	.000	.950
Cultural competence US	6	2.36	0.631	.160	.000	.866
Total US acculturation	21	2.59	0.613	.120	.000	.941
Cultural identity TR	6	3.86	0.316	.473	.000	.850
Language competence TR	9	3.67	0.538	.341	.000	.952
Cultural competence TR	6	2.96	0.515	.086	.025	.811
Total TR acculturation	21	3.52	0.362	.200	.000	.881

n=124

In order to test the normality of sub-dimensions and total scores, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed. As far as the analysis results are concerned, not all sub-dimensions and total scores yielded normal distribution. Therefore, non-parametric tests (Kruskal Wallis, Mann-Whitney U, Spearman Brown Correlation) were used and the significance values were evaluated with the Bonferroni Correction.

In order to determine the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach alpha value was calculated. According to Nunnally (1978 [1967]), if the alpha coefficient is equal to or bigger than 0.70, the result is acceptable. Our findings showed that the reliability values were between 0.811 and 0.952 and these values were within the limits of reliability. Besides, these findings were compatible with the values found by Zea et al. (2003: 114), the developers of the scale.

The fact that the Turkish cultural identity was not within the levels suggested could be explained by the respondents' commitment to their Turkish identity as they were all alienated in Russia and their Turkish identity and language were the sole factors that helped them defend themselves against alienation and assimilation. This will be discussed in detail below.

The means of the variables in the scale ranged between 2.31 and 3.86, the standard deviations being between 0.316 and 0.846. As far as the means of the variables in Table 1 are concerned, the means of the dimensions of the US acculturation ranged between 2 and 3. The English language competence dimension was higher than the total US mean. This could be the result of a need to use English in an environment where the majority language was English. The younger respondents use English at school, while most of the older respondents use English at work. On the other hand, with regard to the dimensions of Turkish acculturation, the Turkish cultural competence had the lowest value. This could be explained by the fact that nearly none of the respondents had lived in Turkey before, nor had they had any formal education in Turkey. Almost all the respondents go to, or have been to, Turkey just to visit some family members for a short time during their vacation. The only source of information for the respondents to learn about Turkey is television or internet. The values for the Turkish identity and the Turkish language competence dimensions were, however, higher than the mean, which meant the respondents were committed to their Turkish identity and their language even though they had never lived in Turkey before.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are given in Table 2 and Table 3. Most of the respondents were married and had jobs. Their length of stay in the US was mostly 13 or 14 years. This is because the Ahıska Turks, as mentioned above, started to come to the US in 2004. The respondents whose length of stay was 12 years or less were mainly the ones who came to the US as a result of marriage and in some rare cases joined their family there at a later stage. The distribution of the respondents in terms of gender and age was homogenous.

Table 2. Demographic information

Gender	N	Percent (%)	Age	N	Percent (%)
Female	61	49.2	25&under	26	21.0
Male	63	50.8	26–35	34	27.4
Marital status	N	Percent (%)	36–45	16	12.9
Married	97	78.2	46&over	48	38.7
Single	27	21.8	Length of stay in the US	N	Percent (%)
Do you work?	N	Percent (%)	12&under years	7	5.6
Yes	71	57.3	13 years	57	46.0
No	53	42.7	14 years	60	48.4

In order to better explain the relationship between the level of education and the age (as the minimum age of the respondents was 14), a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted. According to the cross-tabulation findings in Table 3, most of the respondents were high school or university graduates. The university graduates in the age group of 46&over studied in Uzbekistan, while the respondents in the age group of 26–34 studied in the US. The fact that most of the respondents in the age group of 36–45 were not university graduates could be explained by their not being able to attend university due to the reasons mentioned above, such as being denied their citizenship in Russia.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation results of the level of education and age

Elementary		Level of education				
		High school	Unfinished higher education	University	Total	
Age	25&under	5	16	2	3	26
	26–35	1	10	3	20	34
	36–45	5	8	0	3	16
	46&over	3	24	0	21	48
Total		14	58	5	47	124

The analysis of variance was conducted to determine the statistical differences between socio-demographic variables and the acculturation scale. The independent t-test was conducted for the variables consisting of two groups, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted for the variables consisting of more than two groups so as to examine the differences between the scale and the socio-demographic characteristics. The post-hoc tests were conducted and the results of the Tukey analysis were given.

The gender was not significant in terms of acculturation and all the dimensions were above the significance level 0.05. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was refuted. The fact that acculturation was not significant in terms of gender may result from the equality between females and males in the Ahıska Turkish community.

The marital status of the respondents was statistically significant in terms of acculturation (Sig<0.05). The mean of the married respondents' acculturation was, according to the findings, higher for Turkish acculturation, while the mean of the single respondents' acculturation was higher for American acculturation. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was validated. Table 4 presents the findings that show whether the marital status was significant in terms of acculturation.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test results to determine whether the marital status of the respondents is significant in terms of acculturation

	Marital status		N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	p
Cultural identity US	Dimension1	Married	97	55.10	5345.00	592.000	-4.369	.000
		Single	27	89.07	2405.00			
		Total	124					
Language competence English	Dimension1	Married	97	52.45	5088.00	335.000	-6.040	.000
		Single	27	98.59	2662.00			
		Total	124					
Cultural competence US	Dimension1	Married	97	52.91	5132.00	379.000	-5.659	.000
		Single	27	96.96	2618.00			
		Total	124					
Total acculturation US	Dimension1	Married	97	51.69	5014.00	261.000	-6.352	.000
		Single	27	101.33	2736.00			
		Total	124					
Cultural identity Turkish	Dimension1	Married	97	67.54	6551.50	820.500	-4.294	.000
		Single	27	44.39	1198.50			
		Total	124					
Language competence Turkish	Dimension1	Married	97	73.11	7091.50	280.500	-7.070	.000
		Single	27	24.39	658.50			
		Total	124					
Cultural competence Turkish	Dimension1	Married	97	69.14	6706.50	665.500	-3.920	.000
		Single	27	38.65	1043.50			
		Total	124					
Total acculturation Turkish	Dimension1	Married	97	73.26	7106.50	265.500	-6.341	.000
		Single	27	23.83	643.50			
		Total	124					

As far as the acculturation levels of the respondents who work and those who do not are concerned, the English language competence turned out to be the only significant dimension (Sig.<0.05) among these respondents. According to the findings, the English language competence among the respondents who work was higher than that of the respondents who do not work. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was partially validated. Table 5 presents the relationship between the variable “Do you work?” and the language competence dimension.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U test results to determine whether the employment of the respondents is significant in terms of the English language competence

	Do you work?	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	p	
Language competence English	Dimension 1	Yes	71	69.38	4926.00	1393.000	-2.526	.012
		No	53	53.28	2824.00			
		Total	124					

According to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis analysis, the length of stay in the US and the level of education were not significant for any of the sub-dimensions of the scale. This could be explained by the fact that the length of stay in the US was almost the same for all respondents, with only a few exceptions. Besides, the fact that the level of education was not significant could be explained by the respondents mainly attending school or university in Uzbekistan or Russia. Therefore, hypotheses 4 and 5 were refuted. However, the new generation, who were born in the US or came to the US at a very young age, could be more inclined to US acculturation because the respondents in the group of 25&under had higher values for all sub-dimensions of US acculturation than all the other groups.

To test the significance of the age group variable in terms of acculturation, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted. After Bonferroni Correction procedure, 0.008 (0.05/6) value was determined.

As shown in Table 6, age was significant for all sub-dimensions of the acculturation scale (p<0.008). The differences between the groups were determined with the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis H results to determine whether the age groups of the respondents are significant in terms of acculturation

	Age	N	Mean rank	χ^2	p	Variance
Cultural identity US	25&under (1)	26	87.92	21.863	.000	1>2
	26–35 (2)	34	66.50			1>3
	36–45 (3)	16	55.56			1>4
	46&over (4)	48	48.21			2>3
	Total	124				2>4
Language competence English	25&under (1)	26	101.42	97.281	.000	3>4
	26–35 (2)	34	82.78			1>2
	36–45 (3)	16	67.50			1>3
	46&over (4)	48	25.39			1>4
	Total	124				2>3
						2>4
						3>4

Cultural competence US	25&under (1)	26	98.71	61.716	.000	1>2
	26–35 (2)	34	74.22			1>3
	36–45 (3)	16	65.47			1>4
	46&over (4)	48	33.59			2>3
	Total	124				2>4
Total acculturation US	25&under (1)	26	103.69	89.978	.000	3>4
	26–35 (2)	34	79.63			1>3
	36–45 (3)	16	66.72			1>4
	46&over (4)	48	26.65			2>3
	Total	124				2>4
Cultural identity TR	25&under (1)	26	36.00	42.801	.000	1<2
	26–35 (2)	34	61.93			1<3
	36–45 (3)	16	70.78			1<4
	46&over (4)	48	74.50			2<3
	Total	124				2<4
Language competence Turkish	25&under (1)	26	15.92	74.080	.000	3<4
	26–35 (2)	34	67.44			1<2
	36–45 (3)	16	80.41			1<3
	46&over (4)	48	78.26			1<4
	Total	124				2<3
Cultural competence TR	25&under (1)	26	38.42	15.560	.001	2<4
	26–35 (2)	34	65.62			1<2
	36–45 (3)	16	74.06			1<3
	46&over (4)	48	69.48			1<4
	Total	124				2<3
Total acculturation TR	25&under (1)	26	16.21	58.789	.000	4<3
	26–35 (2)	34	65.06			1<2
	36–45 (3)	16	81.47			1<3
	46&over (4)	48	79.44			1<4
	Total	124				2<3

According to these results, the levels of the US cultural identity, the English language competence, the US cultural competence, and the total US acculturation among the age group of 25&under were higher than those of all other age groups, while among the age groups of 26–35, 36–45, and 45&over, the levels of Turkish cultural identity, the Turkish language competence, and the Turkish cultural competence as well as the total Turkish acculturation were higher. This suggests that the respondents in the age group of 25&under were more inclined to the American culture than in other groups. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was validated.

The Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to see whether the sub-dimensions of the US acculturation and the sub-dimensions of Turkish acculturation were related significantly. Table 7 shows the levels of relation and significance between the variables.

Table 7. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)
Cultural identity US (A)	1							
Language competence English (B)	0.44**	1						
Cultural competence US (C)	0.52**	0.72**	1					
Total acculturation US (D)	0.70**	0.92**	0.86**	1				
Cultural identity TR (E)	-0.18*	-0.47**	-0.38**	-0.45**	1			
Language competence Turkish (F)	-0.34**	-0.57**	-0.47**	-0.57**	0.50**	1		
Cultural competence TR (G)	-0.22*	-0.22**	-0.05	-0.21*	0.22*	0.30**	1	
Total acculturation TR (H)	-0.33**	-0.53**	-0.36**	-0.51**	0.56**	0.77**	0.74**	1

n=124, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

According to the results of the correlation analysis, the sub-dimensions of the US acculturation had positive relationships between themselves and negative relationships with the sub-dimensions of Turkish acculturation. Likewise, the sub-dimensions of Turkish acculturation had positive relationships between themselves, while they had negative relationships with the sub-dimensions of the US acculturation. While the US acculturation levels of the respondents increased, the Turkish acculturation levels decreased, and vice versa. In other words, there was an inverse relationship between the US acculturation and the Turkish acculturation. This suggests that hypothesis 7 was validated.

Lastly, the multiple regression analysis was conducted to see whether the language competence was significant in terms of acculturation, and the results are given in Table 8.

Table 8. The results of regression analysis

	St. Beta	R ²	R ² ad-justed	F	p	T	P
Language competence English ^a		0.871	0.870	825.592	0.000		
Total acculturation US ^b	0.933					28.733	0.000*
Language competence English ^a		0.368	0.363	71.169	0.000		
Total acculturation TR ^b	-0.607					-8.436	0.000*
Language competence Turkish ^a		0.798	0.796	480.909	0.000		
Total acculturation TR ^b	0.893					21.930	0.000*
Language competence Turkish ^a		0.427	0.422	90.836	0.000		
Total acculturation US ^b	-0.653					-9.531	0.000*

N=124, ^a independent variable, ^b dependent variable, * p<0.05

According to the results of the regression analysis, the model constituted by the US acculturation, the dependent variable, and the English language competence, the independent variable, was significant as a whole (F=825.592, p<0.001), and the English language competence affected the total US acculturation on a 5% significance level (t=28.733, p<0.05). The English language competence accounted for 87.1% of the change in the US acculturation. This result suggests that, as the English language competence increased, so did the US acculturation.

The model constituted by the Turkish acculturation, the dependent variable, and the English language competence, the independent variable, was significant as a whole (F=480.909, p<0.001) and the Turkish language competence affected the total Turkish acculturation on a 5% significance level (t=21.930, p<0.05). The Turkish language competence accounted for 36.8% of the change in the Turkish acculturation. This result suggests that as the English language competence increased, the total Turkish acculturation would decrease. However, this result was not as strong as it was for the US acculturation. In other

words, the language competence had an effect on acculturation but the effect was more modest on decreasing the Turkish acculturation.

The model constituted by the Turkish acculturation, the dependent variable, and the Turkish language competence, the independent variable, was significant as a whole ($F=71.169$, $p<0.001$) and the English language competence affected the total Turkish acculturation on a 5% significance level ($t=-8.436$, $p<0.05$). The English language competence accounted for 79.8% of change in the total Turkish acculturation. This suggests that as the Turkish language competence of the respondents increased, so did their total Turkish acculturation.

The model constituted by the total US acculturation, the dependent variable, and the Turkish language competence, the independent variable, was significant as a whole ($F=90.836$, $p<0.001$) and the Turkish language competence affected the total US acculturation on a 5% significance level ($t=-9.531$, $p<0.05$). The Turkish language competence accounted for 42.7% of change in the total US acculturation. This result suggests that as the Turkish language competence of the respondents increased, the total US acculturation decreased.

DISCUSSION

The US and Turkish acculturation among the Ahıska Turks was found to be correlated with some variables, as the findings above suggest.

Padilla and Peres (2003) state that gender is one of the various factors that affect the way in which individuals acculturate. However, the gender was not significant for acculturation in this study. In other words, the acculturation levels for both female and male respondents were close to each other. This contradicts the findings of some of the previous researchers (Berry 1997; Chen & Benet-Martínez & Bond 2008; Lorenzo-Blanco et al. 2012; Yoon et al. 2013), who found that gender was significant in their studies. However, this could be explained by the number of male and female respondents; that is, there were 61 female and 63 male respondents. The number of respondents in terms of gender was almost equal, which could affect the result. It could, on the other hand, be explained by the way in which the Ahıska Turks regard women. Namely, women in the Ahıska Turkish community have always been equal to men, unlike in several communities where women usually stay at home with almost no interaction with outsiders. Therefore, it was not different in the US. As they migrated to the US, the women started to work as the men did, so their exposure to the American culture was the same and, as a result, the gender was not significant for the US acculturation.

The marital status of the respondents was also significant in terms of acculturation. The US acculturation levels of the single respondents were high, and so were the Turkish acculturation levels of the married respondents. This finding, however, is also associated with the age of the respondents. In other words, the single respondents were mostly the younger ones who were still at school. However, the married respondents were the older ones who had limited interaction with the home culture unlike the younger ones. Since the younger respondents had the opportunity to interact with their American peers, they were more inclined to the US culture. Conversely, the married respondents, not all of them though, kept more to their own, Turkish culture. This is because most of the Ahıska Turks, who had been alienated in the past both in Uzbekistan and Russia, are still afraid of losing their Turkish identity, language, and culture. Therefore, most of them try to keep their interaction with the American culture limited. On the other hand, married individuals might find it easier to adapt to new cultures. Poyrazlı & Kavanaugh (2006) found that married international students had lower levels of adaptation difficulties compared to single international students. Likewise, Knyshevyytska & Hill (2007) concluded that being married and having a family helped acculturation.

The respondents who worked were expected to be more US-accultured. However, there was no difference between those who worked and those who did not. The only difference between these two groups was that the level of English language competence was higher among the respondents who worked than that of the respondents who did not. This is not surprising if the language use at work is taken into consideration. Most of the respondents who work make business with others using English. Therefore, they are expected to be more competent in English. The fact that there was no difference between these two groups is not compatible with the literature. Lu, Samaratunge and Härtel (2011: 144) found that “Chinese immigrants adopting assimilation attitude have significantly higher level of work engagement than those who adopt separation and marginalization”. Yijälä and Luoma (2019) also stated that the employment of the Iraqi immigrants contributed to their acculturation process.

The length of stay was not found to be significant in terms of acculturation. On average the length of stay of the respondents in the US was 13 years, with only a few exceptions. This could be the reason for my findings. However, further research could be conducted among those with varying lengths of stay in order to reach a solid conclusion as to the role of the length of residence with regard to acculturation. After all, individuals who stay in a new culture longer are supposed to be more acculturated, which was also supported by the previous research. Ward and Kennedy (1996), Zhang and Rentz (1996), and Wilton and

Constantine (2003) found in their studies that the length of residence played an important role in the acculturation of individuals.

The age of the respondents was significant in terms of acculturation. While the younger respondents were more inclined to the US acculturation, the older ones tended to incline to the Turkish acculturation. This suggests that age is an important factor in the acculturation of individuals. This result is compatible with the literature data. Furnham and Bochner (1982) state that age is one of the individual differences that affects the culture shock and that younger people are expected to adjust faster to the host culture than the older ones. Similarly, Schwartz et al. (2010) state that “individuals who migrate as young children are more likely to acquire receiving-culture practices, values, and identifications easily and fluidly than those who migrate at older ages”. The older respondents might be more resistant to the US acculturation due to their understanding and commitment to the social clock. Different cultures have different time preferences for the important events in a person’s life, such as marriage, leaving home, having kids, and so on. For example, the older respondents are still of the opinion that people should marry at a young age, which is about between 18 and 22 for the Ahiska Turks, so they expect their children to marry within this age range. However, for the younger respondents it is too early to marry at the age of 18. Most younger and single respondents stated that the ideal age for them to marry was in their late twenties. This suggests that the social clock for the younger respondents is changing from the Turkish to the American style, which is the very result of American acculturation.

According to Young and Gardner (1990: 59), “how one acculturates may well influence how well one acquires the dominant language and vice-versa”. Similarly, Clément (1986: 285) argues that “language proficiency has a direct impact on acculturation”. Likewise, Kmiotek and Boski (2017: 193) suggest that acquiring a second language means the involvement of an individual in a second culture, and add that the use of a language by one is an implication of one’s being a member of a certain group. In this research, the younger respondents were found to be more competent in English, which results from the fact that they were still in school and that they were more exposed to English. The more individuals are exposed to a language, the more proficient or dominant they tend to be in that language (Grosjean 1982; Flege & MacKay & Piske 2002; Bonfieni et al. 2019). The relationship between language proficiency and acculturation is a topic that has been studied by many researchers. We can find extensive research that suggests the interrelation between acculturation and language proficiency; that is, second-language proficiency has a positive impact on acculturation and vice versa (Jia et al. 2016; Graham & Brown 1996; Choi 2014). The findings of this research are compatible with literature data. A high

level of proficiency in English means higher US acculturation. The respondents with a higher level of proficiency in English displayed a higher level of US acculturation. Namely, as the English language competence increased, the total Turkish acculturation decreased. However, this result was not as impressive as it was for the US acculturation. In other words, the language competence had an effect on acculturation but the effect was more modest on decreasing the Turkish acculturation. This could be explained by the fact that enculturation among the Ahıska Turks is as strong as acculturation. Although the young generation is more US-acculturated, this does not mean the attrition of the Turkish language and culture. This is mostly due to the alienation of the Ahıska Turks in Uzbekistan and especially in Russia in the past.

CONCLUSION

The acculturation process and experience of the Ahıska Turks in the US were investigated. The findings revealed that the Ahıska Turks were in Berry's integration category as expected. However, some of the variables – gender, employment, and length of stay – were not found significant, which contradicts the literature and suggests that the acculturation process of the Ahıska Turks was different from that of most minorities. The possible explanation for that is their previous experience in Russia, especially in Krasnodar Krai. Since they were alienated and marginalized as they were denied citizenship in the post-Soviet period, they were more engaged with their Turkish identity. The younger generation, on the other hand, who had not faced the discrimination and alienation before, were found to be more inclined to the US acculturation. Therefore, new research as to the acculturation experience of the Ahıska Turks in the US should be implemented in the coming years and the findings should be compared and contrasted with the findings of the current research. Besides, the acculturation experience of the Ahıska Turks in other countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia should be assessed and evaluated in order to get a complete picture of the acculturation experience of the Ahıska Turks. Moreover, the findings of this study could be compared and contrasted with those from the studies investigating the acculturation of other minorities who, similar to Ahıska Turks, were forcibly displaced.

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