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Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures (APTOC): Development of a Scale that Measures Intercultural Competence of Syrians Who Reside in Germany

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to develop and validate a scale that measures the level of intercultural competence of Syrians who reside in Germany in order to shed light on patterns and behaviours that are practiced by them in a different culture. The starting point was Cushner's 32-item Inventory of Cross-cultural Sensitivity, which in its original form includes 5 subscales. Based on Cushner's ICCS, a 20-item scale, here referred to as Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures (APTOC), was constructed and tested with 308 respondents. After factor and internal consistency analyses, the 20-item scale APTOC was reduced to a 15-item scale consisting of 3 subscales, namely Openness to Other Cultures (5 items, alpha = .73), Global Mindset (5 items, alpha = .83) and Narrow Mindset (5 items, alpha = .70). It is recommended to conduct similar procedures following the same approach when choosing a different population than Syrians who reside in a European nation.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Openness to Other Cultures, Global Mindset, Narrow Mindset, Syrians in Germany

Introduction

The wave of globalisation has led to more interaction between people from various countries and different cultures (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). The civil war in Syria has led to the greatest influx of immigration in modern history as a huge number of Syrians have been displaced internally and externally. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) that made its estimates about displaced Syrians in 2017, over 6 million Syrians have been displaced within Syria (IDMC, 2018). According to Eurostat (2018), the number of Syrians who were displaced and moved to Europe is around 1 million between 2011 and the end of 2016.

Syrians who reside in Germany are a perfect research subject for the aim of this article for two reasons: first, Syria has an Arabic culture that defers very much from the German culture; second, Germany is the largest host European country with 637,845 displaced Syrians, according to the Federal Statistical Office whose statistics were made between 2011 and the end of 2016 (The German Federal Statistical Office, 2018).

The subject of intercultural competence has become a subject of interest for many researchers involved in different arenas such as business psychology, management, communication, education, healthcare, social science and even military (Abbe, Gulick, & Herman, 2007). This subject has been popular amongst academics for about 35 years (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991) as the wave of globalisation became prominent, which led to more interaction between people from different countries and different cultures (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

The term intercultural competence has been widely used in the literature interchangeably with terms such as intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, and cultural awareness. Regardless of the confusion caused by the interchangeable use of many terms, there is a broad area of overlap about the construct that is generally agreed upon, which is mainly concerned with "the ability to function effectively in another culture." (Gertsen, 1990, p. 342). Johnson, Lenartowicz and Apud (2006), in an attempt to find a common ground for the different definitions and terms, found three main factors that most definitions of intercultural competence possess: attitudes, skills and knowledge.

Cultural competence as described by Cross (1988, p. 83) is "a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, and among professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Cultural awareness indicates beliefs, attitudes and tolerance. Cultural competence speaks to the skills that help counsellors to translate beliefs and attitudes into actions within work, family and community contexts". Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman's (2003) definition of the term "intercultural competence" is "the ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways." (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422). Ang, Van Dyne and Koh (2006, p. 101) describe

cultural intelligence as "an individual's capability to deal effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity...". Also, Thomas, Elron, Stahl, Ekelund, Ravlin, Cerdin and Maznevski (2008, p. 126) define cultural intelligence as "...a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment." Gelan (2017, p. 38) describes intercultural competence as "...the ability to communicate efficiently and properly with the representatives of other cultures, to empathize and act efficiently when concerned with them."; and she further sheds light on other things that serve the purpose of the definition such as learning the language (verbal and nonverbal), learning essential cultural symbols and understanding the value system (Gelan, 2017).

Frameworks and Conceptualisations of Intercultural Competence

Gelan demonstrates the concept of intercultural competence from an epistemological point of view. She emphasises that knowledge, empathy, self-esteem, and cultural identity are the main elements that constitute intercultural competence (Gelan, 2017). To that end, knowledge means knowing about other cultures and understanding how people from a certain culture behave with one another; empathy is inclined towards the feelings and needs of other people from different cultures; self-esteem refers to being aware of one's own desires, weaknesses and strengths; cultural identity is concerned with knowledge of one's own culture (Gelan, 2017). In addition, according to Wiseman (1995), the intercultural dimension comprises three competences: cognitive, emotional and operational. First, cognitive competence underlines the ability that one has to understand the language, history, traditions and norms of a new culture; whereas emotional competence taps into one's ability to adapt to other cultures with emotions being involved, and that generally includes attitudes towards other cultures such as knowledge, respect, and open-mindedness; last but not least, operational competence is a behavioural trait such as abilities and capabilities to adapt through experimenting positive behaviours in an intercultural setting, and through understanding behaviours (verbal and nonverbal) as well as tolerating others' behaviours (Wiseman, 1995).

When it comes to assessing intercultural competence, there seems to be an issue among researchers concerning the measurability and definition. In other words, a fair number of instruments can be found in the literature, which makes it quite confusing for many researchers (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). To address this issue, Hammer and others (2003) distinguish between intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity; the former is, as they stated, "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences", and on the other hand, the latter is "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422). In addition to the interchangeable use of different terms, different frameworks and assessments have been made for various purposes and in different ways. Thus, recognising the common conceptual frameworks and models in the literature is a very

important step to understand the assessment of intercultural competence (Sinicrope et al., 2007). Hence, Sinicrope with colleagues identify four frameworks that serve as a basis for the commonly used inventories and scales of intercultural competence, and these frameworks are the behavioural approach, the European Multidimensional model, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, and a Culture-Generic Approach (Sinicrope et al., 2007). There are two other models that are worth shedding light on: the first one is anxiety/uncertainty management, a model that was developed in 1993 by Gudykunst; and the second one, developed in the same year, is called identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 1993).

The behavioural approach is based on bridging between behaviour and the knowledge of intercultural competence that individuals have. The behavioural approach measures what can be done with that knowledge in intercultural situations. In addition, Ruben (1976) demonstrates that certain measures of competence are necessary to understand behaviours, as he states "measures of competency that reflect an individual's ability to display concepts in his behavior rather than intentions, understandings, knowledges, attitudes, or desires" (p. 337). Based on the behavioural approach, Ruben identifies seven determinants that constitute intercultural competence: display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, self-oriented role behaviour, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity (Ruben, 1976). Display of respect means that one is able to show respect and positive regard for others; whereas, interaction posture is concerned with responding to others in a non-judgmental way; orientation to knowledge sheds light on "the extent to which knowledge is individual in nature" (p. 39); empathy is about the ability of putting oneself in others' shoes; self-oriented role behaviour is about being able to have the flexibility needed and to function in roles; interaction management is concerned with being able to assess the needs of others in an accurate way, and this assessment serves as a basis upon which an individual is able to maneuver (start and end) in the discussion or interaction; and last but not least, tolerance for ambiguity demonstrates as little discomfort as possible when reacting to new ambiguous situations (Ruben, 1976). All in all, Ruben's behavioural approach is not based upon self-report methods of assessing intercultural competence; in fact, it is based upon observing individuals' actions in certain intercultural situations as he regards these actions as the "ability to function in a manner that is perceived to be relatively consistent with the needs, capacities, goals, and expectations of the individuals in one's environment while satisfying one's own needs, capacities, goals, and expectations" (Ruben, 1976, p. 336).

Byram (1997) developed the European Multidimensional Model, which covers five dimensions: attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Attitude means the ability to being open to and curious about other cultures with "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (p. 91); knowledge is about being acquainted with the dynamics of social groups of one's own culture as well as other

cultures; having the skills that allow individuals to interpret and relate certain events to their own culture; having the skills that are necessary for individuals to discover other cultures more by using the existing knowledge and intercultural interaction skills; being able to make evaluations based on the point of view of one's own culture and other culture (Byram, 1997).

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) has been rather popular in North America, as many have discussed and researched it recently (Sinicrope et al., 2007). The model was developed by Bennett (1993), with a purpose to not only study cultural differences, but the way in which individuals respond to these differences and how their response changes over time. The DMIS has two main stages: ethnocentric and ethnorelative; the former underlines that one's own culture is the central point of comparison, whereas the latter describes that there is no such thing as one standard culture; and each stage contains three substages.

On the one hand, the ethnocentric stage includes three substages, i.e. denial, defense and minimisation. Denial refers to the process of denying other cultures and cultural differences, and that happens when an individual isolates him/herself from others from different cultures through imposing psychological or physical barriers; defense sheds light on how an individual tends to defend or compare their culture favourably (or in a superior way) against other cultures when they feel threatened by other cultures; however, an individual might experience the exact opposite when the worldview gets the favourable stance against one's own culture; minimisation describes that an individual is aware of cultural differences, but all cultures are labeled in a similar way when it comes to their roots (Bennett, 1993). On the other hand, the ethnorelative stage consists of three substages acceptance, adaptation and integration. Acceptance refers to the phase during which one accepts cultural differences including values, beliefs and behaviour of others from different cultures; adaptation demonstrates the ability to reframe one's view depending on the culture that s/he is in through empathy and pluralism; integration, which is the last substage of the ethnorelative stage, is about fitting other worldviews into one's own culture and worldview, meaning assimilating other cultural norms and habits on (Bennett, 1993).

The Culture-Generic Approach to Intercultural Competence has 10 dimensions that are heterogeneity, transmission, other-centered, observant, motivation, sensitivity, respect, relational, investment and appropriateness (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005). Unlike other approaches (top-down) that are about theorising and coming up with frameworks for assessment, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (ibid.) decided to adopt an opposite approach (bottom-up), in an attempt to form a model of intercultural communication competence that can be used widely. In other words, the way the dimensions for assessment are formed is based on interviews, whose scripts undergo a semantic network analysis with 37 interculturally competent participants (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005).

The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) and Identity Negotiation Models were developed by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey respectively. According to AUM, when dealing with foreigners, people usually witness some difficulties such as being anxious and uncertain; these difficulties can be managed through mindfulness, which means that, in other words, one needs to be mindful of the source of anxiety and focus on it (Gudykunst, 1993). In this context, the source of anxiety may embrace several things including situations, connections with the host culture, and even one's concept of self (Gudykunst, 1993). Ting-Toomey (1993) developed the identity negotiation model with an emphasis on what contributes to cultural adaptation in light of new and unfamiliar cultural settings. Hence, Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation model has 3 factors (cognitive, effective, and behavioural) that contribute to "/.../ effective identity negotiation and outcome attainment processes" (Ting-Toomey, 1993, p. 106).

The Inventory of Cross-cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) was employed for the aim of this article. Cushner developed in 1986 a 32-item scale to measure cross-cultural sensitivity, which uses a 7-point measure (strongly disagree - strongly agree). The purpose of such a scale was to give individuals an opportunity to, as Mahon and Cushner (2014) state referencing Cushner (2003), "assess their level of understanding and skill in relation to factors deemed important in successful cross-cultural interaction." (Mahon & Cushner, 2014, p. 487). ICCS includes 5 subscales: Cultural Integration (C), Behavioural (B), Intellectual Interaction (I), Attitude Toward Others (A) and Empathy (E). The authors decided to use this scale as it is comprehensive with 5 subscales and it seems to be a good fit for the purpose of this article.

First, Cultural Integration describes the willingness that an individual needs to integrate into other cultures, and this subscales has 10 items (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C16, C17, C18, C19, and C20); secondly, the Behavioural subscale sheds light on the way an individual perceives his/her own behaviour with people for other culture, and it has 6 items (B6, B7, B21, B22, B23, and B24); thirdly, Intellectual Interaction underlines how people are oriented intellectually when interacting with people from different cultures, and this subscale consists of 6 items (I8, I9, I10, I11, I12, and I25); fourthly, Attitude Toward Others focuses on people's attitude towards people from other cultural backgrounds, and it comprises 5 items (A26, A27, A28, A29, and A30); lastly, Empathy means the ability to put oneself in the shoes of people from other cultures, and this subscale contains 5 items, which are E13, E14, E15, E31, and E32 (Cushner, 1986, 2005) (Table 1). Nonetheless, according to Mahon and Cushner (2014), although ICCS showed acceptable content and construct validity when it was initially developed and tested in the mid-eighties, there has been a major problem amongst some researchers who used it with the ability to reproduce "the ICCS's five internal scales, which had weak internal reliability scores" (p. 487). That is why the present authors did not consider ICCS's five subscales as none of them showed internal

consistency as a subscale and decided to construct another scale, however one which is based on the ICCS.

Method

Sample

In total, 308 Syrian respondents completed the questionnaire, 54 of which were female (17.5%) and 254 were male (82.5%). Even though the age of the respondents fluctuated between 18 and 64 years of age, the average of the respondents aged 30 years old (M = 30.45, SD = 7.47).

In addition, 128 respondents ticked "high school" as their highest level of education (41.6%); respondents with a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education had the same proportion (41.6%). A lesser proportion (14.6%) went to the respondents who had a Master's degree as their highest level of education, whereas only 7 respondents had no education at all. More than half of the respondents had no jobs (56.2%), whereas 60.7% of them were studying something. The civil status of the respondents was as follows: 48.1% were single, which is the majority; followed by 44.2% of married respondents; 5.5% of the respondents were living with a partner; 1.9% were divorced; and only 1 widow.

The majority of the respondents (39.3%) were undecided about the question "Do you consider yourself as a religious person?", followed by 21.1% of respondents who answered "not at all", and those who considered themselves a little religious were 16.9% of the respondents, just the same proportion as the group who considered themselves quite much religious. Eighteen (5.8%) of the respondents considered themselves very much religious.

170 respondents (55.2%) had been in Germany for 3 years, whereas ~18% and ~12% of the respondents had lived in Germany for 4 and 2 years respectively. There were 4 respondents that had been in Germany for a longer time (two for 15 year, one for 25 years and one for 46 years). 98.4% of the respondents were granted a residence permit.

Instrument

Since one of the study's objectives was to measure attitudes of Syrians who were residing in Germany towards people and things, the authors found ICCS (Inventory of Cross Cultural Sensitivity - a 32-item scale) developed by Cushner (1986) to be applicable for the purpose of this article. Hence, 20 items were selected from ICCS to form a scale that measured attitudes towards people and things from other cultures without taking into consideration any of the 5 subscales (Cultural Integration, Behavioural, Intellectual Interaction, Attitude Toward Others, and Empathy) that ICCS originally represented. In addition, some alterations were made to some items, so they fit the situation and context of Syrians who are in Germany. The revised version will in the fgllowing be referred to as the Attitudes towards People and Things

from Other Cultures (APTOC). Table 1 presents which items have been deleted, which have been altered, and which have been added into the new scale. The response alternatives were on a five-point scale ranging from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Table 1: List of Items in the Original Inventory of Cross Cultural Sensitivity (Cushner, 1986) and whether They Were Added as Such or Altered for Use, or Deleted from Use in the Present Study. The New Version Is here Labeled "Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures"

Inventory of Cross Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) – 32 items	Altered/Added/ Deleted	Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures – 20 items
C1- I have foreigners to my home on a regular basis.	Altered	1- I invite people from other cultures to my home on a regular basis.
C2- I listen to music from another culture on a regular basis.	Altered	2- I listen to music from other cultures on a regular basis.
C3- I decorate my home or room with artifacts from other countries.	Added	3- I decorate my home or room with artifacts from other countries.
C4- I think about living within another culture in the future.	Added	4- I think about living within another culture in the future.
C5- I eat ethnic foods at least twice a week.	Altered	5- I eat foods from other cultures at least twice a week.
B6- The way other people express themselves is very interesting to me.	Altered	6- The way other people from other cultures express themselves is very interesting to me.
B7- Crowds of foreigners frighten	Altered	7- Crowds of people from other cultures than my own frighten me
I8- I enjoy being with people from other cultures	Altered	8- I enjoy being with people from other cultures than my own.
I9- I enjoy studying about people from other cultures.	Added	9- I enjoy studying about people from other cultures.

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I10- The very existence of humanity depends on our knowledge about other people.	Altered	10- The very existence of humanity depends on our knowledge about people from other cultures.
I11- I like to discuss issues with people from other cultures.	Altered	11- I like to discuss issues with people from other cultures than my own.
I12- When something newsworthy happens I seek out someone from that part of the world to discuss the issue with.	Deleted	
E13- I think people are basically alike.	Deleted	
E14- There is usually more than one good way to get things done.	Deleted	
E15- I have many friends.	Deleted	
C16- I speak only one language.	Added	12- I speak only one language.
C17- I cannot eat with chopsticks.	Deleted	
C18- I have never lived outside my own culture for any great length of time.	Altered	13- I have lived outside my own culture for a great length of time.
C19- I dislike eating foods from other cultures.	Altered	14- I dislike eating foods from other cultures than my own.
C20- I read more national news than international news in the daily newspaper.	Altered	15- I read more national news than international news.
B21- I avoid people who are different from me	Deleted	
B22- It makes me nervous to talk to people who are different from me.	Deleted	
B23- I feel uncomfortable when in a crowd of people.	Deleted	
B24- Moving into another culture would be easy.	Deleted	
I25- It is better that people from other cultures avoid one another.	Added	16- It is better that people from other cultures avoid one another.

A26- Foreign influence in our country threatens our national identity.	Added	17- Foreign influence in our country threatens our national identity.
A27- Culturally mixed marriages are wrong.	Added	18- Culturally mixed marriages are wrong.
A28- People from other cultures do things differently because they do not know any other way.	Deleted	
A29- Residential neighbourhoods should be culturally separated.	Added	19- Residential neighborhoods should be culturally separated.
A30- There should be tighter controls on the number of immigrants allowed into my country.	Altered	20- There should be tighter controls on the number of immigrants allowed into my Germany.
E31- Others' feelings rarely influence decisions I make.	Deleted	
E32- The more I know about people, the more I dislike them.	Deleted	

Procedure

For data collection, the questionnaire was distributed electronically on GoogleDrive, and the link of the questionnaire was posted on two large Facebook groups for Syrians in Germany.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). The collected data are stored according to the regulations of the European Commission Data Protection (2016).

Results

A factor analysis (principal component, varimax rotation) was conducted in order to investigate whether the 20-item scale (Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures = APTOC) would constitute any major factors. A three-factor solution provided a reasonable factor structure. The first factor had an Eigenvalue of 5.91 and explained 15.6% of the variance. The second factor had an Eigenvalue of 4.76 and explained 12.6% of the variance, while the third factor had an Eigenvalue of 3.20 and explained 8.4% of the variance.

Three items (items 7, 15, and 20) were omitted because they did not have any significant loadings (a significant loading was considered to be > .40). .Hence, 17 out

of 20 items loaded significantly on the three factors. The first factor consisted of 6 items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 13), and it was named as "Openness to Other Cultures". However, item 13 was removed according to the internal consistency analysis, which then produced a satisfactory Cronbach's Alpha score for the subscale (.73). The second factor consisted of 5 items (items 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11), and its Cronbach's Alpha score was .83; it was named as "Global Mindset". The third factor contained 6 items (items 12, 14, 16,17,18 and 19); it was called "Narrow Mindset". Item 17 was removed, as it was internally inconsistent with the other items, according to the internal consistency analysis. Hence, the final Cronbach's Alpha score for "Narrow Mindset" was .70. To sum up, according to the factor and internal consistency analyses that were conducted, the 20-item scale APTOC came to consist of 3 main subscales; Openness to Other Cultures, Global Mindset and Narrow Mindset, and each of these subscales contained 5 items (Table 2).

Table 2: Items with Factor Loadings, and Cronbach's Alphas of the Subscales in the Scale "Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures" (APTOC)

Subcales
Openness to Other Cultures (5 items, α = .79)
I invite people from other cultures to my home on a regular basis. (Item loading = .54)
I listen to music from other cultures on a regular basis. (Item loading = .67)
I decorate my home or room with artifacts from other countries. (Item loading = .70)
I think about living within another culture in the future. (Item loading = .67)
I eat foods from other cultures at least twice a week. (Item loading = .73)
Global Mindset (5 items, α = .83)
The way other people from other cultures express themselves is very interesting to me. (Item loading = .52)
I enjoy being with people from other cultures than my own. (Item loading = .68)
I enjoy studying about people from other cultures. (Item loading = .70)
The very existence of humanity depends on our knowledge about people from other cultures. (Item loading = .72)
I like to discuss issues with people from other cultures than my own. (Item loading = .76)
Narrow Mindset (5 items, α = .70)
I speak only one language. (Item loading = .45)
I dislike eating foods from other cultures than my own. (Item loading = .58)
It is better that people from other cultures avoid one another. (Item loading = .68)
Culturally mixed marriages are wrong. (Item loading = .64)

Residential neighborhoods should be culturally separated. (Item loading = .52)

Discussion

The primary aim of this article was to develop and validate a scale that measures the level of intercultural competence of Syrians who reside in Germany in order to shed light on patterns and behaviours that are practiced by them in a different culture. Intercultural competence was measured using a 20-item scale (Attitudes towards People and Things from Other Cultures = APTOC) that was taken from ICCS (Inventory of Cross Cultural Sensitivity - a 32-item scale) Cushner (1986). The APTOC, after conducting factor and internal consistency analyses, comprised three dimensions "Openness to Other Cultures," "Global Mindset" and "Narrow Mindedness" with 5 items each.

This article is concerned with intercultural competence of Syrians who reside in Germany. Thus, APTOC was designed for this subject only, unless some adjustments and alterations are made so that it suits another subjects' circumstances. More research is needed in the future to validate the findings. The authors used a questionnaire as a means of measurement, and questionnaires in their nature are based on personal perceptions of the respondents, which change over time. Hence, there is no guarantee that the results will last for a long time. Nevertheless, the approach taken by the authors can be used over again to check changes in perceptions.

Although this research has been conducted following scientific standards, there is a chance that randomness and mistakes have occurred. It is recommended to conduct similar research following the same approach in a different environment, different approach in the same environment or choosing different population than Syrians who reside in Germany (Germans, for example). By doing so, one can assure the validity and reliability of the results.

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