Measuring the effectiveness of theory in action: Grass-roots initiatives and social justice for Japan's Kurdish migrants

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Abstract

Set in the Kurdish migrant community of Kawaguchi, Japan, the current study examines interview data to investigate the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives to stimulate social justice. Analysis is based on Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. Measured according to Sorrells's and Leydens and Lucena's characteristics of social justice, the results indicate progress toward this aim. However, the emergent opportunities that favour the documented and the continuing risks for the undocumented suggest an unequal distribution of social justice. The initiatives discussed here hold potential for implementation in other migrant communities, especially those comprised of are minorities in their countries of origin.

Lêkolîna ku li ser civaka koçber a Kawaguchi, Japonyayê de bi cih tê,datayên hevpeyvînên bandora însiyatifên herêmî yên ku dadweriya civakî teşwiq dike bi kar tîne. Bingeha analîzan li ser Modela Byram a Pêşbazî ya Têkilî ya Navçandîyetîyê ye. Li gorî taybetmendiyên Sorrells û Leydens û Lucena yên dadmendiya civakî hatine pîvandin, encamên pêşkeftina li ber vê armancê destnîşan dikin. Lêbelê, derfetên derketî yên ku ji hêla belgekirî ve piştgirî dikin û rîskên domdar ji bo yên nehatine belgekirin, belavokek wekhevî ya dadmendiya civakî pêşniyar dikin ku ji hêla teoriyan ve nehatiye pejirandin.

Keywords: social justice, migration, Kurdish, intercultural communicative competence, Japan

Introduction and background

Intercultural communication that is rooted in 'critical engagement, democratic participation, and

social justice' (Sorrells, 2010, p. 177) is at the heart of this paper, which focuses on grassroots

initiatives by a Kurdish migrant association to defuse intercultural conflicts within their local

Kawaguchi, Japan communities. Guided by both Baraldi's (2009) criteria for managing

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intercultural conflict and measured by Sorrells's (2016) and Leydens and Lucena's (2014) characteristics of social justice, the analysis featured here assesses the degree to which the highlighted initiatives adhere to the tenets of social justice-oriented intercultural communication research and, further, their connections to successful outcomes in the given context. With its focus on social action, the approach to this investigation reflects Piacentini et al.'s (2018, p. 1) call for more 'practice-evidenced' research to address intercultural communication. While the results show progress through reduced conflict, increased community engagement by Kurdish migrants, and Japanese-led advocacy initiatives, some participants' undocumented status, nevertheless, limits their ability to take advantage of opportunities created by these initiatives and continues to expose them to risk. In this way, the application of theory to this real-world context contributes to positive outcomes, but still represents relatively minor progress for those who face larger top-down constraints.

Caught in a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005) in which official migration policy neither recognizes asylum seekers from Turkey, nor grants concessions for migrant workers from states that lack bilateral agreements with Japan, most of the estimated 2,000 members of the Kurdish population residing in Japan remain in the country only through their status of 'provisional release.' Provisional release is a migration policy that defers deportation for three months and offers no legal status during this period. Furthermore, it restricts mobility to within local districts, forbids employment, and denies access to any subsidized healthcare (Tanaka, 2018). At the end of this three-month period, recipients face deportation, detention, or an extension for an additional three months. As recruits for the local construction industry that faces worker shortages, the males from this population work in spite of these restrictions and, in this way, operate in the unstable space outlined by De Genova (2013) that serves the interest of the local

market but does not align with government policy. The result is a precarious migration status that influences the details of the migrants' everyday lives in which the fear of detention and/or deportation loom large. With respect to Yuval-Davis's (1999) and Choo's (2016) definitions of citizenship that consider human rights, dignity, and a sense of belonging in addition to individuals' legal status, 'provisional release' essentially strips its recipients of citizenship. Such a positionality substantially reduces the relevance of integration into the host culture.

Integration is further complicated by widespread visions of a homogenous Japanese national identity that is grounded in the traditions of *Nihonjinron* (writings that emphasize the uniqueness of Japanese cultural identity; Burgess, 2010). Although the multi-ethnic autochthonous and foreign-born population of Japanese residents has been well established in the literature (cf. Wiener, 2004), such ideologies of homogeneity remain: over 72% of the Japanese respondents to the most recent International Social Survey Program on National Identity (ISSPNP) considered Japanese ancestry to be an important component of being 'truly Japanese' (Burgess, 2010, p. 12). Moreover, this conceptualization of Japanese identity influences migration policy. In an effort to alleviate the potential for migration to dilute the concentration of full-blooded Japanese residents, migration policies in recent decades have favoured Nikkei, descendants of the Japanese diaspora born in the Americas, despite their very different cultural backgrounds.

Targeting ethnocentricity and progressing toward social justice

Unconscious bias impedes intercultural integration (Sorrells, 2016). Strategies that seek to manage intercultural conflict specifically target ethnocentricity, the most common form of unconscious bias (Baraldi, 2009). For the purposes of the current paper, ethnocentricity refers to

'the interpretation and evaluation of others' behaviour using one's own cultural presuppositions i.e. using a guiding distinction between a positive US and a negative THEM' (Baraldi, 2009, p. 11). As suggested by the above discussion of Japanese cultural history, ethnocentricity is widespread at the research site. Such an inward orientation by the dominant group reinforces the existing power asymmetries between members of the dominant and marginalized groups of Kawaguchi. While the task of fostering a dominant group's empathy toward a local minority group presents a challenge in most settings, this challenge is especially salient in this context, given the culturally embedded unconscious bias toward embodiments of Japaneseness and the lack of tradition of integrating individuals of non-Japanese origins. In these ways, the imperial Japanese custom of considering non-Japanese-origin residents as subject to Japanese legal obligations but not its rights has been preserved (Askew, 2001).

In addition to this unconscious bias, explicitly negative attitudes toward undocumented migrants have emerged as greater numbers of migrant workers have come to Japan to fill labour shortages. Amidst a growing discourse that places blame for societal problems on *gaikokujin hanzai* (foreign crime), the ISSPNP finds that 86% of Japanese respondents support increased measures to exclude the undocumented (Burgess, 2010 p. 13). Moreover, Kurdish migrants' habit of gathering together and speaking loudly does not help to instil empathy among their Japanese neighbours, who often misinterpret their loud voices as fighting. Similarly, the Kurdish men's general-purpose use of direct, honorifics-free Japanese acquired on construction sites further contributes to perceptions of Kurds as rude. Given existing biases against undocumented migrants in general and specific perceptions of Kurds as loud, rude, and potentially aggressive, the obstacles to overcoming ethnocentricity are compounded.

Overcoming ethnocentricity lies at the heart of intercultural communicative competence. Moreover, as skilful intercultural speakers can serve as effective mediators who 'establish relationships and manage dysfunctions' between individuals from different cultures (Byram, 1997, p. 38), they hold potential to heighten the dominant community's empathy toward their own community, which, as a result, can experience less marginalization. For this reason, the current paper adopts Byram's (1997) Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence as its primary analytical lens. This model measures intercultural communicative competence according to the following characteristics of the individual: knowledge of self and other, skills to interpret and relate, political education and critical cultural awareness, attitudes formed through relativizing the self and valuing the other, and skills to discover and/or interact. By applying these criteria to the data presented below, it is possible to assess participants' ability to engage in the intercultural bridgework (Sorrells, 2016) that is associated with social justice.

The final analysis incorporates Sorrells's (2016) and Leydens and Lucena's (2014) characteristics of social justice as means of measuring the outcome of these efforts. In addition to emphasizing the role of empathy, Sorrells (2016) underlines the importance of marginalized individuals' participation within the dominant community. Leydens and Lucena (2014) also identify three more characteristics of social justice: 1) increasing opportunities and resources, 2) reducing imposed risks and harms, and 3) enhancing human capabilities. Data analysis and discussion will focus on the initiatives advanced by the Japanese-Kurdish Cultural Association (JKCA), three of its members' progress toward intercultural communicative competence, and the resulting perception of Kurdish migrants according to a Japanese advocate. In an effort to examine links between these findings and progress toward social justice, the criteria of social justice will be revisited following this discussion. In addition to this larger framework, two

principal questions guide the current investigation: With a focus on the Japanese-Kurdish Cultural Association (JKCA) and its members, to what degree does the development of intercultural communicative competence help to counteract ethnocentricity and contribute to social justice? What do these results suggest about translating theory into action?

Methods

Critical ethnography, with its aim of highlighting inequality and initiating social change (Martin-Jones and Martin, 2017), informs this study's approach to data collection. As part of this approach, this paper also recognizes the inextricable influence of the researcher's identity on the collection of data and interpretation of results. In terms of the data presented in this paper, the researcher's sex, Turkish language ability, and familiarity with the Kurdish-Turkish experience allowed for intimate interviews with female members of the community who had not contributed to the local Kurdish migrant narrative prior to this study. Empathy for migrants and the Kurdish cause inspired the current project; moreover, subsequent contact has deepened this empathy. This bias cannot be separated from the perspective presented in this paper.

   With the aim of conducting research in partnership with participants (Cameron et al., 1992), much of the background provided here comes from conversations with the participants themselves, and sustained contact with these individuals has allowed for further consultation as themes and results emerge. This project, thus, adopts an intercultural ethics (Phipps, 2013) that attempts to merge the product of research with the objectives of the community members who contribute to it. Both the participants and the researcher share the goal of increasing exposure to the Kurdish migrant cause with the hope that it may foster changes to Japanese migration policy.

As increased awareness also carries potential risks for this vulnerable population, participants'

anonymity has been preserved throughout the research process; all names that appear in this

paper are pseudonyms.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected during three research trips to Kawaguchi, Japan that took place in June of

2018, August of 2018, and January of 2019. Each trip lasted an average of seven days; however,

the researcher also maintained contact with some participants between these research trips. The

data presented here come out of a larger study that uses a variety of techniques to address

participants' language attitudes, linguistic insecurity, adaptation to Japanese language and

culture, development as intercultural citizens, and perspectives on JKCA initiatives. The data

collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups represent the primary focus of this

paper. Some of topics that guided the interview data presented here include:

1.) Participants' reasons for relocating to Japan and their future prospects

2.) Japanese language proficiency and comparisons to Kurdish-language proficiency

3.) Reflections on participants' status as foreigners in Japan vs. a minority population in

Turkey

4.) Descriptions, participants' roles, and outcomes of JKCA initiatives

Fourteen participants took part in individual interviews and generated a total of 626 minutes of

audio recording. Twenty-eight additional participants contributed data as members of eight

different focus groups that provided 374 more minutes of audio recording. The primary language

of these interviews and focus groups was Turkish, while Kurdish represented an occasional

secondary language. These recordings were transcribed and analysed to identify common emergent themes. The parameters of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) informed data analysis: this focus on the details of utterances at different levels, including the discourse and lexical levels, allowed for close examination of the data according to Byram's Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997).

The interviews discussed here took place at participants' homes and in the meeting room of the Japan-Kurdistan Friendship Association. The number of audio-recorded minutes mentioned above, however, does not reflect the much longer periods of time spent engaging with community members in various capacities, including as participants in policy-oriented meetings at the association, as invited guests at dinner and tea gatherings at participants' houses, and as patrons of three local Kurdish restaurants. These interactions provided background knowledge for the analysis presented below. In this way, this study's ethnographic approach, following Johnstone (2000), drew on insights formulated during two phases: 'one relatively unplanned and exploratory', which included our informal interactions with community members, and 'the second, more systematic', which entailed more formal data collection (p. 90).

Participants

All participants trace their origins to the South-Eastern region of Antep, Turkey. Among them, some come from villages, and others, the city of Gaziantep. Their shared regional origins are no mistake: they learned about the prospects of relocating to Kawaguchi through members of their transnational social networks, many of which are also familial. With the growth of Kawaguchi's Kurdish population through the years, Kurdish participation in the local construction sector has

also increased, leading current workers to increase their recruitment efforts of new workers. As Kurds from Turkey, they share a history of pressure to assimilate to Turkish cultural and linguistic norms, both as members of a Kurdish community in a Turkish-dominant region and as part of a stigmatized minority group within a national system that, through discourse and policy, routinely demonstrates its orientation to Turkish language and culture at the exclusion of all others indigenous to the country (cf. Içduygu, Romano & Sirkeci, 1999; Coşkun, Derince & Uçarlar, 2011). Moving to Japan offers an opportunity to earn a higher salary and the potential to experience less discrimination. In light of the marginalization that results from widespread Japanese ethnocentricity on the one hand, and Kurdish community members' precarious migration status on the other, preference for life in Japan reflects the harsh conditions that many Kurds still face in Turkey. Given the ease with which Turkish law penalizes ethnically based challenges to a unified Turkish identity, a number of Kawaguchi's Kurds also find political refuge in Japan, despite Japan's policy to deny political asylum and only grant provisional release in the vast majority of cases.

This paper presents interview data from three Kurdish participants who take part in the JKCA's initiatives, and one Japanese participant who helps to direct the Japan-Kurdistan Friendship Association (JKFA), a Japanese-run association that advocates on behalf of the local Kurdish population. Of the three JKCA-affiliated participants, one serves as a leader, and the other two, as active participants. The decision to include these three participants' data demonstrates an interest in explicitly incorporating our key informant's voice and balancing it with that of two female members, who, due to their sex and migration status, possess far fewer opportunities for self-expression. The views of the representative director of JKFA, the fourth

participant, provide a Japanese perspective as one means of gauging the three participants' progress toward intercultural development.

Hevi, the Japan-Kurdistan Friendship Association, and the Japan Kurdish Cultural Association

Throughout the data collection process, Hevi has served as our primary contact within the community who facilitates our access to the participants and frames the larger socio-cultural situation. Through his involvement in two Japanese-Kurdish associations, he is well positioned to introduce us to community members. He is a founding member of the JKCA, a Kurdish-run association that focuses primarily on grassroots initiatives within the local community. At the same time, he serves as the secretary and translator of the JKFA, a Japanese-led association that focuses on policy, diplomacy, and research.

In addition to his positions at these two associations, Hevi is also a university lecturer of Kurdish language studies. He has resided in Japan for ten years and, unlike the majority of the members of his community, is a permanent legal resident of Japan through his former marriage to a Japanese citizen. Given the warrant for his arrest in Turkey as a result of his pro-Kurdish activities, this legal status also grants him protection from the Turkish authorities.

Firyal

Firyal, an approximately 40-year-old mother of three children and wife of a construction worker, has a primary school education. She and her family have resided in Japan for five years under provisional release. Despite her low level of education and her unstable migration status, she is the founding owner of Mesopotamia, a Kurdish restaurant that caters to a Japanese clientele. With her displays of Kurdish culture through food, language books, and images of the imagined

homeland, Firyal's restaurant could not exist in Turkey. However, a space exists for it in Japan, whose residents she attempts to educate about the Kurdish cause.

Jale

Like most of the women in Warabi's Kurdish community, Jale does not hold a job outside of her home. She works hard, nevertheless, as the person responsible for all of the cooking and cleaning inside the household in addition to her duties as the primary caretaker of her two children. This is especially the case due to her husband's current detainment in a migrant detention centre for an unknown duration. Like Firyal, she and her family can stay in Japan only through provisional release. She is approximately 40 years old and has a primary school education. She has resided in Japan for fourteen years.

Akio

Akio, a director of the JKFA, is the fourth participant. As a leader of the JKFA, he has established diplomatic ties with the autonomous Kurdistan region of Northern Iraq, lobbied on behalf of Kurdish migrants in Japan, and promoted research about this group. Akio's right-of-centre political ideology helps to contextualize his advocacy for Kurdish migrants, who he considers a preferred alternative to the Chinese and Korean migrant groups favoured by Japanese migration policy.

Setting

Home to approximately 1500 of the 2000 Kurdish migrants residing in the Tokyo area, Kawaguchi city serves as the setting for the current study. The city is located in Saitama

Prefecture and is connected to downtown Tokyo by a 30-minute train ride. Kurdish residents come to this area to gather in one of the local Kurdish restaurants or the Japan Kurdish Cultural Association meeting room. At approximately 5% of the population (Hoffman, December 22, 2018), the area surrounding the Warabi train station in Kawaguchi contains one of the highest concentrations of foreigners in Japan; its nickname of 'Warabistan' reflects local perceptions that much of its population comes from predominately Muslim countries.

Analysis and discussion

The discussion and analysis below begins with the Japanese Kurdish Cultural Association's (JKCA's) collaboration with local law enforcement as outlined by Hevi, a founding member of the association. The focus of the discussion then shifts to one of the outcomes of this collaboration, the placement of Turkish and Kurdish-language signs throughout the community to make explicit some culturally implicit rules of conduct. Connections between these signs and the development of knowledge and attitudes about Japanese cultural expectations (two of the tenets of intercultural communicative competence) come out of interview excerpts from two Kurdish community members: Jale and Firyal. Finally, through comments from a Japanese director of the Japan-Kurdistan Friendship Association, a direct link emerges between Kurdish migrants' intercultural communicative competence and their representation in public discourse, albeit through a decisively ethnocentric voice. The conclusion assesses the degree to which social justice has been achieved and points out the unequal distribution of this social justice according to migration status. A final section reflects on the applicability of JKCA initiatives to other migrant groups who seek social justice.

Reframing police-community member interactions and modifying cultural presuppositions

The JKCA has strengthened its legitimacy and instilled greater trust within the community by collaborating with local law enforcement in cases that involve the Kurdish community. This cooperation with authorities opens a direct line of communication between the police and the Kurdish community that can allow tensions to dissipate before they develop into conflict. In excerpt 1, Hevi discusses a police officer's request for help from the JKCA. Hevi also highlights the mutually beneficial nature of this arrangement.

Excerpt 1*:

1. We talk to police. Police was also good cooperating with these things, not like their
2. intelligence agency. They will take information to use against us. [The police] came to
3. us officially. Okay…they say, 'We have to protect you. Here is Japan. We are
4. responsible. You are Kurds. We know that. You have some bad…. someone maybe,
5. will harm you and then report you. So we have to protect you. So if something
6. happens, you let us know. We cannot handle Kurdish people when they fight when
7. something happened, communication problem. We do not know. So please help out.'

*Original in English
[.] = Pause between statements
[,] = Short pause
[…] = words omitted

Although a direct line of communication with the local police poses a potential threat to members of a largely undocumented migrant community, Hevi points out that these Japanese police officers, unlike members of the Japanese intelligence agency, do not use such contact as a means of gathering incriminating information (lines 1-2). Hevi emphasizes 'here is Japan' (line 3) to distinguish the Japanese from Turkish police, who, he believes, operate according to different values. In particular, he discusses Japanese law enforcement as a responsible (line 4)

protector (lines 3 and 5) of local residents. This protection, according to Hevi's framing of the police officer's comments, is enhanced by JKCA members' direct reporting of any incidents that involve them (lines 5-7). Indeed, Hevi can point to personal experience to support this statement. Both he and Mesut, another JKCA founding member who has legal residence in Japan, received word of their arrest warrants in Turkey from the Japanese police, who informed them of the situation and warned them to be careful. This relationship has brought them protection: officers' familiarity with the two men allows them to dismiss the Turkish request for legal proceedings as merely politically motivated.

In addition to enhancing safety from those who might try to 'harm [them] and then report [them]' (line 5), this cooperation also serves the police's interest by providing insight into disputes that involve Kurdish residents. Without this insight, such disputes otherwise present a 'communication problem' (line 7) for the local police. In this case, it should be noted, the 'communication problem' does not refer to difficulties associated with different languages – much of Kawaguchi's Kurdish community speaks Japanese – but, rather, to the misinterpretations that can result from cross-cultural misunderstanding.

With this request, law enforcement demonstrates a willingness to engage with the Kurdish migrant community in contextual listening, an activity that suggests an openness to considering the other's point of view and is associated with social justice (Leydens & Lucena, 2014). This association comes out of the important role of contextual listening for participating in intercultural dialogue, which, juxtaposed against 'attitudes such as aggression, hostility, [and] prejudice' (Wierbicka, 2005, p. 67), offers potential to ease cultural conflict.

Aggression, hostility, and prejudice feature prominently in exchanges between Turkish police and Kurdish citizens. Consequently, Kawaguchi's Kurdish migrants tend to regard law

enforcement with suspicion. Previous experience from Turkey has limited officers'

communication with them to commands and reprimands, and their responses have been similarly

limited to either compliance or resistance. The collaborative approach discussed in Excerpt 1

(above), however, reframes this interaction and, in this way, expands the patterns of interaction

beyond the scripts familiar to Turkish-origin Kurds. By entering into dialogue with Kawaguchi's

police, Kurdish migrants hold the potential to 'dismantle their preceding structure of subjective

reality and re-construct it according to new norms' (Byram, 1997, p. 34) by altering their

expectations of communication with the officers. Their acquisition of these new frames to suit

the different cultural context reflects the development of attitudes that are associated with

intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997).

Functioning as the primary mediator between local law enforcement and the Kurdish

community, Hevi shifts easily between frames to highlight divergent cultural expectations and

behaviours, including Japanese police officers' duty to protect its residents (line 4), which

sharply contrasts Kurdish perceptions of the Turkish approach to law enforcement. In this way,

Hevi uses his positionality as a Kurdish-origin migrant who is deeply familiar with the

languages, cultural practices, and cultural history of both Japanese and Kurdish populations to

facilitate intercultural dialogue. Moreover, through the JKCA, he aims to position Kurdish

community members to be similarly capable of identifying and reflecting on their culturally

embedded unconscious biases. In these ways, he displays the critical cultural awareness that is

characteristic of an intercultural speaker (Byram, 1997).

Described as 'defacto arbitors' of their own subjective vision of justice (Waddington, 1991, p.

41), the power of the police resonates across national settings. In the local Kawaguchi context,

however, the value placed on Kurdish cultural knowledge that can help to alter the outcome of a

case grants agency to JKCA members and diminishes the intensity of the police-community member power asymmetry. Data from later portions of this interview with Hevi and a recent newspaper report suggest, further, that the police have created additional opportunities for agentive collaboration by enlisting Kurdish community members to patrol their neighbourhood streets together (Arnsperger, October 2, 2018). Community engagement efforts like these serve as examples of intercultural activism that help to reconfigure some of the existing power structures that contribute to migrants' marginalized status.

Fostering intercultural sensitivity through a trans-cultural communication initiative

An additional outcome of coordination with police includes the placement of Turkish and Kurdish-language signs throughout nearby parks, apartment complexes, and small Kurdish-run businesses. This sign-placement initiative began, according to Hevi, as a result of complaints about Kurds' disruptive behaviour, including, most prominently, their tendency to gather and make more noise than is customary in their neighbourhoods. As Hevi explains, 'we see that the image [of Kurdish migrants] is going, so we have to [take measures].' Hevi's use of this conflict as an opportunity to alleviate an intercultural communication problem aligns with Baraldi's (2009, p. 15) vision of conflicts as 'starting points for the renewal of cultural presuppositions…and new possibilities for action.'

The majority of the signs are situated independently of any Japanese signs and display culturally implicit rules about expected behaviour, including the following examples:

Found in the park: **Top oynamayın burada. (Do not play ball here.)**

Saat 20:00den sonra parka girmeyin. (Do not enter the park after 20:00.)

Found in parks, businesses, and the lobbies of apartment complexes:

Lütfen sessiz olalim. (Let's be quiet please.)

Given the language of the signs, their audience is clearly defined; moreover, the displayed messages directly reflect the cultural infractions that this audience is likely to commit. With their goal of enhancing Kurdish migrants' understanding of local practices, these signs function as trans-cultural forms of communication (Kim, 2001 in Baraldi, 2009). By alerting the sign-readers to culturally appropriate behaviour in the given contexts, they can potentially educate readers about critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). An evaluation of the degree to which these signs achieve this aim draws on Kurdish community members' ability to understand their Japanese neighbours' perspectives, including their likely images of Kurds. Excerpts from interviews with Jale and Firyal address these topics.

Firyal shows her vision of her Japanese neighbours as both strongly orientated toward rules as well as invested in their meticulous interpretation through her statement, 'Japonların en büyük şeyi, kuraldır, o kurala harfiyen uyma' (The biggest thing for Japanese people is rules. They follow the rules to the letter). As this theme emerges throughout the interviews, it indicates wide-spread knowledge about the importance of implicit cultural rules. In excerpt 2 (below), Jale compares drivers' conduct in Japan to that of drivers outside of Japan as a means of illustrating the importance of rules.

Excerpt 2*

Jale: 1. Buranın arabalarını çok severim. Ya yolda gidiyorsun adam duruyor ama diğer
        2. yerde olsa "Siktir lan, git" der hemen sana. Hemen öyle diyorlar birbirlerine. Hiç
        3. ışık dinlemiyorlar.
        (I love the cars here. If you go into the street, the guy waits for you, but in other
        places the guy would shout at you 'fuck off buddy, get off the street.' That's exactly

how they speak to each other. They don't wait for any lights.)

Jale: 4. Ama burada ne güzel. Işıkta duruyorlar, rahat.
(But here, how nice. They wait at the light calmly)

Anne: 5. Ama benim için biraz zor. O kadar kuralcı değilim.
(But for me, it's a little bit difficult. I'm not really such a good rule follower)

Jale: 6. Sen kuralcı değilsen Türkiye'de yaşarsın güzel. Çünkü kural hiç bilmiyorlar.
(If you're not a rule follower, then it's good for you to live in Turkey
because they know nothing about rules.)

*Original in Turkish

Jale's description of Japanese drivers who stop at lights and wait calmly for pedestrians to cross the street (line 4), sharply contrasts her parallel description of drivers in other places who do not (lines 1-2). This disrespect for the law also manifests itself in a disrespect for the pedestrians who attempt to cross the street and, according to her account, are met with obscenities (line 2). She juxtaposes the words 'love' (line 1), 'nice', and 'calmly' (line 4) against the crude language of drivers outside of Japan to articulate her positive stance toward the Japanese approach to driving.

In her response to an explicit reference to the constraints of adhering to such a rule-oriented approach (line 5), Jale shows no empathy. Instead, for someone who cannot follow rules (line 6), she recommends residence in Turkey, where 'they do not know about the rules' (line 6). Her use of the third person to describe residents of Turkey here is noteworthy: it indicates that she does not identify herself as a member of this group. Moreover, the lack of flexibility allocated to foreigners who do not comply with the rules shows no empathy for other migrants who, like her, come from societies that place far less importance on following rules. Such a stance suggests an extreme shift from an ethnocentric positionality that would naturally favour individuals in similar circumstances. The distinction between positive vs.

negative actors in this statement is clear; however, unlike ethnocentric orientations that categorize the out-group member as the 'negative them' (Baraldi, 2009), Jale uses this discourse to refer to fellow Turkish citizens.

These findings provide evidence that, in line with the purpose of the Turkish-language signs, Jale recognizes the importance of rule-oriented behaviour in Japanese culture. Moreover, her alignment with a Japanese cultural practice, in tandem with her distancing from common practice in her own culture, suggests an ability to 'decentre' her orientation from that which is grounded in her own cultural background. In this way, she provides evidence of the acquisition of attitudes that allow her to value others. Moreover, her ability to contrast driving behaviours across cultural contexts further demonstrates her societal knowledge, which Byram's (1997) model also classifies as characteristic of this category of development. These observations, thus, indicate forward progress toward intercultural communicative competence that can be harnessed to create more harmonious relations with Japanese community members, a primary goal of JKCA's Turkish-language sign initiative.

In addition to addressing Kurdish impressions of Japanese culture, the interviews also elicited participants' ability to use this knowledge as a lens through which to contemplate Japanese perspectives. Excerpt 3 (below) features Firyal's comments on this topic.

Excerpt 3*
Firyal: 1. Onlara göre Kürtler… Gerçekten iyi düşünüyorlar. Şu anda Japonya'da ahlaki
      2. olarak…içlerinde en iyileri Kürtlerdir şuanda.
      3. Hırsızlık yok, uyuşturucu yok, fuhuş yok. Kötü şeyler yok. Kesinlikle yok. Sadece biz
      4. biraz yüksek sesle konuşuyoruz… yüksek sesle konuşmazlar. Gürültüyü sevmiyorlar.
    (According to them, Kurds are, they think positively of Kurds. At the moment, in terms of moral standing, Kurds are the best among them. There is no theft, drugs, prostitution. No

bad things. Definitely not. The only thing is that we speak with voices that are a little

loud. They do not speak loudly. They don't like noise.)

*Original in Turkish

Firyal compares the 'moral standing' (line 2) of the Kurdish community to that of other Tokyo-

area migrant groups and concludes that, currently, 'Kurds are the best among them' (line 2). Her

use of the present tense represents a break with the more contentious past that Hevi's earlier

comments about Kurdish disturbances. Moreover, this frame contributes to commentary on the

potential for Kurds to disrupt the community. Firyal elaborates by pointing to the absence of

widespread theft, drugs, and prostitution (line 3), which distinguishes Kurds from locally

prominent migrant groups whose associations with these vices disturb the community. This

statement further supports her opinion that the local Japanese population view Kurdish migrants

positively (line1). With her short summary 'no bad things' (line 3) and emphatic repetition

'definitely not' (line 3), she accentuates her view of their moral high standing and, thus,

harmonious behaviour. She shifts from the topic of morality to address conflict-inducing cultural

differences, of which only one stands out: the Kurdish tendency to speak in voices that are 'a

little loud' (line 4). She contrasts this tendency with the low speaking volume common to

Japanese speakers) and the Japanese distaste for noise in general (line 4).

A closer look at Firyal's discussion of culturally divergent tendencies with regard to noise

level provides more insight into her positionality. In terms of the content she discusses, her

immediate reference to the moral standing of the Kurdish community suggests an ability to frame

her opinion according to the common Japanese media discourse that associates foreigners with

crime (Hamai & Ellis, 2006). At the discourse level, her comments point further to her capacity

to separate her perspective from her ingroup affiliation. Despite her use of the superlative 'the

best' to contrast Kurds to other local migrant groups, Firyal maintains a neutral stance when describing Kurdish-Japanese differences. Although she is outlining a finding that has been discovered through contact and can be well illustrated through comparison, she describes Kurds' loud voices and Japanese quietness in absolute terms: comparative adjectives and adverbs (like *so* or *too*) that might suggest judgment are absent. Moreover, Firyal uses no intensifiers (like *very*) to reflect the other group's extreme position relative to that of the Kurdish migrant community. In these ways, her phrasing – apart from the use of first person to refer to her own community and third person to refer to the Japanese people with whom she has contact – shows no affiliation to either group. By employing the hedge 'little' to minimize the loudness of Kurdish voices, in fact, Firyal manages to articulate a Japanese perspective that draws attention to the other groups' difference with respect to Japanese cultural norms. Moreover, as the hedge provides an understated character, it is well suited for a third-party audience. This positionality precisely reflects our interview request for Firyal to provide a Japanese perspective to us, the third-party interviewers. Through both this ability to adopt a Japanese perspective and to identify – in a relatively neutral way – a culturally divergent practice that may potentially cause conflict, Firyal's comments provide evidence of 'knowledge of the processes of interaction at the individual and societal level' (Byram, 1997, p. 36), which allows her to envision her culture within the context of various other cultures, a key component of intercultural communicative competence.

With her reference to the loud speaking voices of Kurds relative to their Japanese neighbours, Firyal's interview comments parallel those of many other participants. Indeed, this reference represented the most frequent response among participants to our query about Kurdish-Japanese cultural differences. Such agreement shows a heightened awareness of this issue across the

sample and is in line with the ubiquity of the Turkish-language 'let's be quiet' signs throughout the community. Moreover, Firyal's framing of her answer in terms of migrant groups' potential to disturb the Japanese community suggests that it is rooted in precisely the awareness that the signs aim to enhance. This finding shows parallels between participants' comments about the importance of rules and the primary function of the signs: to increase sensitivity toward potentially conflict-inducing cultural differences.

Kurdish compliance with the rules and Japanese-led advocacy

The preceding discussion highlights efforts to raise awareness of implicit socio-cultural rules through Turkish-language signs. Data from Firyal's and Jale's interviews provide insight into their awareness of these rules as a means of understanding their development of intercultural communicative competence. The following discussion also addresses these rules; however, it shifts to a Japanese perspective on the local Kurdish migrant community vis-à-vis its members' adherence to these rules. While many in Japan – including members of the Japan-Kurdistan Friendship Association (JKFA) – view migration as an acceptable solution to Japan's labour shortage, they do not envision all migrants as equally eligible. While discussing his decision to advocate on behalf of the local Kurdish population, Akio, a director of JKFA, discusses his preference for Kurdish migrants in Excerpt 4 (below). Prior to presenting Akio's comments, it is important to note their break from the previous excerpts in terms of their lack of conformity to the tenets of intercultural communicative competence. While they help to balance the views presented above by providing a Japanese perspective, they also reveal a case of migrant advocacy that, contrary to the social justice literature, is not rooted in empathy. Thus, interpretations of Excerpt 4 should incorporate this framing.

Excerpt 4*:

Akio: 1. If you teach the Kurdish people, they follow it. Yeah. If you teach to them, if you
        2. Explain to them, if you make like that, they try to do. They follow. But Chinese, no.
        3. That's it. Korean. Not so…If you come and are just playing around and do not care and
        4. Disturbing the community and Japanese people, we don't need you.

*Original in English

Akio distinguishes Kurdish from Chinese and Korean migrants – of which Japan has much larger

populations and who his political group opposes – in terms of their capacity to adapt to the

values of their adopted culture (lines 1-3). The behaviour of migrants who do not demonstrate

such a capacity, he believes, is disruptive and offsets the value of their contributions to the

community (lines 3-4). Compliance suggests the capacity to orient to this system and, thus,

contributes to Akio's positive discrimination of Kurdish migrants. Through his uncritical vision

of Japanese societal practices as the norm to which migrants should conform, Akio's comments

suggest a perspective that is firmly grounded in his cultural socialisation. This orientation

contrasts the interculturally communicative competent individual's ability to adopt new norms

from which to reflect on their behaviours (Byram, 1997). Moreover, analysis of the discourse

level shows clear alignment with an ethnocentric stance (Baraldi, 2009) through a very clearly

positive 'us' (those who embrace Japanese values) vs. a negative 'them' (Korean and Chinese

migrants).

    With a positionality that is rooted in Japanese nationalism and reflects the nativist ideology of

assimilate or leave common to anti-immigrant movements (Knoll, 2013), Akio's advocacy for

the Kurdish migrant cause is somewhat ironic. Nevertheless, such a view merits attention

because it ultimately benefits the local Kurdish migrant cause. In this way, it is possible to

identify a link between Kurds' awareness of the rules (which is aided by the Turkish-language

signs), their sensitivity to and compliance with these rules (as indicated by Firyal's and Jale's accounts), and Japanese-led support for their cause. Moreover, this support, as will be outlined below, has led to the Kurdish migrants' increased representation in public Japanese discourse.

Indeed, the JKFA serves as the Japanese mouthpiece for the local Kurdish community in ways that are too numerous to discuss here. As a result of the growing awareness of the Kurdish cause among consumers of Japanese media, the number of Japanese university students and faculty interested in carrying out research about Kawaguchi's Kurdish community through the JKCA has increased. The marginalized status of the local Kurdish population has the potential to decrease with the increased exposure to the Kurdish migrant cause by 1) Japanese governmental officials who have the capacity to enact policy that enhances Turkish Kurds' access to work visas, 2) the mainstream news-consuming Japanese public, some of whom interact with Kurds in their community and most of whom can vote for politicians who support their views, and 3) university students and faculty who can further raise the Kurdish community's profile through their research activities. Although these efforts are rooted in Akio's ethnocentric positionality that shows little evidence of intercultural communicative competence, they likely help to foster the empathy of other community members. Indeed, this already appears to be the case for members of group three (above), who have invested time into understanding, investigating, and/or representing the Kurdish voice. In line with Sorrell's (2016) measure of social justice as increased participation by a marginalized group, the JKFA's advocacy work that enhances local Kurds' socio-cultural inclusion represents a step toward social justice. Despite the power differential displayed here and the double standard that requires intercultural sensitivity of the migrant but not of the autochthonous population, Akio's comments, in tandem with his

association's actions, suggest that respect for the rules of the local culture – facilitated by widespread placement of Turkish-language signs – can offer benefits to the minority community.

Conclusion

Hevi means hope in Kurdish, and Hevi intentionally chose this pseudonym to convey optimism about the prospects of achieving social justice in his community. Based on the findings presented above, it is now possible to return to the research questions to discuss the extent to which progress toward social justice merits this optimism. This study assessed the degree to which the development of intercultural communicative competence helped to counteract ethnocentricity and contribute to social justice with respect to Japanese-Kurdish Cultural Association (JKCA) initiatives.

The positive results of actions that, in line with Byram (1997), help to foster intercultural communicative competence provide reasons for hope. As a result of a willingness to adopt new modes of interaction, the relationship between Kurdish migrants and law enforcement is marked more by collaboration than by conflict and promote greater participation among the Kurdish migrant population, a key parameter for social justice (Sorrells, 2016). Moreover, the development of the attitudes and skills associated with intercultural communicative competence among members of the local Kurdish community has enhanced community members' ability to reflect critically on the cultures of both the dominant local community and their own minority group. Recognizing these merits, some members of the Japanese community have also taken up the Kurdish migrant cause by engaging in advocacy and research efforts on their behalf. While the degree to which these advocates and researchers develop empathy for the Kurdish migrant

cause likely varies across individuals, their efforts to raise the profile of the community diminishes the effects of marginalization and, thus, suggests further progress toward social justice.

Following Leydens and Lucena (2014), opportunities have emerged from the efforts noted above for Hevi, who is a legal resident of Japan. They include his position as an instructor of Kurdish-language university courses, the demand for which has emerged from the local Japanese population's growing interest in Kurdish. They also include his funded role as the secretary and translator of the JKFA. Mesut, another founding member of the JKCA who is a legal resident of Japan through marriage, also manages his own construction company. Furthermore, both of these men enjoy the protection of the Japanese government, which refuses to recognize Turkey's arrest warrant for them. In this way, progress toward social justice for them can also be measured through a second characteristic identified by Leydens and Lucena's (2014): reducing imposed risks and harms.

This hope fades, however, with reference to the majority of the Kurdish migrant population who lack any official residency status. Opportunities such as those discussed above with reference to Hevi and Mesut simply do not exist for this section of the population. Firyal, for example, is an entrepreneur who opened a Kurdish-themed restaurant. However, as her work visa has been continually denied and her twenty-one-year old son's migration status also renders him ineligible, she has had to cede ownership to those with work visas and, thus, marginalize herself. Jale's husband is being held in a detention centre because of his immigration status; the financial and psychological repercussions of this situation are difficult to overstate. In her own words, this situation is causing her to 'start to think that everything [she] thought was right is wrong' and to withdraw from the community. In these ways, the conditions profiled here fall short of achieving

fuller participation as outlined by Sorrells (2016) and, more so, Leydens and Lucena's (2014) criteria of increasing opportunities and resources as well as reducing imposed risks and harms. For now, the on-going detention of Jale's husband and the continued exclusion of Jale and her son from the Japanese market represent the two most salient pressures on their daily lives. Moreover, in spite of the progress made toward social justice outlined here, migration policies have become more restrictive in recent years for Kurds as a result of Japan's growing trade partnership with Turkey and its heightened interest in maintaining good diplomatic relations with Turkish representatives, the majority of whom undermine the legitimacy of Kurdish migrants' asylum claims. Top-down policies here appear to override much of the bottom-up progress that has been made in the community. Thus, there may be hope, but it is of little relevance to those for whom migration status supersedes all other aspects of life.

In terms of translating theory into action, therefore, it is possible to trace the application of theory to tangible progress for the whole community with respect to increased empathy among the Japanese public, including the students who enrol in Kurdish classes and the faculty members who carry out research in the Kurdish community. This progress extends to include increased opportunities and reduced risks for the few who are already officially incorporated into the Japanese system. For those who are caught in a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005), however, the benefits are offset by larger legal obstacles for which the theory does not make allowances. In line with McKenna and Main (2013), this finding serves as a reminder to avoid relying too heavily on key informants like Hevi, who, by virtue of their easier accessibility to researchers and fine-tuned intercultural knowledge, are well positioned to serve as spokespeople for the community but are often not representative of the majority of its members.

The success of the migrant-police collaboration and sign-making initiatives carried out by Kawaguchi's Kurdish residents suggest their potential implementation in other minority migrant communities that seek to diminish their marginalized status. The findings presented here provide an example in which openness to reconceptualising culturally determined interaction norms and sensitivity to the implicit rules of a foreign culture can, at the very least, help to raise the profile of a migrant community. Given Turkish-origin Kurds' scepticism toward their own national identity as a result of their historically marginalized position in Turkey, they are well positioned to distance themselves from the Turkish national ideologies that featured prominently in their early education. This distance enhances their ability to shed ethnocentric perspectives when they migrate to new cultures. For these reasons, the approach presented here is especially applicable to migrants who, similar to Turkish-origin Kurds, are minorities in their own countries of origin. It is possible that initiatives such as the ones outlined in the preceding discussion will eventually lead to deep, tangible improvements for the undocumented; an evaluation of the extent to which such improvements actually take place in the coming years represents an appropriate goal for future action-oriented research.

Notes on contributor

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