



Albayrak, F. & Serin, N. (2022). Uzbek learners' opinions on the effect of dialect and cultural similarity on the process of foreign language learning. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 9(2). 792-810.

Received : 22.12.2021  
Revised version received : 25.02.2022  
Accepted : 25.02.2022

## UZBEK LEARNERS' OPINIONS ON THE EFFECT OF DIALECT AND CULTURAL SIMILARITY ON THE PROCESS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING


*(Research article)*

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the effect of Uzbeks' views towards Turkish language and Turkish culture on language learning processes. In the study, which was designed according to the qualitative research model, a semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. Interviews were held with 33 B1-level Uzbek learners who study Turkish language in language teaching centers affiliated to higher education institutions in Turkey. After the data obtained through semi-structured interviews were transcribed, the researchers carried out coding, categorization and classification according to themes on the raw data. According to the results of the study, it was revealed that Uzbek learners generally had a positive perception of Turkish language learning processes, life in Turkey and Turkish culture, and this situation was directly related to the perception that Turkey provided historical closeness, religion, language, cultural similarity and quality education and life opportunities in today's conditions for Uzbeks. In addition, it was seen that learners developed a positive attitude towards learning because they thought that they were advantageous as speakers of the same language dialects in the language learning process, and they also supported their positive view of language with the facilitating effect of vocabulary and grammatical similarity.

*Keywords:* Foreign language learning, dialect effect in language learning, cultural similarity, Uzbek learners, Turkish dialects.

## 1. Introduction

The necessity of a common communication language between large communities or nations from past to present has enabled the emergence and development of the subject of "foreign language learning and teaching" as a scientific field of study. There are basic factors affecting the learning process in foreign language learning such as learner characteristics, learning process, social content, learning effects and learning conditions (Conteh-Morgan, 2002; Taş, 2021). One of the important points in terms of learning conditions is that the language learned is in environments where native speakers are in the majority or in a region / country, in other words, it is necessary to consider the effect of learning the language in the natural environment. Therefore, individuals who want to learn a foreign language are more likely to receive language education in the country where that language is spoken. As mentioned in a number of studies investigating the relationship between language learning and study abroad experience, the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence is important for the acquisition of fluency, the use of communication strategies, and the development of spoken and written language (Freed, 1995) and this situation directly indicates the point of learning a second language in the natural environment / country of the language. In the communicative competence models developed

with the basis of language learning directly on the purpose of communication, the ability to use the language effectively in communication is considered as important as knowing the grammar rules. Pragmatic competence, i.e. the ability to understand and use linguistic forms appropriately according to context, is therefore considered a vital component of language ability. Because it is believed to provide greater opportunities to communicate with native speakers compared to a local classroom setting (Xiao, 2015). This is supportive in the sense that language is also a means of cultural transmission. As a matter of fact, especially in social constructivism, culture and context are emphasized in understanding the events and phenomena in the society. People construct knowledge based on the culture they live in (Kim, 2001). On the other hand, it is mentioned that the proximity / distance factor between the target language and the native language of the language learner is also important in the process. As emphasized in the CEFR (2020), which presents the most general principles for teaching a language as a foreign language, it should be taken into account whether the target audience with different mother tongues has mother tongues from different or same language groups. When it comes to foreign language learning / teaching, regardless of the level of similarity or difference, some difficulties arise due to the confrontation of two different structures (one's own language / native language - the language that he / she is learning / target language) and it is an accepted fact that this situation causes language learners to make many mistakes (Mert, Gündoğdu & Albayrak, 2013). While these mistakes are sometimes caused by not knowing the target language, they can sometimes be caused by the mother tongue, especially if the languages are from the same language family or are similar. In addition, it was revealed by the researchers that the second and third foreign languages learned had an effect on this situation (Şimşek, 2019).

In teaching Turkish to foreigners and promoting Turkish culture as a unifying element, the language origins of learners are an important point to be considered in the teaching process. One of the most important factors affecting the learning process is the degree of similarity or distance of the culture brought by the learners to the Turkish culture and the language they use to the Turkish language. In recent years, parallel to the level of economic and cultural relations of the Republic of Turkey, the demand for Turkish has been increasing, especially in Asian countries. Therefore, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Azeris and Tatars who speak the dialects of the Turkish language constitute a significant part of those who have recently requested to learn Turkish (Mert, Gündoğdu & Albayrak, 2013). According to statistics, the countries from which international students continuing their higher education in Turkey come from are Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Afghanistan, respectively (CHE, 2017). If we include learners speaking other Turkish dialects from the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, the figure will grow considerably. On the basis of having a common language, history and culture, the demand of learners from these groups to learn Turkish is important in the international arena, both politically and economically, as well as culturally.

According to the classification made by linguists, after the Oghuz group Turkish dialects (Azerbaijan, Gagauz, Turkmen), which developed as a dialect by separating from the historical Turkish language family and continues its existence today, Uzbek, which we can call the closest Turkish language dialect to Turkish is located in the southeast group of Turkish written languages together with Uighur (Öztürk, 2011; Yıldırım, 2012). Therefore, the Uzbeks, who have linguistic kinship, historical and cultural unity, live in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan apart from Uzbekistan, also live as diasporas in Russia, Turkey, China, Pakistan and Arab countries, where they settled for various economic and commercial reasons.

The geography of Uzbekistan, which was known as the center of trade and crafts for thousands of years from early dates, includes ancient civilizations and cities, was the

administrative center of many states, and includes very important lands in terms of the history of the Silk Road reaching from China to Europe, it was also a unifying center for peoples from the same language family throughout history. Although they are dispersed in many different geographies today, they maintain their bilateral relations in today's conditions. Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty on 20 June 1990 and its independence on 1 September 1990. Since Turkey is the first country to recognize the independence of Uzbekistan, it has to deal with Uzbekistan culturally and socially (Merdanoğlu & Muhammediev, 1997: 95). 74% Uzbek, 14% Russian, 4% Tajik, 8% other languages are spoken in Uzbekistan (Açık & Canatan, 2007). Uzbekistan has an important share among the countries that send students to Turkey for higher education. Researching the reasons why Uzbeks learn Turkish, knowing their opinions on Turkish and Turkey, and revealing the issues they have difficulty in learning Turkish will provide realistic and important contributions to the field.

## **2. Review of Literature**

While teaching Turkish as a foreign language is carried out both at universities in Turkey or in various private language teaching centers, it is also carried out in various institutions and organizations as a result of bilateral agreements that Turkey has made with universities, research or training centers outside of Turkey. Various studies have been conducted on the language learning processes of the majority of the young learners, who come to Turkey for various economic, commercial and social reasons, especially to learn a language in interaction with the native speakers of Turkish, and then to receive education in various fields in Turkey. These studies were carried out in the form of need analysis studies for regions / countries other than Turkey, and the language needs of the target group learning Turkish (Çalışkan & Bayraktar, 2020; Çangal, 2013) and the perspectives of people on Turkish and Turkish culture (Yaylı, 2007) were determined in the mentioned regions. Language learning processes have been presented in terms of various variables such as the language learning objectives of the target group, the language family to which their language belongs, and the life span in Turkey in terms of learners who perform language learning in Turkey.

Dilek (2016) touched on the needs and expectations of learners coming to Turkey from countries such as Iran, Tanzania, Egypt, Greece, Albania, Tunisia, Pakistan and Ghana, based on their language learning status; Melanlıoğlu (2014) dealt with the perceptions of Turkish learners from Tanzania, who learn Turkish at a basic level, in the dimension of learning areas and it was determined that the learning area that students had difficulty was listening and the one that they did not have difficulty was reading. Studies of Tok and Yiğın (2013); revealed that learners from 34 different countries such as Germany, America, Benin, Brazil, Algeria, China, Indonesia, Morocco, Ghana, India, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Egypt, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia have an integrative motivation in learning Turkish with historical, kinship and religious ties and they determined that foreign students feel the need to learn Turkish for academic, economic, touristic, kinship ties, historical, political, marriage and religious reasons.

In addition to the participants from such a wide geography and who speak different ages, genders and languages, studies have also been conducted on the target audience, which includes learners who are linguistically related to Turkish and speak the dialects of the same language. Garabayev (2000), investigated the adaptation problems and stereotypes about Turkey and Turks, of learners who came to Turkey from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan for university education, determined that those who have the most positive opinion come from Kyrgyzstan, and those who have the most negative opinion are those who come from Azerbaijan. In their study, Alyılmaz, et al. (2015) found that Kyrgyz learners have positive opinions towards Turkey, they see Turkish as an easy-to-learn language,

and the Turkish society treats them warmly and well; Karatay and Kartallıoğlu (2012) revealed that Kyrgyz learners' attitudes towards learning Turkish are generally at a high level. When the studies are examined in general, it is seen that mostly Kyrgyz and Azerbaijani learners are participants in the studies. Although studies on the Turkish learning situation of Uzbeks who speak one of the Turkic dialects are limited, in one of these studies conducted by Açıık and Canatan (2007), revealed that Uzbek students who have received higher education in their own country emphasize mostly the natural beauties in relation to Turkey and Turkish, they also consider Turkey as a modern and developed country; and see the Turks as hospitable. Şengül (2017) also determined that Uzbek learners from Afghanistan who study in Turkey have a special tendency towards Turkey and Turkish, and this is due to the historical relations between Afghanistan and Turkey, the similarity of religion, language, culture and family support.

### **2.1. Research Purpose and Questions**

In this study, in order to reveal the effect of the bilateral relations of the Uzbeks, as speakers of the dialects of the same language, with Turkey, which has a language, history and culture unity, on the language learning situation, it is aimed to determine the Turkish language learning processes of Uzbek learners studying in Turkey and their opinions on life and Turkish culture in Turkey. For this purpose, answers to the following research questions were sought:

- What are the opinions of Uzbek learners studying in Turkey about Turkish language and language learning processes?
- What are the opinions of Uzbek learners studying in Turkey on Turkish culture and life in Turkey?

### **3. Methodology**

In the research, a case study from qualitative research designs was preferred. A case study is defined as “a pattern in which one or more events, environments, programs, social groups, or other interconnected systems are examined in depth” (Yin, 1994: 185). Since there is only one analysis unit in the research, the study was designed with a holistic single case study pattern. In this study, a case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used due to an in-depth analysis of the opinions of Uzbek learners learning Turkish about language learning processes in Turkey.

#### **3.1. Study Group**

The study group of the research consists of 33 Uzbek learners who attended Turkish courses at B1 level at the Turkish Teaching Application and Research Center affiliated to various state universities in Istanbul and Ankara between September 2020 and September 2021. Easily accessible case sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the selection of the sample (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Learners are coded as L1, L2,.. Learner information participating in the research is as follows:

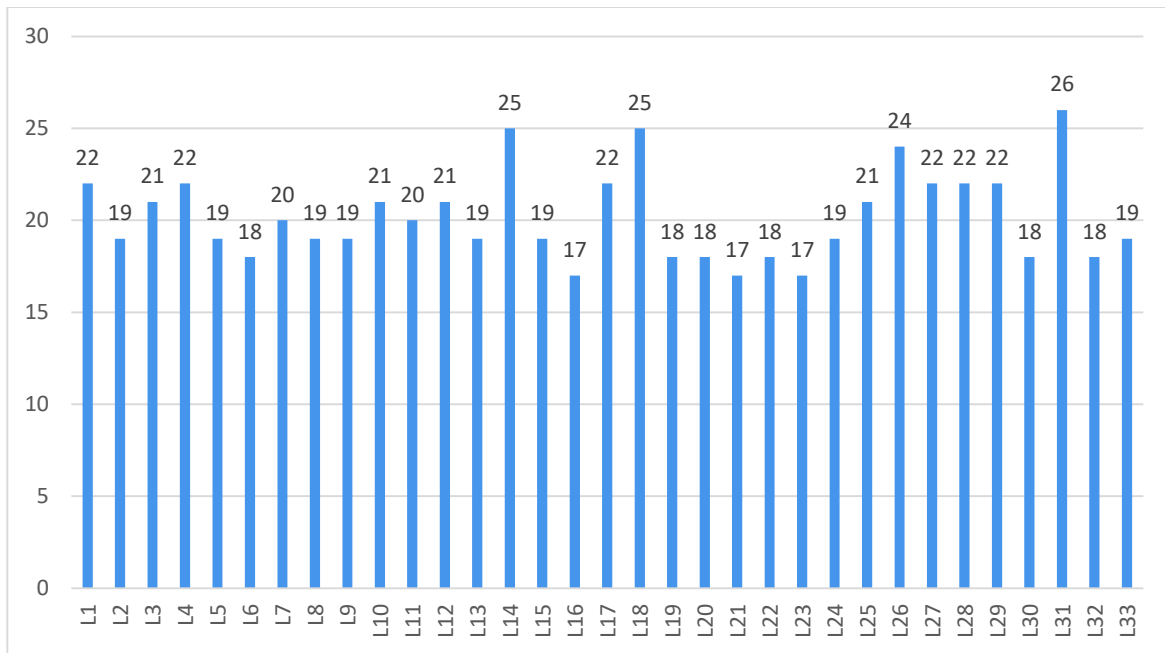


Figure 1. Age distribution of students participating in the research

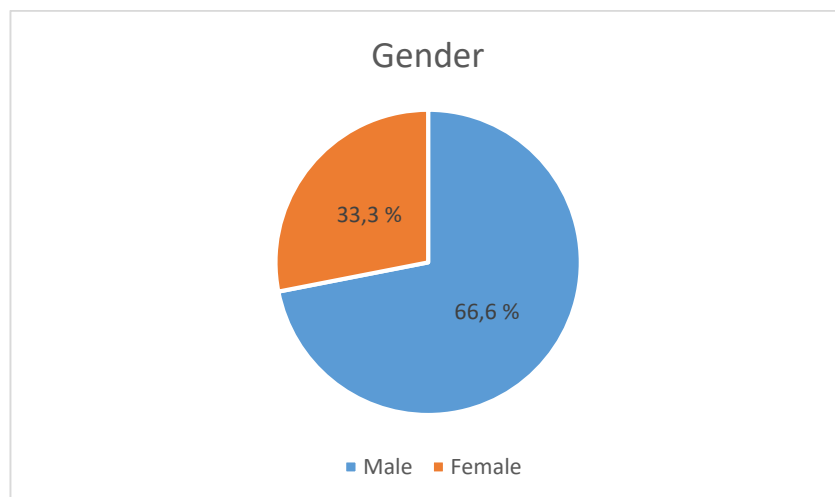


Figure 2. Gender distribution of students participating in the research

22 of the students participating in the study are male and 11 are female. Participants are between the ages of 17-26 and most of them were born and raised in Uzbekistan; some of them are the children of Uzbek families settled in Kyrgyzstan (L22, L23). In addition, 4 of the participants (L14, L15, L16, L19) born and raised in Uzbekistan are citizens of Uzbekistan whose mother tongue is Tajik. The participants were asked about other foreign languages they knew, and according to their answers, they each stated that they knew Russian and English as a second foreign language, as well as Arabic (L4, L8, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20, L21, L23), Korean (L5), Kazakh (L9, L11), Kyrgyz (L21, L22, L23), Persian (L14, L15), German (L6) and Chinese (L10).

### 3.2. Data Collection

Interview method was used in data collection. Interview is a data collection (investigation) technique through verbal communication (Karasar, 2007: 165). The data were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. The questions in the interview

form were examined by the experts in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners and the specialist in the field of assessment and evaluation in order to ensure the validity criterion, and the final form was given after the necessary corrections were made.

The reliability calculation of the research was made using the formula of Agreement / Agreement + Disagreement X 100 suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Accordingly, the reliability of the study was calculated as 94. The semi-structured interview form, which was given its final form, was conducted by the researchers for 15 minutes, sometimes face-to-face in the classroom environment and sometimes over the ZOOM Platform, by planning separate interview times with B1-level Uzbek learners. Turkish communication was established during the meetings. In this study, the content analysis method, one of the qualitative analysis methods, was used in the analysis of the data. Content analysis is a type of analysis used to examine the content of any text or document and to present it numerically or statistically. While examining the document, numerical presentations are made by creating categories (Ekiz, 2013: 77). After the data obtained through semi-structured interviews were transcribed, the researchers carried out coding, categorization and classification according to themes on the raw data. The sentences were transcribed as they were, without making any changes or corrections on the expressions of the participants. The findings are presented in tables and sample sections from the participants' opinions are given to support the codes.

#### 4. Findings and Interpretation

In this part of the research, the opinions of Uzbek learners on Turkish language and culture are included.

##### 4.1. Findings on the opinions of Uzbek learners about Turkish language and Turkish learning processes

Examples of the answers given by the Uzbek learners to the questions asked in order to reveal the Turkish learning purposes, the Turkish learning process, their approach to Turkish, the areas they have difficulty with, the reflection of the fact that Turkish and Uzbek are in the same language family on their learning processes, and the codes that make up these are presented below. The answers to the questions given by the Uzbek learners regarding the purpose of learning Turkish are as follows:

Table 1. *The purpose of learning Turkish of Uzbek learners*

Code	Learner	<i>f</i>	%
Studying in Turkey	L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L9, L10, L11, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20, L21, L22, L23, L25, L28, L29, L30, L31, L32, L33	29	87,87
Communicating	L8, L27, L30	3	9,09
Finding a job	L5, L26	2	6,06
Language similarity	L2, L31	2	6,06
Learning a new language	L6, L24	2	6,06
Family / close circle support	L12	1	3,03

When the table is examined, it is understood that the purpose of learning Turkish of Uzbek learners is to study in Turkey (n=29), to communicate with people living in Turkey (n=3), to find a job (n=2), the similarity of Uzbek and Turkish (n=2), learning a new language (n=2) the desire of the student's family (n=1). The opinions of some of the learners who stated that they learned Turkish because they wanted to study in Turkey are as follows: *"To study at university in Turkey."* (L1), *"To get into a university and to continue in Turkish."* (L15). A learner who stated that s/he learned Turkish to communicate stated her/his opinion as *"to talk to people after coming to Turkey."* (L8), one learner who said s/he learned Turkish to find a job stated her/his opinion as *"in case I need a job to find a job in the future."* (L26) The learner, who said that s/he learned Turkish because of the similarity, expressed her/his views as follows; *"I think Turkish is easier, because it is closer to me as Turkic language. I said maybe this language could be easier. Because as a foreign language, Turkish is the easiest language among the languages I know."* (L2) The opinion of one of the learners who said that s/he wanted to learn a new language is as follows: *"I love learning languages myself, besides German and Arabic. I wanted to learn Turkish (L6)"*

The answers to the questions given by the Uzbek learners regarding their Turkish learning situation before coming to Turkey are as follows:

Table 2. Turkish learning status of Uzbek learners before starting Turkish course in Turkey

	Code	Learner	f	%
Knows	By going to the course	L27, L33	2	6,06
Does not know	-	L2, L3, L6, L7, L12, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20, L22, L24, L25, L26, L28, L30, L31, L32	21	63,63
Knows a little	By watching TV series	L1, L8, L10, L21, L29	9	27,27
	By watching course videos	L4, L9, L11		
	By going to the course	L5		

When the table is examined, it is understood that the learners mostly did not know any Turkish before starting the Turkish course in Turkey (n=21). These learners commented as, *"I have never learned. I started to learn Turkish for the first time when I joined the class. When I first came to the airport, I saw how the Turks were talking. (L7), I've just started, I didn't know before that. (L22)"*. One of the 2 learners who knows Turkish expressed s/he went to a Turkish course in his/her own country by saying *"Yes, I knew. I took an online course. In Uzbekistan, in my own country. (L33)"*. 9 students said that they know a little Turkish. These learners started to learn Turkish by watching TV series, taking courses in their own country or watching course videos on the internet: *"There are YouTube lessons, I watch them. I knew Turkish a little beforehand. (L9)"*

The answers to the questions given by Uzbek learners about their use of Turkish in out-of-school environments are as follows:



Table 3. *Uzbek learners' use of Turkish in out-of-school settings*

Code	Learner	<i>f</i>	%
On the street	L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L10, L11, L12, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L19, L20, L21, L22, L23, L24, L26, L27, L28, L29, L30, L31, L32, L33	29	87,87
At work	L1, L5, L6, L30, L31	5	15,15
At home	L3, L4, L9, L26, L31, L33	6	18,18
In the dormitory	L2, L13, L14, L16, L17, L21, L22, L23, L25	9	27,27
On the internet	L4, L8, L9	3	9,09

Since most of the Uzbek learners live in Turkey, they stated that they mostly use Turkish on the street, in shopping, in the market, in the subway, on the bus, in the restaurant, in short, they use Turkish in their daily life (n=29): “Always. People outside do not know any foreign languages. English language is also very difficult. I have to speak while doing all my work outside. (L2), I use it in shopping and everywhere. (L5), Everywhere on the road, on the street, in the market, in shopping, on the bus (L15).” It was reported that a Turkish usage environment was created for the students living in the dormitories (n=9): “There are many people coming from other countries in our country, there are many Turks. We always speak Turkish in the dormitory (L13). There are Turkish friends in the dormitory, they help us (L17).” Some of the students who said that they speak Turkish at home, speak Turkish because their roommates are Turkish, some of them said that they talk to foreign learners who learn Turkish like themselves to practice at home (n=6): “My roommate is Turkish, I talk to him/her at home (L31)” While 5 learners said that they work in a job in Turkey outside of the course and they speak Turkish there, while the learners who said that they used the internet stated that they needed it to talk to their friends, use it in official business and play games.

The opinions of Uzbek learners regarding the Turkish learning processes are as follows:

Table 4. *Turkish learning process of Uzbek learners*

	Code	Learner	<i>f</i>	%
Easy	Looks like Uzbek			
	There are common words	L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L7, L8, L9, L10, L11, L12, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20, L21, L22, L23, L24, L25, L27, L28,	29	87,87
	Grammar is similar	L31, L32, L33		
	Not a difficult language			
Difficult	Words are difficult	L6, L30	2	6,06
Medium	Grammar is difficult	L26, L29	2	6,06

When the table is examined, it is seen that 29 of the Uzbek learners describe the Turkish learning process as easy. The fact that there are many words in common with Uzbek and the grammar is similar are among the reasons why learners perceive Turkish as easy: “Easier than English. Because it is similar to Uzbek. (L1), Easy. I learned English for 5 years, but I did not

learn that much. The words are very similar to Uzbek, so I think and understand Turkish well. Grammar is similar (L3), Turkish is very similar to the Uzbek language, so it is easy. It's much easier than Russian. Uzbek and Turkish words are eighty percent the same. (L7)” 2 learners who said it was difficult said that they had difficulties at first, but it got easier as they learned gradually.

The opinions of Uzbek learners on the skill/learning area they have the most difficulty in learning Turkish are as follows:

Table 5. *The skill/learning area that Uzbek learners have the most difficulty in learning Turkish*

Code	Learner	f	%
Listening	L8, L20, L26	3	9,09
Reading	L13, L19	2	6,06
Speaking	L7, L11, L15, L26, L30	5	15,15
Writing	L2, L3, L4, L5, L9, L10, L12, L14, L18, L22, L25, L28, L32	13	39,39
Grammar	L1, L6, L20, L24, L25, L27, L29	7	21,21

The skills / learning areas that Uzbek learners have the most difficulty while learning Turkish are expressed as writing (n=13), grammar (n=7), speaking (n=5), listening (n=3), reading (n=2) and 4 students said that they had no difficulties in any of them. The learners who said they had difficulty in writing said that they had difficulties because different alphabets were used, and they mixed up the letters: “*There are some errors in the voices as I write (L4), I think writing is difficult. The letters are different, there are errors in 's and i's. (L12)*” The opinions of the learners who said that they had difficulties while learning grammar are as follows: “*Grammar was difficult. I still don't understand. (L6)*” The learners who said that they had difficulty in speaking said that they could not speak quickly and fluently, and that they had difficulty in finding words: “*I have a little difficulty in speaking, it is difficult to find words. (L11)*” The opinions of the learners who say they have difficulty in listening are as follows: “*Listening is difficult in the exam. It's hard because I don't memorize new words. (L8)*”. For reading, the learners stated that they had difficulty in understanding: “*Reading was a bit difficult for me, I have to work. I had a little trouble understanding. (L13)*”

The opinions of Uzbek learners on the advantages and disadvantages of Turkish and Uzbek being dialects of the same language for language learning are as follows:

Table 6. *Opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of Turkish and Uzbek being dialects of the same language for language learning*

Code	Learner	f	%	
Advantageous	The words are similar	L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L9, L10, L11, L12, L13, L14, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L21, L22, L23, L24, L28, L29, L30, L31, L32, L33	29	87,87
	The times are similar			
	The rules are similar			
	The syntax is similar			
	Affixes are similar			
Disadvantageous	Sounds/letters are different	L1, L17, L18, L20, L26	5	15,15
	Affixes are different			
	Some rules are different			

According to the table, 29 learners stated that it is advantageous for Turkish and Uzbek to be from the same language family, making it easier for them to learn Turkish. It can be said that the most important factors in this are the similarity of words and some grammatical rules: “*There are a lot of easy sides. Since the origin is the same, some words are the same for us and Turkish. I learn fast because it is similar. (L1), Very easy. It helps. Huge help. I understand everything, even if there are mistakes in my writing. It looks very similar. It is not similar to the English language or the Russian language. The Turkish language is very similar to the Uzbek language. (L2), We learned faster. I think the times are always the same. The words are similar. (L4).* 3 out of 5 learners who say they are disadvantaged describe this similarity as both advantageous and disadvantageous 2 of them said that it is a disadvantage, that they are confused due to similar things, that the sounds, letters, suffixes and some other grammatical rules are different: “*There are also parts where it is difficult. In our language, some things are a little confusing because Turkish is different in terms of grammar. There is only o in our language, you also have ö, u and ü, so it is a little difficult (L1), Sometimes we don't remember if it was Turkish or Uzbek. Some suffixes get mixed up, dotted letters (L17), I'm a little confused in letters that is a disadvantage. The letters we have a are e in Turkish, they are mixed in pronunciation (L20)”*

Uzbek learners were asked about the activities they do outside of the classroom to improve their Turkish skills, and the answers were coded in the table below:

Table 7. *Activities performed by Uzbek learners to improve their Turkish skills*

Code	Learner	f	%
Reading book	L1, L4, L7, L8, L11, L13, L14, L17, L20, L24, L25, L28, L29, L30, L31, L33	16	48,48
Watching TV series/movies	L1, L3, L4, L5, L6, L8, L10, L11, L12, L13, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L20, L21, L22, L24, L27, L28, L29, L31	23	69,69
Watching cartoon	L23	1	3,03
Watching news	L27	1	3,03
Watching videos	L7, L10	2	6,06
Listening music	L1, L24	2	6,06
Playing computer games	L9, L19	2	6,06
Using social media	L6	1	3,03
Practice speaking Turkish	L1, L2, L3, L4, L6, L17, L24, L26, L27, L31, L32, L33	12	36,36
Studying	L20	1	3,03

23 of the learners stated that they watched TV series/movies, 16 of them read a book, and 12 of them practiced speaking Turkish. From the answers of the learners, it is understood that especially Turkish TV series play an important role in foreign learners' interest in Turkish and in the process of improving their Turkish: “*I am watching a television series. For example, ‘Sefirin Kızı’ ended very badly. ‘Kara Sevda’, Aşk Laftan Anlamaz’.* They help me a lot to understand the words. (L6), *I watch TV series from time to time. I watch Ottoman TV series,*

*Kurtlar Vadisi, Diriliş Ertuğrul.* (L16)”. The opinions of some of the students who said they read books are as follows: “*I bought a Turkish book about Ottoman history and I am reading it* (L1), *After reading badly in classes, I bought a book, I'm reading it. Now I'm going to go get the Little Prince.* (L8)” One of the learners, who said that s/he practiced speaking Turkish to improve his/her speaking skills, said: “*I speak Turkish with everyone at work. Because nobody speaks Uzbek. I am practicing and improving my Turkish.* (L1)” Apart from these, watching cartoons (n=1), news (n=1), watching videos on the internet (n=2), listening to music (n=2), playing computer games (n=2) or chatting in Turkish on social media (n=2)=1), studying (n=1) are among other activities that Uzbek learners say they do to improve their Turkish skills.

#### 4.2. Findings on the opinions of Uzbek learners towards Turkish culture

Examples of the answers given by Uzbek learners to the questions asked in order to reveal their reasons for choosing to study in Turkey, their opinions on living in Turkey, Turkish people and Turkish culture, and the codes that make up these are presented below:

Table 8. *The reasons why Uzbek learners prefer to study in Turkey*

Code	Learner	<i>f</i>	%
Education quality	L5, L10, L13, L16, L21, L23, L25, L27, L28, L29	10	30,3
Diploma validity	L3, L27, L32	3	9,09
Language similarity	L1, L2, L3, L4, L6, L26	6	18,18
To be a community of same faith	L1, L2, L6, L12, L33	5	15,15
Cultural similarity	L1, L4, L28, L30, L31	5	15,15
Safety	L2	1	3,03
Safety against epidemics	L1, L11	2	6,06
Economic comfort	L3, L12, L14, L15, L16, L33	6	18,18
Beautiful country	L7, L17, L29	3	9,09
Family / close circle support	L1, L5, L8, L10, L16, L20, L23, L24	8	24,24
Friend recommendation	L9, L19	2	6,06

When the table is examined, the reasons why Uzbek learners prefer to study in Turkey can be listed as follows, respectively; finding quality education in Turkey (n=10), encouragement by family or close environment (n=8), finding Turkey economical (n=6), similar language (n=6), similar culture (n=5), being from a country of the same religion (n=5), they think it is a beautiful country (n=3), chance of getting an international diploma (n=3), finding Turkey safe in terms of epidemics (n=2), recommendation by friends studying in Turkey (n=2), the fact that they find Turkey safe (n=1). Some of the answers of the learners who find the education in Turkey to qualified are as follows: “*There are better universities than in my country. Teachers are better.* (L5) *My father said that education is good in Turkey, so I came too.* (L10)” The learners stated that they prefer to study in Turkey because they can use the diploma they received from Turkey all over the world (L3), (L32). Learners who find Turkey more comfortable economically stated that they prefer it because it is cheaper than their own country and other countries (L3), (L15). Language, culture and religion similarity are also among the

important reasons for learners: “My grandfather said to me that you will go to Turkey. Muslim state is better than Russia. The language is similar to us, and its customs are similar to us (L1). Because it is a sister city. Everything is close to the Uzbeks. (L4). The opinions of the learners who stated that they could not go to other countries because of the COVID-19 period and that they chose Turkey because they found it more reliable in this process are as follows: “First I wanted to go to Russia, but when I got back from the military, my family didn't let me because of corona. (L1), I was going to go to China first, but when that place was closed, I came here. Here's safe. (L11)”

Uzbek learners were asked their opinions about life in Turkey and their answers were coded in the table below:

Table 9. *The opinions of Uzbek learners about living in Turkey*

Code	Learner	f	%		
Easy	Cheap	L2, L3, L6, L9, L12, L14, L16, L17, L28	9	27,27	
	Climate	L8, L11, L21, L29	4	12,12	
	Comfortable life	L8, L10, L11, L12, L19, L21, L29	7	21,21	
	Beautiful geography	L2, L3, L4, L13, L15, L29, L30, L31, L33	9	27,27	
	Nice foods	L10, L28	2	6,06	
	Association with good people	L2, L5, L7, L10, L12	5	15,15	
	Similar culture	L1, L5, L7, L9, L16, L17, L18, L29, L33	9	27,27	
	Peace environment	L31	1	3,03	
	Difficult	Expensive	L1, L25, L28	3	9,09
		Climate	L4, L20	2	6,06
Housing		L8, L30	2	6,06	
Crowded		L5, L22, L30	3	9,09	
Traffic		L1, L22, L30	3	9,09	
City life		L14, L18	2	6,06	
Finding a job		L28	1	3,03	
Food		L1, L19	2	6,06	
Getting used to a foreign country		L21, L23	2	6,06	
Different language		L2	1	3,03	
European lifestyle		L8	1	3,03	
People's behavior		L2	1	3,03	

When the table is examined, it can be said that the majority of the learners find it easy to live in Turkey. 9 learners consider Turkey economically cheap, 9 of them think about having a similar culture to their own country, 9 learners consider beautiful in terms of geography, 7 of them think it is a comfortable country to live in, 5 learners think it has good people, 4 of them think it has suitable climate and weather, 2 learners consider the food is good, and 1 describes it as a country with an environment of peace. The general opinions of the learners who stated that they like to live in Turkey and find it easy are as follows: "It's a nice country. Istanbul is beautiful, it has the sea. (L3) People are good. They always treat us well. (L7) We will buy a house with my mother. I prefer here. Because the air here is clean. (L8)" The learners were asked, "Are you experiencing difficulties in Turkey?", 18 learners stated that they did not experience any difficulties in Turkey. When the answers of the learners who stated that they had various difficulties are examined, the main difficulties expressed by the learners are as follows; economically expensive (n=3), crowded (n=3), heavy traffic (n=3), different climate (n=2), housing problems (n=2), dislike of Turkish food (n=2), the process of getting used to a new country, a big city (n=2), a different language (n=1), finding a job, finding the European lifestyle in Turkey (n=1), the behavior of some people towards them (n=1). Some of the opinions of the learners on this subject are as follows: "I really don't like food. Life in Istanbul is a bit difficult. There is a lot of traffic, but it is not a problem for me (L1). I had a difficult time with the language. Nobody understands what I say in English. (L2) I live in a village in my country, it is difficult to get used to the city. (L14)"

The opinions of Uzbek learners on Turkish culture are as follows:

Table 10. *The things Uzbek learners know about Turkish culture*

Code	Learner	f	%
Turkish family structure	L1, L16	2	6,06
Food variety	L1, L2, L4, L8, L9, L13, L15, L22, L26, L30, L33	11	33,33
Way of dressing	L9	1	3,03
Wedding traditions	L2, L31	2	6,06
Girl request ceremony	L13, L20, L21	3	9,09
Military farewell traditions	L31	1	3,03
Holiday traditions	L6	1	3,03
Ramadan month	L6, L16	2	6,06
Entertainment style	L3	1	3,03
Music	L5, L31	2	6,06
Architecture	L6, L33	2	6,06
Turkish literature	L14	1	3,03
Turkish history	L7, L10, L11, L12, L13, L15, L17, L19, L20, L23, L25, L27, L28	13	39,39

According to the table, 2 learners stated that they did not know anything about Turkish culture but were trying to learn, while 8 learners stated that it was very similar to the Uzbek culture, so they felt close to the Turks: "I came here and looked at the culture, there is not

*much difference from our culture. (L17) Turkish culture is similar to Uzbek culture. I don't feel like a stranger here. I love Turks and their culture. (L33)*” It can be said that Uzbek learners have the most knowledge about Turkish history (n=13) and Turkish food (n=11). The opinions of some of the learners who say that Turkish history comes to their mind when they think of Turkish culture are as follows: *“I loved your history. I am very interested in Turkish history. I know Ottoman, Osman Gazi. (L10) I was very interested in Ottoman history. I watched The Magnificent Century. Very beautiful cultures. (L11)”* Some of the learners, who said that they see Turkish food as an important part of Turkish culture and that there is a wide variety of food, expressed their opinions as: *“Food is a culture, an art, I think it's incredible. I like. I can eat Kısır every day and also Manti. Tashkent girls like me. They also like Kısır. (L2) Doner comes to my mind. (L9) Let me give a good example from Turkish culture. Turkish coffee and tea. I also like this culture. I drink tea for breakfast now. (L30) Turkish delight and baklava are famous. When you think of Turkish culture, Turkish food comes to mind. (L31)”* Girl request ceremony (n=3), wedding (n=2), Turkish family structure (n=2), holiday (n=1), military farewell traditions (n=1), Ramadan (n=2), entertainment style (n=1), music (n=2), architecture (n=2), Turkish literature (n=1), clothing style (n=1) can be counted among other cultural features: *“During the girl request ceremony, I was most curious about coffee. Why do they put salt in coffee? (L20) I know about wedding ceremonies and henna nights. I know the military farewell traditions, I watched them in TV series. (L31)”* When the answers given are examined, it is understood that the Uzbek learners mostly learn the elements of Turkish culture from TV series and books, although they live in Turkey. This may be due to the fact that the research was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic, and because of this reason, the learners did not have the opportunity to participate in environments where they could observe a lot of Turkish culture.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

As one of the speakers of Turkish dialects, Uzbeks, who learn Turkish in various language teaching centers in Turkey, in order to reveal the effect of bilateral relations with Turkey, which has a language, history and culture unity, on language learning situations, in the light of the data obtained in this study, which was carried out to determine the Turkish learning processes and their opinions on life in Turkey and Turkish culture, the following conclusions were reached:

It can be said that the answers given by the Uzbek learners to the questions about Turkish and Turkish learning processes and their opinions on Turkey and the Turkish people support each other, therefore, language learning purposes and preferences are directly related to language learning abroad and the field of education / business in the next period. When the Turkish learning purposes of the Uzbek learners are examined, it is seen that they give the answers of studying in Turkey, communicating, finding a job, language similarity, learning a new language and family support. Therefore, the main reason why learners put Turkish at the center is the fact that it is a country language that will provide better conditions for them in today's world with its close relations with Turkey and Turks on historical and cultural grounds. The quality of education in Turkey ranks first among the reasons why Uzbek learners prefer to study in Turkey, and diploma validity is also one of the reasons. These results are in good agreement with the results of similar studies in the literature. Aydın (2017), Şengül (2017), Alyılmaz, et al. (2015) also stated in their studies that receiving quality education and educational opportunities in Turkey are among the reasons for foreign learners to come to Turkey. Şengül (2017) listed the reasons for Afghan Uzbeks to learn Turkish as two languages being related, belief in finding good job opportunities, living in Turkey and seeing Turkish as more valuable than their own dialect.

Language learning preferences made by Uzbek learners in line with their life-based goals are also directly related to the country's conditions and social opportunities during their language learning process. Therefore, they are affected by the living conditions of the Uzbeks in Turkey and the dialogues of the Turkish people with them in social relations. The majority of the learners see Turkey as a cheap country, with a culture similar to their own country, beautiful geographically, having good people, suitable climate and weather, having good food, and a peaceful environment and these not only influenced their goals, but also enabled them to develop a positive perspective on Turkish and Turkish culture in the learning process. It can be said that the situations they describe as negative, such as being expensive, crowded, heavy traffic, different climate, housing problems, not liking Turkish food, getting used to the big city, not being able to find a job, are not related to the process of learning Turkish, but rather related to living in a different country. Being in the natural environment of the language they want to learn and being one-on-one with native speakers in social life helped the learners to clarify their perspectives on Turkish culture and to see similar and different aspects with their own culture. When the views of Uzbek learners on Turkish culture are examined, the elements they know can be grouped under the headings of Turkish history, Turkish food, girl request ceremony, wedding, Turkish family structure, holidays, military farewell traditions, Ramadan, entertainment, music, architecture, Turkish literature, and clothing. Some of the learners stated that Turkish culture is very similar to their own culture.

When we look at the effect of Uzbek learners' education in a country where the natural speakers of the language are native speakers of the same language and the effect of being speakers of the same language on the language learning processes, it is seen that they have the chance to communicate in Turkish by spreading the communication need to different times of the day, mostly in the street, shopping, market, subway, bus, restaurant. Not limited to these, learners also stated that they do activities such as watching TV series/movies, reading books, watching various videos, listening to music, playing computer games to improve their Turkish skills. At this point, it shows that especially Turkish TV series help learners to start learning Turkish before they come to Turkey, and they are supportive in their language learning processes. It is possible to say that the dialect union of Uzbek and Turkish has developed a positive perspective on the language learning processes of the learners. The similarity of grammar with Uzbek and the fact that there are many common words are among the reasons why learners perceive Turkish as easy. According to the learners who answered in their own statements by comparing them with other languages they know, such as English and Russian this similarity is mostly advantageous, especially they express that they learn languages easily and quickly. However, they also stated that sometimes there are cases where words are confused or wrong in sound preferences due to similarity. "Writing" ranks first as the skill / learning area that Uzbek learners have the most difficulty as learning Turkish while "reading" is in the last place. It was seen that the writing problems were caused by the alphabet difference and the pronunciation order. Alyilmaz et al. (2015: 335) also revealed that "writing" is one of the main problems faced by the Kyrgyz, who speak another Turkic dialect.

When it is looked at the results of the research, it can be said that the perception of Uzbek learners towards Turkish learning processes, life in Turkey and Turkish culture is generally positive. The fact that Turkey has the necessary conditions for getting education and living, and the closeness they feel to Turkish people and Turkish culture has been an important factor in their language learning preferences being Turkish. At this point, while this group is expanded with bilateral education agreements between countries, the current positive opinion can be supported by improving the conditions for learners to receive language education abroad. This perspective, which has a positive effect on language preferences, both helped them develop positive attitudes towards learning as they provided an advantage as speakers of the dialects of



the same language, and supported their positive perspectives with its facilitating effect in the process due to the similarity of vocabulary and grammar. In addition to these, the problem of negative transfer between dialects arising from similarity or sometimes the inability to distinguish languages can be minimized with supportive teaching activities to be carried out over time. For this, existing problems can be reduced with a special program and course teaching material to be developed for the target group coming from the Turkic languages group.

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