AN INVESTIGATION INTO TURKISH EFL LEARNERS' STEREOTYPED THOUGHTS AND EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate tertiary EFL learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages, the extent of their exposure to English, and the potential relationships between these variables, also in relation to their proficiency level. 124 EFL students in the preparatory school of a state university in Turkey participated in the study. Two quantitative data collection instruments were distributed to the participants: *Stereotyped Thoughts About Foreign Languages Scale* (Ünal, 2015) and *Exposure to English Scale* (Gökcan & Çobanoğlu-Aktan, 2016). Descriptive statistics and correlations were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the participants held a moderate level of stereotyped thoughts and exposure to English. Moreover, significant and positive relationships were revealed between L2 exposure and (1) proficiency level and (2) the two dimensions of stereotyped thoughts: *collectivity* at a weak level and *trying to change people* at a moderate level. However, L2 exposure correlated significantly and negatively with *taking it personally* and *exaggerated generalization* at a weak level. Concerning the relationships between proficiency level and the dimensions of stereotyping, *the "Must" rule*, *taking it personally* and *excessively self-sacrificing* showed significant and negative relationships with proficiency level weakly, while *exaggerated generalization* correlated with proficiency at a moderate level.

Keywords: L2 exposure, stereotypes, foreign languages, attitudes

1. Introduction

A variety of factors have been historically and theoretically mentioned as being significant in learning a second/foreign language. Among the most significant of these is sufficient and comprehensible language input for successful acquisition of a language (Harmer, 2007; Krashen, 1985, 1991; Krashen & Terrell, 1995). The term *input* here refers to learners' exposure to spoken and written language, in other words, it includes experiencing the target language through listening and reading (Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2013; Gass & Mackey, 2007). Considering the essential role of exposure in language learning, many researchers (e.g. Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Bahrani & Soltani, 2012; Caravolas & Bruck, 1993; Durrant & Schmitt, 2010; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Collins, 2009; Hernandez, 2008; Marsden, 2006; Okyar & Yangın Ekşi, 2017; Rodrigo, Krashen & Gribbons, 2004; Rott, 1999; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2013) conducted studies in search for the link between language input and language learning from various perspectives.

Related to L2 input, to mention but a few, Rott (1999) investigated the effects of quantity of input, i.e. the frequency of exposure on the learning of the target words. In her study,

learners were exposed to the target words in reading texts twice, four or six times, and it was noticed that the more the learners encounter the target words, the more effectively they learn. Considering this finding, it can be argued that the quantity of input, that is to say, amount of exposure plays an important role in L2 learning. Shehata (2008) investigated the correlation between EFL and ESL learners' exposure to collocations and their collocational knowledge. With this purpose in mind, she included two groups in her study: Arabic students learning English as a second language in the U.S., and Arabic students learning English as a foreign language in Egypt. In order to see the learners' perceived amount of exposure to English, a questionnaire was delivered to the participants. Additionally, students' collocational knowledge was assessed through productive and receptive tests. The results of the analysis showed a moderate positive correlation between the learners' self-reported amount of exposure and their collocational knowledge. When the analysis was conducted separately for each group, it was seen that the correlation was strong for the ESL group while it was moderate for the EFL group. Moreover, Matsumura (2003) reported a positive correlation between the amount of L2 exposure and development of pragmatic competence of language learners. Along similar lines, Trofimovich and Baker (2006) revealed the productive effect of exposure on stress timing, while Leow (1998) found that multiple exposure to morphological forms promoted students' ability to produce these forms. These results overall show the fundamental role of exposure to the target language for successful language learning.

Since there is a positive link between sufficient language exposure and successful language learning (Harmer, 2007), it seems crucial for language learners to be exposed to the target language to the greatest extent possible. However, ample exposure to target language may not be easily possible for learners who learn English as a foreign language. This is because in foreign language learning contexts—contrary to second language learning contexts—the target language is not a medium of communication outside the classroom (Brown, 2007a; Van den Branden, 2007; VanPatten & Benati, 2010). As a case in point, students in Turkey learn English as a foreign language, and therefore they do not have plenty of opportunities to hear and practice English outside the classroom while on the other hand digital technologies seem to pave the way for more language exposure in EFL contexts. Therefore, it is worth scrutiny to find out the amount of Turkish EFL learners' exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom. Language teachers might think that they provide as much English input as possible in class; however, approaching the issue from the other side of the coin, i.e. from the viewpoint of learners can be very helpful to get more detailed information. Moreover, learners' self-reported exposure to L2 can help to determine what they do for their own learning outside the class.

In addition to language exposure, other factors such as motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, attitude, in other words, personality factors can also impact on the learning of the target language (Brown, 2007a; Gass et al., 2013; Krashen, 1981). To put it another way, individual differences are involved in the language learning process in a way that affects the achievement of language learners (Carrasquillo, 1994). Along these lines, another concept that may have an important role in language learning process is *stereotyping*. In the most general sense, stereotyping refers to "some type of attitude toward the culture or language in question" (Brown, 2007b, p. 192). The term attitude is crucial since a plethora of studies mentioned the facilitative effects of positive attitudes on leading to language learning gains (e.g., Csizér & Kormos, 2014; Krashen, 1981). With this in mind, stereotyping in relation to L2 learning is worth investigating. While some studies addressed stereotyping within the framework of L2 culture (e.g. Heusinkveld, 1985; Nguyen & Kellogg, 2010; Nikitina, 2015; Itakura, 2004; Stephens, 1997), others also included different variables such as gender stereotypes (Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Lewandowski, 2014; Oliveira, 2008; Tajeddin & Janebi

Enayat, 2010) in relation to L2. As different from these studies, depending on Ünal (2015), the current study focuses on stereotyped thoughts of learners about foreign languages. Ünal (2015) highlighted the need for studies related to learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages. To that end, he designed a study considering Dökmen's (1997) classification of stereotyped thoughts that affect daily life and learning process. These stereotyped thoughts are categorized as exaggerated generalization, polarization, taking it personally, the must rule, trying to change people, excessively self-sacrificing, regret, collectivity. Each of them is elaborated by Dökmen (1996, p. 80-86) as follows:

Exaggerated generalization: Generalization refers to the thought that something (e.g. an event or a situation) is true all the time for everyone. People who make exaggerated generalizations miss the difference between the whole and the piece, and they like using the words such as "everyone, always, all the time, and never" (p. 80). For instance, the sentence *I will never succeed in English* is typical of an exaggerated generalization. These kinds of negative generalizations are discouraging and they may cause lack of self-confidence.

Polarization (all or nothing): It refers to the extreme attitudes toward the events. In polarization, there is either black or white, that is to say, there is no gray. Therefore, people with this kind of stereotyped thought perceive events as *all-or-nothing*. As a case in point, a student might conceive of proficient speakers of English as respectable in comparison to those who are not.

Taking it Personally: It refers to a person's state of feeling responsible for other people's problems even though he/she is not involved in them. This involves self-accusation. To exemplify, a student may not believe in his/her hard work to be sufficient to succeed in English.

The "Must" Rule: It refers to the thought that some of the rules can never change. The following sentences exemplify the nature of the "must" rule for L2 learners:

- "*It is a prerequisite for me to take private English courses to be successful."*

Trying to Change People: This refers to the effort to change people in a way that they think and act the way we do. The following is an example for this categorization.

- *"I direct people around me to learn a foreign language."*

Excessively self-sacrificing: The exact opposite of *trying to change people* is excessively self-sacrificing. For excessively self-sacrificing people, other people's thoughts are more important than their own. These people sacrifice their own desires, and try to behave and act the way other people want them to as the following example shows:

- *"I learn the foreign language because my family wants."*

Regret (I wish I had…): Regret means a feeling of sadness as a result of some events that happened in the past. The expressions such as *I wish I had not gone there, I wish I had not said that* are typical examples of regret which make us unhappy (p. 85). It is exemplified as follows:

- *"I wish I had studied more to learn a foreign language."*

Collectivity (To put all eggs in one basket): A person can have various roles and traits such as being beautiful, a housewife, a landlord, and so on. Collectivity refers to a person's perception of all these traits and roles collectively without differentiating among them. For instance, if an employee starts to conceive of himself as a useless person as a result of a punishment because of his/her one mistake at work, then this is called collectivity. A person

has many different roles and being unsuccessful in one area does not mean that this person is totally unsuccessful in many other areas. Collectivity for L2 learners is exemplified below:

- *"My writing ability shows my foreign language knowledge."*

Ünal (2015), based on the above-mentioned stereotyped thoughts, developed a scale related to learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages, which served as a springboard for the researchers to handle stereotyping from a different perspective. Investigating L2 learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages and their relationship with learners' proficiency level may shed light on the possible reasons behind their success and failure in L2 learning. In addition to this, learners' self-perceived exposure to English in relation to their proficiency level can help to gain deeper insights into the effects of L2 exposure on L2 learning. Considering the need for research on these issues, the present study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What are Turkish EFL learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages?
2. What is the extent of exposure to English among Turkish EFL learners?
3. Do EFL learners' stereotypes about foreign languages, their exposure to English, and English proficiency correlate?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study are tertiary-level EFL learners in the English preparatory program of a state university in Turkey. Having been sampled conveniently out of the compulsory English classes at the end of 2017-18 academic year, a total of 124 intermediate-level participants were involved in the study, which corresponds to almost one third of the whole population. 34% of the participants were females (n=42) while 66% were males (n=82). The distribution of the research participants in relation their departments is as follows: civil aviation management (49%, n=61), engineering faculty (31%, n=38), and international relations (20%, n=25).

2.2. Data collection instruments

Two scales were utilized in the data collection process of the study. The first one was oriented toward measuring the amount of exposure to English (Exposure to English Scale), and the second one allowed for revealing students' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages (Stereotyped Thoughts About Foreign Languages Scale). Both of the scales were developed in a similar context as in the current study, i.e. in the Turkish EFL context with Turkish EFL learners, and were applied in their mother tongue.

Stereotyped Thoughts About Foreign Languages Scale was developed by Ünal (2015) with 313 university students. In order to generate factors and check the suitability of the scale for factor analysis, *Bartlett's test of sphericity* and the *KMO* index (Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin) were calculated. KMO index was calculated as .810 while *Bartlett's test of sphericity* had a significant value ($p<.01$), which were eligible results for exploratory factor analysis. The emergent stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages scale consisted of 42 items under 8 factors. The scale items were based on a *five*-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the whole instrument was reported as 0.876.

Developed by Gökcan and Çobanoğlu-Aktan (2016) with 505 students, the 20-item *Exposure to English Scale* was arranged into five dimensions as a result of exploratory factor analysis, induced by a significant *Bartlett's test of sphericity* value ($p<.01$) and a KMO index of .932. The whole scale had an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.907. In the current study, the

scale measured exposure to English based on the frequency words ranging from "never" to "always".

2.3. Data analysis

The item scores in both of the scales were directly input into SPSS 23 software, i.e. no reverse coding was made. This is because in the first scale, all the items elicited stereotyped thoughts irrespective of negativeness/positiveness of the phrasings, while the second scale revealed exposure to English through frequencies. The results with regard to the students' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages and their exposure to English were evaluated within the following limit values as specified in the original scale developed by Ünal (2015), respectively: "strongly disagree" (1.00 – 1.79), "disagree" (1.80 – 2.59), "undecided" (2.60 – 3.39), "agree" (3.40 – 4.19) and "strongly agree" (4.20 – 5.00) for the first scale, and "never" (1.00 – 1.79), "rarely" (1.80 – 2.59), "sometimes" (2.60 – 3.39), "usually" (3.40 – 4.19) and "always" (4.20 – 5.00) for the second scale. In the present study, alpha reliability coefficients were calculated as 0.862 for the *Stereotyped Thoughts About Foreign Languages Scale*, and 0.810 for the *Exposure To English Scale*.

In the reporting of the data, descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage and standard deviation were utilized. In addition, before the statistical analyses, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted to check for the distribution of the data in terms of normality. As a result of the *p* value that is lower than .05 and therefore signals that the data did not show normal distribution, non-parametric tests were opted over parametric tests. In this respect, Spearman's correlation was performed in order to reveal possible correlations in place of Pearson correlation test.

3. Results

3.1. Turkish EFL learners' stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages

Table 1 shows the mean scores received by the eight dimensions of the stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages scale as well as the average score on the whole instrument. Considering the reference ranges specified, it is seen that the participants hold a moderate level of stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages ($\bar{x}$=2.86). With reference to the dimensions of the scale, *regret* and *collectivity* demonstrate the highest mean scores ($\bar{x}$=3.72, sd=4.402; $\bar{x}$=3.40, sd=4.381, respectively. Reference range is *agree* for both dimensions). On the other hand, *excessively self-sacrificing*, *taking it personally*, and *exaggerated generalization* receive the lowest mean scores ($\bar{x}$=1.96, sd=2.899; $\bar{x}$=2.35, sd=3.398; $\bar{x}$=2.35, sd=5.427, respectively. Reference range is *disagree* for all the three dimensions). The remaining three dimensions fall within *undecided* category in a descending order as *the "must" rule* ($\bar{x}$=3.14, sd=4.774), *trying to change people* ($\bar{x}$=2.98, sd=4.967) and *polarization* ($\bar{x}$=2.87, sd=5.099).

Table 1. *Results related to the stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages scale*

Dimension	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Exaggerated generalization	124	2.35	5.427
Trying to change people	124	2.98	4.967
Regret	124	3.72	4.402
Polarization	124	2.87	5.099
Collectivity	124	3.40	4.381
The "Must" rule	124	3.14	4.774
Taking it personally	124	2.35	3.398

Excessively self-sacrificing	124	1.96	2.899
Total	124	2.86	

As shown in Table 2, the four top rated items of the scale belong to *regret* dimension (at *agree* level, $\bar{x}$=4.02, sd=1.189; $\bar{x}$=4.01, sd=1.016; $\bar{x}$=4.00, sd=1.119; $\bar{x}$=3.98, sd=1.158, respectively). These items include regretfulness regarding the students' past negligences of beginning to study earlier and harder, dedicating enough time and importance to a foreign language. The fifth most rated item, which sees it as a prerequisite to practice a foreign language with an accompanier in order to succeed, belongs to *the "Must" rule* dimension (at *agree* level, $\bar{x}$=3.81, sd=1.054).

Concerning the first three least rated items, the students seem not to be holding excessively self-sacrificing dispositions. (at *disagree* level, $\bar{x}$=1.83, sd=1.010; $\bar{x}$=1.90, sd=1.078; $\bar{x}$=1.98, sd=1.024, respectively). These items reflect the students' reluctance to renounce the opportunity of learning a foreign language for the sake of their families. As for the other least rated items, they do not tend to make exaggerated generalizations such as never being able to learn a foreign language and believing to make the same error all the time (at *disagree* level, $\bar{x}$=2.06, sd=.917; $\bar{x}$=2.10, sd=1.019, respectively).

Table 2. *The most and the least rated items in the stereotyped thoughts scale*

Most rated items	$\bar{x}$	**SD**
I wish I had started learning a foreign language earlier. (regret)	4.02	1.189
I wish I had allowed more time to learn a foreign language. (regret)	4.01	1.016
I wish I had grasped the importance of learning a foreign language earlier. (regret)	4.00	1.119
I wish I had studied more to learn a foreign language. (regret)	3.98	1.158
In order to succeed in a foreign language, there certainly must be somebody around me with whom I can speak that language. (the "Must" rule)	3.81	1.054
Least rated items	$\bar{x}$	**SD**
I learn a foreign language because my family wants me to do so. (excessively self-sacrificing)	1.83	1.010
I can renounce an opportunity of foreign language education if my family does not want it. (excessively self-sacrificing)	1.90	1.078
I can give up learning a foreign language in order not to get my family into financial trouble. (excessively self-sacrificing)	1.98	1.024
I think I will always make the same error in a foreign language. (exaggerated generalization)	2.06	.917
I think I will never succeed in learning a foreign language. (exaggerated generalization)	2.10	1.019

"strongly disagree" (1.00 – 1.79), "disagree" (1.80 – 2.59), "undecided" (2.60 – 3.39), "agree" (3.40 – 4.19) and "strongly agree" (4.20 – 5.00)

3.2. The extent of exposure to English

When the extent of exposure to English is examined, as seen in Table 3, the students show a moderate level of exposure to English ($\bar{x}$=2.87 out of 5.00, in *sometimes* range). While their biggest sources of exposure are multimedia ($\bar{x}$=3.71, sd=3.320, in *usually* range) and school ($\bar{x}$=3.61, sd=3.137, in *usually* range), they get the least exposure from the text ($\bar{x}$=2.12, sd=4.595, in *rarely* range) and friends ($\bar{x}$=2.43, sd=2.276, in *rarely* range) dimensions.

Table 3. *Results related to extent of exposure to English*

Dimension	**N**	$\bar{x}$	**SD**
Text	124	2.12	4.595
Multimedia	124	3.71	3.320
School	124	3.61	3.137
Friends	124	2.43	2.276
Software	124	3.01	2.521
Total	124	2.87	

"never" (1.00 – 1.79), "rarely" (1.80 – 2.59), "sometimes" (2.60 – 3.39), "usually" (3.40 – 4.19) and "always" (4.20 – 5.00)

Moreover, a scrutiny of the featured exposure items reveals that the students get the most exposure, in a descending order, from the lessons being taught in English ($\bar{x}$=4.34, sd=.835), English songs ($\bar{x}$=4.17, sd=.960) and films ($\bar{x}$=3.99, sd=.975), teacher talk in English ($\bar{x}$=3.97, sd=.945) and English TV series ($\bar{x}$=3.90, sd=1.015). On the other hand, they are least exposed to English newspapers ($\bar{x}$=1.69, sd=.868), short messages in English ($\bar{x}$=1.81, sd=.974), and magazines ($\bar{x}$=1.82, sd=996).

3.3. Correlations between exposure, stereotyped thoughts and English proficiency level

The correlations between/among students' level of exposure to English, English proficiency as understood from their year-end scores, and the dimensions of their stereotyped thoughts were examined through Spearman correlation coefficient. As shown in Table 4, slightly though, the students' exposure to English and their proficiency level correlated positively and significantly (r =.232, p<.01), which means as the amount of exposure increases, so does the level of proficiency, and vice versa. What is more, by dividing the exposure scale items into two categories (peripheral exposure items such as teacher, school, friends etc. as opposed to personal exposure items such as watching English films, TV series, reading magazines etc.), an effort was made to understand the potential relationships between proficiency level and (1) *peripheral* and (2) *personal* exposure, separately. As a result, a significant positive relationship was revealed only between proficiency level and personal exposure (r =.223, p<.05 at a weak level).

When the potential relationships between the level of exposure and the dimensions of stereotyped thoughts are investigated, it is seen that significant positive relationships were observed between exposure and (1) *trying to change people* (r =.401, p<.000 at a moderate level), and (2) *collectivity* (r =.216, p<.05 at a weak level) whereas exposure correlated with (1) *taking it personally* (r = -.252, p<.01) and (2) *exaggerated generalization* (r = -.205, p<.05) weakly and negatively. However, no significant relationships were observed between exposure and (1) *regret*, (2) *polarization*, (3) *the "Must" rule* and (4) *excessively self-sacrificing* dimensions (p>.05 in all cases).

With reference to the relationships between proficiency level and the dimensions of stereotyped thoughts, (1) *the "Must" rule* (r = -.239, p<.01 at a weak level), (2) *taking it personally* (r = -.256, p<.01 at a weak level), (3) *excessively self-sacrificing* (r = -.209, p<.05 at a weak level) and (4) *exaggerated generalization* (r = -.468, p<.000 at a moderate level) showed significant and negative relationships with proficiency level. On the other side, there were not significant relationships between proficiency level and (1) *trying to change people*, (2) *regret*, (3) *polarization*, and (4) *collectivity* (p>.05 in all cases).

Table 4. *Correlations between exposure, stereotyped thoughts and proficiency level*

		exposure	ex. generalization	trying to change people	regret	polarization	collectivity	the "Must" rule	taking it personally	ex.self-sacrificing	proficiency level
exposure	r	1,000	-,205*	,401**	,086	,102	,216*	-,008	-,252**	-,154	,232**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	**,022**	**,000**	,340	,259	**,016**	,934	**,005**	,089	**,009**
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
ex. general.	r	-,205*	1,000	-,151	,270**	,203*	,002	,356**	,511**	,407**	-,468**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,022	.	,094	,002	,024	,979	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
trying to change p.	r	,401**	-,151	1,000	,286**	,147	,327**	,194*	-,137	-,009	,073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,094	.	,001	,104	,000	,031	,131	,921	,421
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
regret	r	,086	,270**	,286**	1,000	,288**	,129	,247**	,002	,020	-,011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,340	,002	,001	.	,001	,152	,006	,980	,828	,906
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
polarization	r	,102	,203*	,147	,288**	1,000	,311**	,168	,159	,158	,031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,259	,024	,104	,001	.	,000	,061	,078	,080	,734
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
collectivity	r	,216*	,002	,327**	,129	,311**	1,000	,085	,009	-,050	-,093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,016	,979	,000	,152	,000	.	,346	,920	,584	,303
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
the "Must" rule	r	-,008	,356**	,194*	,247**	,168	,085	1,000	,202*	,021	-,239**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,934	,000	,031	,006	,061	,346	.	,024	,820	,008
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
taking it personally	r	-,252**	,511**	-,137	,002	,159	,009	,202*	1,000	,490**	-,256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	,000	,131	,980	,078	,920	,024	.	,000	,004
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
ex.self-sacrificing	r	-,154	,407**	-,009	,020	,158	-,050	,021	,490**	1,000	-,209*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,089	,000	,921	,828	,080	,584	,820	,000	.	,020
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
proficiency level	r	,232**	-,468**	,073	-,011	,031	-,093	-,239**	-,256**	-,209*	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	**,000**	,421	,906	,734	,303	**,008**	**,004**	**,020**	.
	N	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

One of the prominent findings of this study was that the tertiary-level EFL learners' exposure to English was at a moderate level and the most reported type of exposure to English was through multimedia and school, respectively. The least reported source of exposure to English, on the other hand, was through texts. It is worth noting that the learners' proficiency levels correlated positively with their exposure to English. This finding seems to be in line with those of many other studies (e.g. Matsumura, 2003; Rott, 1999; Shehata, 2008) which reported positive relationships between the amount of exposure and L2 development. At the same time, this finding of the present study supports the claims of some theorists and methodologists (e.g. Harmer, 2007; Krashen, 1985, 1991; Krashen & Terrell, 1995) who highlight the positive link between sufficient L2 exposure and language gains. With regard to exposure, another featured result of this study was that the students' personal exposure, rather than peripheral exposure, was significantly and positively correlated with their proficiency levels. This shows that learners' personal struggle to get target language input outside the class (e.g. by reading magazines, watching English TV series, listening to English songs etc.) can have more positive effects on their L2 development in comparison to

the exposure provided in formal instructional settings (e.g. teacher talk). This may also be the result of the fact that when learners take responsibility for their own learning beyond the classroom (see Benson, 2011), they can become more successful in L2 learning. This personal effort is very crucial for EFL learners given the fact that there are no "ready-made contexts for communication beyond their classroom" (Brown, 2007a, p. 134) in EFL contexts unlike the case in ESL contexts. Therefore, in EFL contexts, learners' voluntary efforts to be exposed to L2 through a variety of ways beyond the classroom seem to have facilitative effects on their L2 proficiency development.

As is the case with the learners' general exposure to L2, analyses also revealed a moderate level of stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages. Among the eight dimensions of stereotyped thoughts, *regret (I wish I had…)* was the most frequently reported stereotype by the learners. This highlights their expressions of regret regarding not spending more time or not making more efforts for learning English. The second most rated dimension of stereotyped thoughts by the learners was *collectivity*. Learners having the stereotype of collectivity think that their success in one aspect of a language (e.g. grammar) indicates their level of knowledge in L2. However, the success of a learner in one language skill does not necessarily generalize to every aspect of L2. The least rated dimensions of stereotyped thoughts were *excessively self-sacrificing*, *taking it personally*, and *exaggerated generalization*, respectively. First of all, these results indicate that learners do not want to give up learning a foreign language for the sake of others (e.g. their families). With this in mind, it can be said that learners tend to adopt positive attitudes toward learning foreign languages. This is especially important given that learners become more successful in learning a foreign language when their attitudes toward the target language is positive (Eshghinejad, 2016; Fakeye, 2010; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). When the low scores regarding the dimensions *taking it personally and exaggerated generalization* are taken into account, it can be deduced that the students do not have very negative stereotyped thoughts about learning foreign languages. As for the results related to the relationship between learners' stereotyped thoughts and proficiency level, *exaggerated generalization, excessively self-sacrificing, taking it personally and the "Must" rule* are in negative correlation with the learners' proficiency level. This finding may imply that when learners' negative generalizations and stereotyped thoughts are eliminated, their L2 development can be promoted.

As to the correlations between L2 exposure and the dimensions of stereotyped thoughts, it was seen that the highest positive relationship was between L2 exposure and *trying to change people* at a moderate level. On this basis, it can be said that when learners feel the benefits of exposure to L2, considering this usefulness, they try to change other people, in other words, encourage others to engage more with the target language (e.g. leading others to learn and speak English, to read texts and watch TV programs in English, etc.). In addition to this, the negative correlations between exposure to L2 and *exaggerated generalization* and *taking it personally* indicates that more exposure to L2 can help to minimize making exaggerated and unfavorable generalizations and taking it personally. For instance, one's biased misconception of never being able to learn a foreign language could be disposed through his/her exposure to foreign languages, of course depending on the quality and quantity of input.

With respect to the relationships between proficiency level and the dimensions of stereotyped thoughts, there was a moderate and negative correlation between the learners' proficiency level and exaggerated generalization. To put it another way, as the learners' proficiency level increases, they tend to make less generalization (e.g. I can never learn a foreign language) about learning foreign languages. Furthermore, other three dimensions of

stereotyped thoughts, namely, *the "Must" rule, taking it personally* and *excessively self-sacrificing* were also negatively correlated with proficiency level. From this point forth, it can be reasoned that stereotyped thoughts seem to have some serious potential to negatively affect learners' achievement in L2. Therefore, as a consequence, it seems to be a worthwhile investment to help learners get rid of these stereotyped thoughts.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study was conducted to find out the EFL learners' self-reported level of exposure to English and their stereotyped thoughts about learning English as well as their relationship with learners' English proficiency. One of the important findings of the study is that the students' level of exposure to English was moderate, and there was a positive relationship between the students' level of exposure and proficiency levels in English. Therefore, considering the central role of L2 input both inside and outside the classroom, it seems necessary to create opportunities for EFL learners to receive large amount of language input. On this basis, language classes can be equipped with modern technologies that provide as much authentic exposure to L2 as possible. Besides, it would be better to inform learners about different kinds of L2 resources for using outside the class so that they can get plenty of opportunities to meet the target language. Another important thing to mention here is that the students reported to receive the least exposure from the texts and their friends, respectively. Keeping this in mind, sources of L2 input can be enriched by exposing students to extensive reading and by increasing students' interaction through English-spoken cafes and clubs so that the lack of exposure to the language in non-English speaking countries like Turkey can be compensated.

Another important finding of the study is that the students' had a moderate level of stereotyped thoughts about foreign languages. Moreover, it was highlighted that there was a negative relationship between some types of stereotyped thoughts (e.g. *the "Must" rule, taking it personally, excessively self-sacrificing, exaggerated generalization)* and the students' proficiency level. In the light of this result, it seems a real necessity to eliminate the negative effects of these stereotyped thoughts for more effective L2 learning. Therefore, future studies need to be done on how to minimize the negative effects of learners' stereotyped thoughts on learning foreign languages. Moreover, this study examined the aforementioned concepts through quantitative measurements, and for this reason, further research can add a qualitative dimension to get deeper insights into the effects of L2 exposure and stereotyped thoughts on L2 learning. Besides, this study focused only on learners' self-reported level of L2 exposure and stereotyped thoughts. Considering this, further research can also include observational methods to see how learners' self-reported L2 exposure and stereotyped thoughts are reflected to their L2 learning process. Lastly, in order to validate the conclusions obtained from this study, future studies can explore these issues by including larger sample sizes in different EFL contexts.

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