"Can You Speak German?" A Theoretical Review of the Importance of Intrinsic Motivation for Migrants in Germany to Learn German

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: *Immigration,* *Language Learning,* *Identity,* *Xenophobia*	Learning a new language is not simply memorizing grammar rules. It is a much deeper process of "being" in that speech. Identity and belonging can be strong motivators to learn and practice a new language, but they can be detrimental in certain cases. When perceiving discrimination as an immigrant, one might move away from the local language, as a reaction to feeling unwelcomed in that environment. A stronger connection to the identity as an "immigrant" may arise and, in some cases, it can even hinder language acquisition. In this article, we will explore the connections between perceiving xenophobic experiences as an immigrant and the impact it can have on the motivation to learn the local language.

1. Introduction: "New language"

"No one who survives to speak
new language, has avoided this:
the cutting-away of an old force that held her
rooted to an old ground
the pitch of utter loneliness
where she herself and all creation
seem equally dispersed, weightless, her being a cry
to which no echo comes or can ever come."

Adrienne Rich, The Dream of a Common Language.

In this article, we will investigate the connections between perceiving xenophobia as an immigrant and the possible effects it has on learning the local language. For that, first of all, we need to understand what is "language". As many know well, learning a language is not simply memorizing a set of translated words and rules. One needs to re-educate their own thinking into following paths once unknown and start grasping the absurdity of new sounds and expressions. "This is sausage to me," for instance, might sound strange in most contexts for an English speaker (as most literal translations do), and the original, *Das ist mir Wurst*, would be just a hoard of unfamiliar phonemes. Now, as most German speakers might tell you

(regardless of knowing the origins of this expression), if "something is sausage" to you, that means you are indifferent to it. Not to mention all the untranslatable words. It is told that the untranslatable Portuguese word *saudades* comes from the great navigation times when sailors would not return home for years at a time. Consumed by this pain, a new feeling was named, and therefore born. And as *saudades* has an origin story, many other words across different languages do too, attaching their meaning to the history of that culture, celebrating its roots throught the act of speaking it. But between sausages and *saudades*, and the past they carry, how can migrants find their way around in this *unbekannte* [Unknown, translation from German] world? If even the feelings are felt differently (hence the extra - or lack of - words), becoming part of a foreign country is much more complex than achieving a good score on TOEFL (Official English proficiency exam.), or on DSH (Official German proficiency exam).

Changing countries and speaking the local language (which is not your mother tongue) also means losing cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973), as the way we speak tells the story of who we are and where we come from. In a hierarchical world, accents and ways of speaking place us higher or lower in the social ranking. Coming from abroad marks us in our speech, changing our positionality in society. Besides this loss of status, going from expressing yourself comfortably and eloquently to making the "basic" mistakes is frustrating and it can even be depersonalizing (besides being lonely). This loneliness is the same as mentioned by Adrienne Rich in her poem. The lack of weight in the words, the dispersion of meaning can also be understood as the distance one can feel from the new language. The sense of isolation is provenient from the lack of grasp. All those new concepts at first might just float instead of attaching to you, as your story is not present in those words.

Without the words to connect to your surroundings, how can you dream of belonging? And even more than that, there is the bureaucracy, the confusion with the never-ending letters and new accents: Ausländerbehörde [From German, Immigration office], *Aufenhaltenstittel* [From German, residence permit]*, Flüchtlingsstatus* [From German, refugee status],... The forms, the paperwork, the *Sie sind in Deutschland, Sie sollten Deutsch sprechen!* [From German: you are in germany, you should speak german.] and the not-always-nice workers in those departments. The foreignness of it all, often compounded by the absence of links to others in the new country. One might think, "The solution for it is quite easy, though - simply learn the local language." But how do we make sense of this other world and learn its language?

2. Motivation to Learn a Language: "But I Don't Study Anymore, – I Have Given it up.". (Twain)

I would not rob you of your food or your clothes or your umbrella,
but if I caught your German out, I would take it.
But I don't study anymore, – I have given it up.
MARK TWAIN, Letter to Bayard Taylor

Twain himself seems to have given up on the idea of learning German, and would rather rob these skills. He even came to the point of saying that he "never knew before what eternity was made for. It is to give some of us a chance to learn German." While some would certainly agree with him, in 2019 Germany was home to around 13.7 million immigrants (*Bildung, Bundeszentrale für politische*), many of whom now speak the language (and took less than the whole eternity to learn it). I am sure among them, many would disagree it takes this long (even though it might have felt like an eternity for some).

If we follow Gardner's(1983, 2001, 2010) theory, we could come to understand that what Twain lacked was the motivation to learn it. But no, that does not mean "willpower." Gardner (1983) has divided motivation to learn a language into two main groups: instrumental and integrative.

Instrumental motivation would be when someone is learning a language to access better job opportunities or to be able to deal with German bureaucracy and administration, for instance. However, this type of motivation does not seem to be enough to lead students to higher proficiency levels (Gardner 1983, 2001, 2010).

Integrative motivation comes from the desire to belong to a certain group. Wanting to be part of German culture, to better communicate with German-speaking friends, and to partake in the community are some examples of drivers of this motivation. This is rather important, as it seems to be what one needs to excel at a new language (Gardner, 1983, 2001 and 2010).

Instrumental and integrative motivation can often be found together, such as when one wants to learn the language because of better job opportunities as well as identification with the host group (e.g: Kong, Y., 2009, Lai, H.T., 2013, Oroujlou, Nasser & Vahedi, Majid, 2011.). This is rather common in people learning another language during an exchange program or even in people who travel to a certain country specifically to improve their language skills, as such behavior shows previous interest and identification with the local culture (Taylor, Meynard and Rheault 1977; Ellis 1997; Crookes et al 1991). None of that means learning a language (especially if it is very different from your own) will be an easy journey, but having the right type of motivation might help you get farther in this adventure. Some could assume, in this case, that Twain actually lacked integrative motivation, which lowered his endurance and hindered his performance.

However, what affects motivation? <u>Svanes (1987), for instance, used it to study how foreign students learned Norwegian during an exchange program, while Wahab, Nor, et al. (2015) onducted a similar study in China. They have also added to our understanding of motivation.</u> Svanes (1987) has suggested the role of cultural proximity as a bridge to integrative motivation. Moreover, seeing the application of those models in different countries indicates that intrinsic and integrative motivation are not restricted to only one geography, language, and/or culture.

Norton (1995; 2000) also brings up the concept of "investment" (which is not necessarily material investment), as a complementary concept. He understands that the practices in the community around the learner (as well as in the classroom) have an impact on how invested the learner will be or not. If the environment has a negative influence, the person might not invest much time and/or effort into practicing the language. Building investment leads to improvement in the relationship between student motivation and commitment to language learning in schools and/or the local language (Dornyei & Ushioda 2009). In accordance with that, in 2015, Wahab, Nor, et al. have conducted a study in China about the importance of motivation to learn a second language. The findings from their quantitative research indicated that using a PBL (Problem Based Learnign) method in the classroom led to improvement in students' performance. The PBL model was created as a way to try and help learners to feel engaged with the language, by using theories of motivation. It also comes to show the importance of the learner's environment when it comes to acquiring a new language.

However, theories of motivation and the importance of intrinsic motivation are not consensus in the scientific community. Au, 1988; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994, just to cite a few, have questioned the actual weight those motivations have on learning a foreign language. Some of those studies also indicate

motivation might be more complex than Gardner had initially suggested. Oxford, for instance (1996) found that instrumental orientation had more influence among foreign language learners who were "separated in space and attitude from the target culture" (p. 5), while integrative orientation was more influential among second language learners who had the opportunities to interact with the target language community (Oxford, 1996). From this we can understand that where you are geographically also impacts how you learn the language. Learning it in your home country and as an immigrant is not only different, but also has deeper implications in the needs language learners have.

The approach taken by Gardner (1983, 2001, 2010) is very individual-centered and did not take one's surroundings into account. He focuses on how each individual finds motivation and, while this remains important, a more sociological perspective seems to be missing. This does not prove them wrong, but it does suggest that there is more to this theory than it has been explored so far. The contributions of Svanes (1987) and Oxford and Shearin (1996) seem to also go in this direction, as they add layers of complexity to Graham's (1985) idea. Some other relevant layers would be group behavior, peer pressure, and shared subjectivities, which are not taken into account.

For Bakhtin (1981), language is "(...) a living, socio-ideological concrete thing" which "lies on the border between self and other" (p. 293), which underlines that: language is social. This might sound obvious, as language is the medium through which we communicate, but this societal aspect is often ignored by researchers. Another important point Bakhtin makes is that language is "populated e overpopulated e with the intentions of others" and that "I live in a world of others' words ... my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words. (p. 143)", showing that language is not only a medium for communication, but also a way through which we come to be. We become through others' speech, and they become through ours. Each word exists in a particular time and space as a statement of the speaker's worldview through which social significance strives (Lou Harvey, 2017). This means that language is always ideological, and speakers reinforce those ideologies (Tappan, 2005). For Lou Harvey (2017), this means that finding your way in a new language also means locating yourself in the particular context of that society. But if the words of others are not so kind to the group one belongs to, how would that reflect in their "becoming" in this new language? If the words used to describe the learner and where they come from are the likes of "terrorist" or "uncivilized" (just to cite a few), how motivated could they be? This is actually the main question brought up by this article: can perceiving xenophobia as an immigrant affect the motivation to learn the local langue?

3. Who "can" Speak German?

First of all, who "can'" speak the language? Should one abandon their own language (and accent) when crossing the border? If we think of current nation-states as imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) united by a certain aspect, then not all immigrants would fall into the social imaginary of what Germans are (or should stereotypically be); in that case, should they not speak the language?

In a study done in Germany by the Max-Plank-Institute in 2019, when asked what made someone "German," 39% of people mentioned speaking the language. As this was done through open questions, there was almost an infinite number of possible answers and the mastery of the language was still the one that appeared the most frequently. Hobsbawm (1996), argues that monolingual countries are actually an aberration and can only exist through state coercion. This becomes even more interesting when we take into account that "Hochdeutsch" is an artificial language which was not spoken across Germany in family

homes (unlike the dialects), but used as a way to homogenize the country's language. And yet language ended up tightly associated with the concept of nation, as well as the patterns that come with it. This association is even present outside of Germany. A study done in the U.SA. with german descendants has shown that features such as "looking german" and "having german roots" had an impact on language learners. They were not only more prone to study German, but people around them expected them to speak the language (even when they had no contact with it growing up) (Chavez, 2020).

"Blond," "tall," "blue-eyed," "on time," "direct," among others, are how many would stereotypically define a German person, and yet, in reality, very few people (even among those born and raised in the country) correspond to that (Ditlmann, 2019). But the complexity and endless possibilities of how a German person can be are often denied to racialized groups. While most can wrap their heads around a German who is not invariably on time, thinking of a black German might startle some. Unfortunately, there is no demographic data at the moment regarding ethnicity in Germany, so exact numbers cannot be expressed; however, going to a school in certain neighborhoods of Berlin (for instance) will quickly make clear that German kids exist in many different ways.

4. "(...)And When We Speak We Are Afraid Our Words Will Not Be Heard Nor Welcomed" (Lord) - Language Learning and Xenophobia

The existence of ethnic and cultural diversity within Germany, nonetheless, has not (at least not yet) changed the general public perception of who is or not a local, and xenophobia and racism are still very much present in Germany. While there is pressure for newcomers to learn the local language, that does not mean every foreigner's attempt to learn it will be seen the same way (and neither will their accents). The language and country you come from will heavily impact how you (and your accent) are read. Sometimes, speaking a foreign language can even reduce your social capital. In the USA, researchers have found that immigrants who also speak Spanish are seen as incapable of speaking English (regardless of their level) (Rosa, 2016). In Germany, Turkish and Arab migrants report suffering discrimination and being regarded as foreigners, regardless of their level of German and how long they have been living in the country (this even remains unchanged for second, third…generations) (Çelik, 2015).

The aforementioned possibility of cultural proximity being a bridge for cultural motivation (Svanes, 1987) might be considered here. German and Turkish cultures are quite different indeed, but a study conducted in South Africa in 2003 (Warner and Finchilescu, 2003) showed that the groups to suffer the most xenophobia in the country were the ones coming from the countries nearby (such as Angola and Namibia). Migrants coming from Europe and North America had, on the contrary, a position of privilege. Their "foreignness" was seen as a good thing. This shows cultural proximity will not necessarily predict a connection, at least while different nations and languages have a different hierarchical power. The colonial past (and the racial structure that comes with it) is still very much present in how we address each other. Globalization has increased migration between countries; however, multiculturalism does not really exist: What we do have, however, is cultural hierarchy (Quijano, 1997, 2007). Immigrant's cultures and traditions are seen differently and fall into different categories (while some are seen as "chic" others are seen as less than the locals).

The relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism: It is the way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonization without the colonizing (Zizek, 1997). Depending on your country of origin and where this

country is in the colonizer/colonized game, the value of one's traditions differs. Feeling proud of your origins can make you sound like a fundamentalist nationalist if you come from the Global South. By devaluing traditions and shaming those who reproduce them, a process of "self-colonization" is created in which the members of said culture themselves reproduce this system. At the same time, Western imperialism is not only allowed, but even encouraged.

The fundamental axis of this model of power is the racialized social classification of the world. This model discriminates and only accepts certain traditions and rationalities: the European ones. This system has origins in colonialism but remains alive today by constantly reinventing itself and finding new forms to control Global South bodies, cultures, traditions, and self-worth (Quijano, 1997 and 2007). Racism, racialization, colonialism, and cultural hierarchy go hand in hand, and it is hard to talk about one without talking about the other. This overlap means intersectional stereotyping will be often used as a way to understand and explain such phenomena (Zizek, 1997, Quijano, 2007).

Here we can return to Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital: How valuable is your culture? And your language? And if you face discrimination because of where you are from and because of your accent, how (and sometimes even *why*) could you speak? It is also worth mentioning that without actually speaking, you do not learn how to speak a language.

(...)
and when we speak we are afraid
    our words will not be heard
    nor welcomed
    but when we are silent
    we are still afraid
(...)
    So it is better to speak
    remembering
we were never meant to survive.
A litany for survival, Audre Lord.

Even though this poem from Audre Lord might seem unrelated to this article, it accurately depicts the mix of fear and yet the will to resist faced by many immigrants. This fear and discrimination are felt on top of the loneliness initially mentioned in the poem of Adrienne Rich. If the locals will not accept them (and going "back home" is not always an option) finding comfort in the diaspora of your country abroad, or in the immigrant community, can be a way around the isolation and loneliness. Many foreigners find their voice again by adopting the identity of "immigrant" and strengthening ties with their national identity. This identity strengthens the ties to one's ethnicity and traditions, which studies (such as the ones from Battu and Zenou, 2010 and Howarth, 2011) have shown to have a positive overall effect on mental health (Battu and Zenou, 2010). However, those individuals are also the ones who feel xenophobia the most. It could be argued both that this perception of animosity is increased by this identity, or that this identity was only developed due to repetitive xenophobic experiences.

This identity that opposes the mainstream one (in this case, the cliché standardized German one) can be called an "identity of resistance." The dominant culture and some attitudes that come with it can oppress and/or alienate certain students to the point they end up putting themselves on the margins of a mainstream activity (Ogbu, 2010). Those same students might develop an oppositional cultural identity, meaning this system has led them to identify themselves not with what they are, but with what they are not. Their identities rely on how

they differ from the norm, on the "deviant" traits and characteristics (Ogbu & Davis, 2003; Carter, 2005). Many other studies have also shown that systematic discrimination of specific groups leads to increased ethnic identification. Members of those groups tend to be able to identify faster when they are being racially profiled, creating an increased feeling of "us against them" and stronger group recognition and ethnic consciousness (Çelik, 2015).

When we see language as a place for political struggle (Hall, 1981) and cultural negotiation (Holliday et al, 2004) and a way of constantly (re)creating the self (Bakhtin, 1981), we cannot ignore the racial (and racialization) factor (Hall 1988, 1997). Experiencing systemic discrimination as an immigrant can reshape the learner's identity and self-understanding. While internalizing those concepts is certainly an option, denying and resisting them is also a possibility.

The oppositional identity of resistance also impacts integrative motivation. If one's identity is deeply connected to one's host country as a way of resistance to xenophobia, this person will hardly have the desire to belong to the host community (Howarth, 2011). All of this can negatively impact the learner's motivation and hinder their language learning journey. This is not to say that language skills encompass all issues regarding identity, but they can be used as a marker of resisting the local language, its culture and values as a reaction to suffering prejudice. In a multicultural setting, it is important to have a good understanding of those narrative negotiations and production of cultural differences, as it is through them that "otherness" is created (Horwath, 2011)

This is, however, situational and not all immigrants react the same way. It is fair to mention that this is not the only possible outcome: Some minority groups obtain above-average results or even outperform the local students. This is the case of pupils with Chinese and Indian backgrounds in the UK, for example (Ogbu, 2010). While the literature shows strong links between suffering discrimination, developing an identity of resistance, and the impact this has on integrative motivation, humans are still complex and we cannot be fatalistic. Even though there is enough literature to support the connection between experience and its impact on language learning, this does not mean that will always be the case.

5. Conclusion

In a broad way, immigrants are all of those who have moved to a new country with the intention to stay there. However, that commonality does not mean they all experience this transition the same way. Turkish and Arab kids report feeling racially profiled in Germany (Çelik, 2015), but this is not necessarily the same for all groups. Not all immigrants have the same experience.

There is extensive data showing that certain groups suffer racialization and prejudice (such as the aforementioned studies done by Çelik, 2015). If one's identity is deeply connected to one's host country as a way of resistance to xenophobia, this person will hardly have the desire to belong to the host community (Howarth, 2011). Without this desire to belong to the community, integrative motivation will hardly take place (Gardner 1983, 2001, 2010 and Graham 1985). From that, we can conclude that experiencing xenophobia has potential for hindering learning the local language. By assuming certain newcomers cannot speak the language and will not become part of the society, locals often create the conditions that create this exact effect. It ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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