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### I speak, thus I belong?

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# **Chapter 1**

## Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Worldwide many countries are faced with a large influx of immigrants. In recent years, the number of immigrants coming to Western countries increased to the unprecedented amount of 5 million people (OECD, 2016a). This immense migration asks for effective policy directed at integrating immigrants in the host society. In this context, throughout decades, many researchers have suggested that being proficient in the language of the host country is a key factor or even a prerequisite for immigrants' integration in the host society (Barker, 2015; Clement, Gardner, & Smythe, 1980; Gordon, 1964; Hagendoorn, Veenman, & Vollebergh, 2003; Schumann, 1978). To date, many politicians and policymakers embrace this claim; integration programs generally have a strong emphasis on fostering second language acquisition. However, as it turns out, in research on whether and how second language acquisition is related to integration, a number of important questions are still not answered. The current dissertation aims to contribute to filling this gap by examining how and to what extent second language learning is related to cultural integration and which factors facilitate or hinder such relation. More specifically, the following key questions were investigated: Firstly, which factors facilitate or hinder immigrants' second language proficiency? Secondly, to what extent does second language learning actually go together with an increasing cultural integration? And finally, are there other factors that have been identified in the literature on integration that are relevant in this relation between second language learning and cultural integration such as multicultural personality or interethnic friendships? By examining these questions among various groups of immigrants we aim to provide insight into the extent to which findings from both earlier research and the current dissertation can be generalized to immigrants in general.<sup>1</sup>

In the remainder of this introduction we first introduce the main concept which is central in this dissertation, namely the concept of cultural integration. Subsequently, we briefly elaborate on the specific research questions and give a schematic overview of the chapters in which these questions are addressed. Finally, a description is given of the datasets of various immigrant groups which were used to answer the addressed research questions.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'we' because much of the research that is reported in this dissertation has benefitted from close collaboration with my supervisors.

## **1.2 Cultural integration**

In the current research, we used the term cultural integration to refer to the extent to which immigrants (a) have positive attitudes towards the host society and (b) have a sense of belonging towards that society, and thus, identify themselves with the host society. Doing so, we focus on the aspects of integration that policymakers and thus policies around language courses aim to foster. This focus is in line with the general thought that even though language use is an individual phenomenon, it binds, through communication, those using it to a social and ethnic community (Clement, Noels, & Deneault, 2001). Moreover, our conceptualization closely resembles the view on integration that is taken in much sociological research on the topic (de Vroome, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2014; Hagendoorn et al., 2003).

However, as was noted already decennia ago (e.g. Searle & Ward, 1990), and is still the case today, research on the integration of immigrants in their host society lacks a consensus on definitions of key constructs and the theoretical framework which is used. For example, often research on integration does not only take into account the extent to which immigrants are oriented towards the host society, but also the extent of orientation towards their home society. In such research integration is seen as one of the four distinctive ‘strategies’ of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Other strategies are separation, marginalization and assimilation. The integration strategy combines high motivation to maintain the original cultural background with a high motivation to get to know and take part in the host culture.

In this dissertation, orientation towards the home society is left aside. This is in line with earlier research indicating that orientation towards the home- and the host society are independent, and thus do not go at the expense of each other (see Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). Therefore, orientation towards the home society is not seen as an obstacle to cultural integration in the host society. On the contrary, high orientation towards both the home and host society has been found to be associated with the most beneficial psychological outcomes (Ince et al., 2014).

## **1.3 Factors influencing immigrants’ second language proficiency**

Many researchers have suggested that second language acquisition fosters (cultural) integration (Barker, 2015; Clement et al., 1980; Hagendoorn et al., 2003; Schumann, 1978). But what factors actually influence whether and how well immigrants acquire the second language? Previous research has consistently shown that immigrants who migrated at an earlier age, who have been in the host society for a larger number of years, and who have a

higher educational level have a higher level of second language proficiency (see for an overview Chiswick & Miller, 2007). However, it can be questioned whether these findings are also applicable to a group of immigrants that is generally underrepresented in research: immigrants who hardly participate in the host society, and who have a relatively low level of second language proficiency (Groves & Couper, 1998; Stoop, 2005: 274). Moreover, it can be questioned whether, in addition to the predictors reported in previous research, there are also other (new) predictors of second language proficiency which might be of relevance. Given the aforementioned specific group of immigrants in which we are interested, also similarity in alphabet between mother tongue and second language, daily interactions with natives in the public domain, and speaking the second language at home might be relevant predictors.

Finally, it can be questioned whether findings on the determinants of second language proficiency differ according to the way in which language proficiency is measured, that is to say by objective language proficiency tests versus subjective self-assessment reports (Beenstock, Chiswick, & Repetto, 2001; Carliner, 2000; Chiswick & Miller, 1995; Chiswick & Miller, 2002; van Tubergen, 2010).

## **1.4 The link between second language proficiency and cultural integration**

Earlier research seems to support the notion that second language proficiency is a key factor in integration (Jiang, Green, Henley, & Masten, 2009; Kang, 2006), as theorists and policies on second language acquisition suggest. However, the positive cross sectional correlations between second language proficiency and attitudes towards- or identification with the host society which are found in these studies do not necessarily imply that an increase in second language proficiency goes together with an increase in cultural integration. Thus, it remains unclear whether second language learning is actually associated with an increase in cultural integration. In the, to our knowledge, only longitudinal study that actually tested this supposed relation it was found that an increase in second language proficiency is associated with a stronger identification with the host society in that same period of time (Hochman & Davidov, 2014). Elaborating on that study, the second question addressed in this dissertation is, to what extent does second language learning actually go together with an increasing cultural integration?

However, we assume that a positive link between second language learning and cultural integration may also depend on a couple of other factors. More specifically, based on

the literature on diversity, immigration, and interethnic contact, we will investigate the role of (a) immigrants multicultural personality, and (b) their interethnic friendship relations.

#### **1.4.1 The moderating role of multicultural personality traits**

Elaborating on earlier research revealing the importance of personality in integration (e.g. Leong, 2007; Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002), in the current dissertation it was tested whether the degree to which an increase in second language proficiency is associated with an increase in cultural integration differs for immigrants with different personality traits. In doing so, we focused on trainable multicultural personality traits (see van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013) which if indeed relevant, could be targeted in future second language lessons. Specifically, we focused on the trait ‘social initiative’, which is defined as actively approaching social situations and demonstrating initiative in these interactions, and the trait ‘openness’ which is defined as being non-judgmental towards members of the host society and being able to empathize with them (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001).

We expected that immigrants with a higher degree of ‘social initiative’ would be more prone to actually use the acquired language skills to engage in contact with member of the host society and, as a consequence, would experience more positive change in attitudes towards the host culture and identification with that society. Moreover, we hypothesized that a higher degree of ‘openness’ is related to a more positive change in terms of attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society. After all, an immigrant who is judgmental towards members of the host society and not able to empathize with them will likely not experience positive changes in attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society while acquiring the second language.

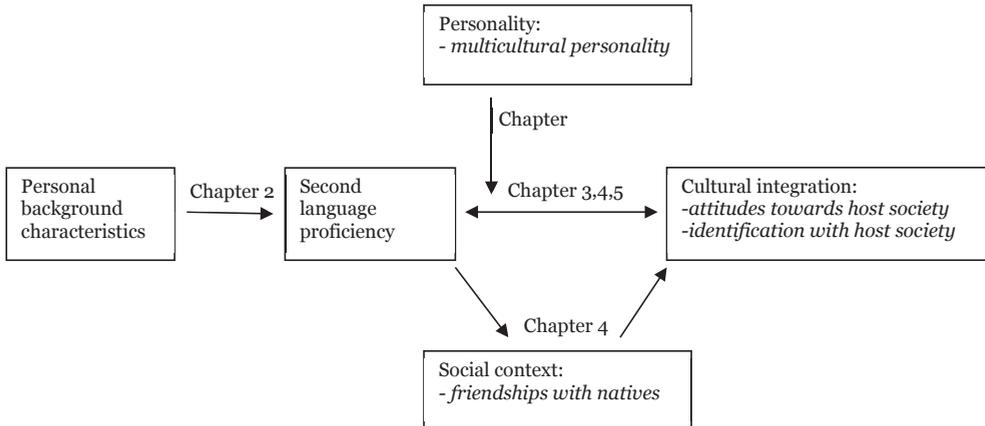
#### **1.4.2 The mediating role of interethnic friendships**

Another factor which was expected to be influential in the supposed relation between second language learning and increasing cultural integration is interethnic contact in the form of friendships. Interethnic contact is a factor in integration that has arguably received even more attention from researchers than second language proficiency. Findings of many studies support the view that contact of (descendants of) immigrants with natives is associated with more favorable attitudes of immigrants towards members of the host society (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011), and stronger identification with the host society (e.g. Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011; Sabatier, 2008). Furthermore,

these findings indicate that friendship is an especially powerful form of contact. Elaborating on earlier research on second language use and friendship formation (Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, 2012), one of our main expectations was that the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration would be mediated by interethnic friendships. Thus, becoming more proficient in the host culture’s language should lead to more friendships with natives, which would likely be associated with more positive attitudes towards- and stronger identification with the host society.

### 1.5 Overview of the dissertation

In the former section we briefly introduced the specific research questions which are addressed in this dissertation. The first research question, about the relation between immigrants’ background characteristics and second language proficiency, is studied in Chapter 2. The chapters 3, 4, and 5 all three focused on the relationship between second language proficiency and cultural integration. However, in each chapter this relation is addressed from a different angle and for a different group of immigrants. In chapter 3 we examined the moderating role of multicultural personality traits among a group of temporary immigrants. In chapter 4 we examined the mediating role of friendships with natives among preadolescent immigrant children. Chapter 5, finally, studies the relation between second language learning and cultural integration in a sample of socially isolated immigrants who took part in an intervention that provided immigrants with second language lessons given by volunteers. Figure 1.1 gives a schematic representation of the expected relations between the different concepts and the empirical chapters in which these relations were addressed.



**Figure 1.1** Schematic representation of overall dissertation including chapter numbers

## 1.6 Data

The empirical chapters in this dissertation are based on three different data sources. The data used in chapter 2 and 5 stem from a larger research project on the effectiveness of a Dutch intervention called ‘Language encounters’ (‘Taalontmoetingen’: van Niejenhuis, Naayer, & Verkade, 2012). This national intervention was carried out by 22 non-governmental organizations and financed by a Dutch foundation called ‘Oranje Fonds.’ The target group of this intervention consisted of socially isolated immigrants residing in the Netherlands, who did not speak or hardly spoke the Dutch language. The aim of the intervention was to stimulate the social participation and integration of these immigrants through informal Dutch-language lessons given by a volunteer who functioned as a mentor.

Exceptional is that this dataset contains both subjective and objective measures of second language proficiency: self-assessed Dutch proficiency and passive- as well as active lexicon test scores (Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2001). Also, given that the questionnaire which was used for chapter 5 was translated in Turkish, Arabic, Berber, Somali, English, and Polish and the fact that illiterate respondents received help in the completion of the questionnaire, relatively many respondents participated in this research. Part of them even completed the questionnaire twice (time lag 6 months) which enabled a study on the development of the second language proficiency, attitudes towards the Dutch society, identification with the Dutch culture, and ease of participation in the host society.

To our knowledge, earlier datasets did not enable a study on the role of multicultural personality traits in the (supposed) relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration. The data used for chapter 3 of this dissertation, were thus specifically collected for this purpose. Respondents were participants of Dutch language course and newly arrived international psychology students. Data was gathered at two time points (time lag three months) by means of a paper and pencil questionnaire. The measures used were self-assessed Dutch language proficiency, attitudes towards the Dutch host culture and identification with the Dutch host society. Also an abbreviated version of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire was administered at the second time point (MPQ: Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001).

Chapter 4 examined whether the second language proficiency of the children of immigrants was related to their cultural integration and the role of interethnic friendships in this. Unlike earlier research, we were able to disentangle the simultaneous influences of these two key factors in cultural integration. This topic was addressed with a longitudinal dataset that maps the change in second language proficiency and interethnic friendships in a sample of pre-adolescents. The data used originate from the primary school module of The Arnhem

School Study (TASS), a longitudinal paper and pencil study comprising three data waves among children living in the city of Arnhem in the Netherlands (Stark, Flache, & Veenstra, 2013; Stark & Flache, 2012). TASS was originally set up to get insight into the ethnic integration of preadolescents living in this town. Data from two time points were utilized, being the end of the seventh grade and eighth grade (subsequently 5th and 6th grade in the American system). Main variables were proportion of Dutch friends, attitudes towards members of the Dutch society and identification with the Dutch society. Grade on the school subject Dutch, as given by the teacher, was used as indicator of second language proficiency.

## **1.7 Outline of the book**

Table 1.1 (see next page) summarizes the general research questions and the datasets used in the empirical chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 of this dissertation. In the final chapter of this dissertation, chapter 6, the main findings of the empirical chapters are discussed, including its implications for practice, policy, and future research.

**Table 1.1** Overview of general research questions and data used per chapters

Chapter	Research question	Data
2	<p>What are predictors of whether and how well immigrants acquire the second language and are there additional predictors which are of relevance to the specific group of immigrants who are underrepresented in earlier research?</p> <p>Are findings on predictors of second language proficiency similar when objective measures of second language proficiency (passive- and active lexicon test scores) are used instead of the commonly used subjective measures (self-assessment)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants Language encounters</li> <li>• Socially isolated immigrants</li> <li>• <math>N= 624</math> &amp; <math>98</math></li> <li>• Cross sectional</li> </ul>
3	<p>Does improvement in second language proficiency go together with a higher extent of cultural integration?</p> <p>What is the role of multicultural personality traits in the postulated relation between second language learning and cultural integration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International psychology students and Dutch language course members</li> <li>• Sojourners</li> <li>• <math>N= 163</math></li> <li>• Longitudinal study: 2 time points, time lag 3 months</li> </ul>
4	<p>Does improvement in second language proficiency go together with a higher extent of cultural integration?</p> <p>What is the role of interethnic friendships in the postulated relation between second language learning and cultural integration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Arnhem School Study</li> <li>• Pre-adolescents</li> <li>• <math>N=173</math></li> <li>• Longitudinal study: 2 time points, time lag 9 months</li> </ul>
5	<p>Does improvement in second language proficiency go together with a higher extent of cultural integration in the context of an intervention that provided immigrants with second language lessons given by volunteers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants Language encounters</li> <li>• Socially isolated immigrants</li> <li>• <math>N= 85</math></li> <li>• Longitudinal study: 2 time points, time lag 6 months</li> </ul>

*Note:* The question on whether improvement of second language proficiency goes together with a higher extent of cultural integration was addressed in three different chapters, each concerned with a different group of immigrants. In doing so, we also address the following overarching question: To what extent can findings on the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration from both earlier research and the current dissertation be generalized to immigrants in general?

