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I speak, thus I belong?

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Chapter 3

Second language learning and integration. The moderating effect of multicultural personality traits.

Abstract

This study examines the role of trainable intercultural personality traits in the widely assumed link between immigrants' second language learning and their integration in the host country. The research was based on longitudinal data (time lag: 3 months) of international students who reside in the Netherlands and participants of a Dutch language course (total $N=163$). Findings reveal that an increase in second language proficiency is related to a positive change in two indicators of cultural integration: identification with the host society and attitudes towards the host culture. An increase in second language proficiency appears to be related to a positive change in terms of identification, regardless of immigrants' personality traits. With respect to attitudes towards the host culture, however, we find that increasing second language proficiency only goes together with a positive change in attitudes towards the host culture for immigrants with a high degree of social initiative. Another notable finding is that, in the time period that this study was conducted, immigrants with a high degree of openness became more positive in their attitudes towards the host culture, regardless of the progress they made in terms of second language proficiency. Results from this study suggest the importance of social perceptual personality traits in cultural integration. Therefore policy makers may be well-advised to not only pay attention to implementing language teaching programs, but to also consider a training of social perceptual personality traits when trying to set up efficient integration programs for immigrants.

This study is based upon:

Van Niejenhuis, C., Otten, S., & A. Flache (2017). Second language learning and integration. The moderating effect of multicultural personality traits. *Submitted for publication.*

3.1 Introduction

Millions of people migrate to other countries on a yearly basis (OECD, 2015). In some parts of the world the number of immigrants continues to grow. Due to the unprecedented influx of asylum seekers, in 2015 Europe faced a historically high number of immigrants. This immense migratory asks for effective policy which is 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 (Clement, Gardner, & Smythe, 1980; Edwards, 1994; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Gordon, 1964; Lambert, 1974; Schumann, 1978). To date, many politicians and policymakers embrace this claim; integration programs generally have a strong emphasis on fostering second language acquisition. In some countries, a high language proficiency is even a requirement for a permanent residence permit (e.g., in the Netherlands; www.ind.nl) or citizenship (e.g. Canada; www.canada.ca/en).

But to what extent are the assumptions, on which such policy is based, actually correct? Firstly, one important assumption in the debate is that an increase in second language proficiency is associated with an increasing orientation towards the host society or, in other words, with immigrants' cultural integration. Earlier research indeed found an association between second language proficiency and indicators of cultural integration (e.g. Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008; Kang, 2006). Despite the fact that these studies only focused on one point in time, they thus offer some support for the notion that enhancing immigrants' second language proficiency by means of language courses can be an efficient way of fostering immigrants' integration into the host society.

An additional assumption that can be questioned is that this policy that aims to increase cultural integration by means of second language courses works for all immigrants. Is this actually the case? Is policy that focuses predominantly on improving language proficiency really the most important tool for integration? Or does policy that focuses predominantly on improving language proficiency only benefit a few? Despite of the fact that it seems plausible to doubt that “one size fits all”-, to our knowledge, this assumption has not yet been empirically tested in the context of second language training policies. Based 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), it can be assumed that the degree to which second language proficiency is associated with cultural integration will differ between immigrants with different personality traits. A plausible reason for such an assumption is that some personality traits may facilitate the actual use of the second

language and (thus) the extent to which immigrants are receptive for integration. In this context, especially trainable personality traits are of interest, because these, if they indeed appear to be relevant, could be targeted in integration programs (see also van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013).

The current study was aimed at testing the underlying assumptions of integration programs that have a strong emphasis on learning the second language. It did this by using longitudinal data (with a time lag of three months) from temporary immigrants (sojourners), whose second language proficiency could be expected to have changed over time. Specifically the present research concerned Dutch language course participants and international psychology students who just arrived in the Netherlands ($N=167$). Firstly, we studied whether, as correlational research suggests, in our sample an *increase* in Dutch language proficiency is indeed associated with an *increase* in cultural integration. In line with previous work (e.g. Hagendoorn, Veenman, & Vollebergh, 2003), we used attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society as indicators of cultural integration. Secondly, we investigated whether the positive relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration was stronger for immigrants who score high on certain trainable personality traits. In conclusion, we discussed the practical relevance of our results for integration policy.

3.1.1 Language and integration

Gordon (1964) was one of the first scientists who identified second language proficiency as a key factor in immigrants' integration in the host-society. According to his 'classical assimilation theory', second language proficiency is a form of integration which stimulates all other forms of integration, including identification with the host society which he considered to be the final stage of integration. In a similar vein, the assumption of much contemporary integration policy is that learning a second language will facilitate further orientation towards the host society. It is thought that even though language use is an individual phenomenon, it binds, through communication (e.g. talking with members of the host society or host country media use), those using it to a social and ethnic community (Clement, Noels, & Deneault, 2001). Although not all researchers agree about the exact causality between the factors involved, many indeed found support for a relation between second language proficiency and indicators of cultural integration. A high second language proficiency has for example been found to be associated with a strong overall orientation towards the host society (Jiang, Green, Henley, & Masten, 2009; Kang, 2006), more favorable attitudes towards (members of) the host society (Rubinfeld, Clément, Lussier, Lebrun, & Auger, 2006) and stronger

identification with the host society (Chen et al., 2008; de Vroome, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2014; Rubinfeld et al., 2006). Putting these correlational findings in a longitudinal perspective, it can be expected that an increase in second language proficiency is associated with a higher extent of cultural integration. Specifically, in the present study, the first hypothesis that will be tested are:

H1: An increase in second language proficiency is associated with a positive change in (a) *attitudes* towards the host culture, and (b) *identification* with the host society.

3.1.2 Multicultural personality

Personality appears to be an influential factor in the adjustment of immigrants in their host countries (Bakker, Van Oudenhoven, & Van Der Zee, 2004; Galchenko & van, 2007). Based on earlier research, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000; 2001) propose the concept of a multicultural personality, that is, a personality that predisposes a person to successfully deal with the challenges that intercultural interaction and integration entail. They distinguish between five personality traits that characterize a multicultural personality. The first trait, *emotional stability*, is the ability to remain calm under new and stressful situations. *Flexibility* refers to interpreting new situations as a positive challenge and adapting to these situations accordingly. *Cultural empathy* implies empathizing with the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of members of other cultures. *Open-mindedness* reflects an open and nonjudgmental attitude towards members of different cultural groups. *Social initiative*, finally, is defined as actively approaching social situations and demonstrating initiative in these interactions (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001).

To assess the degree to which individuals possess a multicultural personality, the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001) was developed, which reliably assesses the proposed five multicultural personality traits. Research using this instrument has shown it to be predictive of the ‘intercultural success’ of different groups like international students, expatriates and immigrants. High scores on dimensions of the MPQ are for example associated with a higher extent of sociocultural integration, psychological adjustment and better mental health (Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Leong, 2007; Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013).

Based on the results of several empirical studies which made use of the MPQ (e.g. Hofhuis, van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, & de Grijjs, 2004; Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007), the authors of the MPQ recently argued that the five defined traits can be divided in stress-buffering and social-perceptual traits (van der Zee & van

Oudenhoven, 2013). Individuals scoring high on stress-buffering traits (emotional stability, flexibility) can be expected to perceive an intercultural situation as less threatening. Individuals scoring high on the social-perceptual traits (cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative), perceive intercultural situations as challenging, explore the social and cognitive opportunities, and respond with more positive affect. Importantly, while the stress buffering traits are considered to be quite stable, the social-perceptual traits are more flexible and assumed to be trainable (Herfst, van Oudenhoven, & Timmerman, 2008).

In line with the assumption that the social-perceptual traits are trainable, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2013) suggest that it would be worthwhile to train these traits at the start of or during second language courses. After all, as described above, two different lines of research show the relevance of (a) second language proficiency and (b) personality traits for various forms of integration. However, to the best of our knowledge, no integrative research has been done so far to study second language proficiency, personality and integration altogether. This is remarkable, because it is very likely that the relation between progress in second language proficiency and progress in terms of integration is stronger for immigrants who score higher on social-perceptual personality traits. Stated otherwise, the social-perceptual personality traits are very plausible moderators in the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration (i.e. attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society).

Specifically, the personality trait *social initiative* is a plausible moderator in the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration. This can be assumed because research suggests that being proficient in the second language facilitates contact with natives which, in turn, may lead to more positive attitudes towards the host culture (de Vroome, Coenders, van Tubergen, & Verkuyten, 2011). Contact with members of the host society is also known to be related to stronger identification with the host society (de Vroome et al., 2014; Nesdale, 2002). Thus, the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration can, at least partially, be explained by contact with members of the host society. However, although being proficient in the second language might certainly *facilitate* contact, it does not necessarily *initiate* contact. That is, immigrants might know the language but may nonetheless still keep to themselves. Therefore, the extent to which an increase in second language proficiency is related to an increase in cultural integration might depend on an immigrants' social initiative; the trait that is most clearly linked to relation building (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Accordingly, we hypothesize that immigrants who are learning the second language and who have a high degree of social initiative, are more prone to actually use the acquired language skills to engage in contact with member of the

host society and, as a consequence, should experience more positive change in attitudes towards the host culture and identification with that society.

Furthermore, the personality trait *openness* is a plausible moderator in the relation between second language proficiency and cultural integration. Openness is a higher order factor based on the traits cultural empathy and open-mindedness, which are generally highly correlated (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013). Openness refers to being non-judgmental towards members of the host society and being able to empathize with them (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Likely this trait is also essential for a positive change in terms of attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society. An immigrant who is judgmental towards members of the host society and not able to empathize with them will likely not experience any positive changes in attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society despite acquiring the second language. Therefore, we expect that the extent to which an increase in second language proficiency is related to an increase in immigrants cultural integration' depends on immigrants' degree of openness.

To sum up, in line with the nature of the social perceptual traits and earlier research revealing clear links between these trainable traits and various forms of integration (e.g. Ali et al., 2003; Leong, 2007; Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009), we expect the traits social initiative and openness to be related to indicators of cultural integration (i.e. positive attitudes towards the host culture and identification with the host society). Specifically, our expectations are:

- H2: The higher the degree of *social initiative* the more positive the change in (a) *attitudes* towards the host culture, and (b) *identification* with the host society.
- H3: The higher the degree of *openness* the more positive the change in (a) *attitudes* towards the host culture, and (b) *identification* with the host society.

More importantly, we expect these social-perceptual personality traits to moderate the relation between second language proficiency and immigrants' cultural integration:

- H4: The higher the degree of *social initiative*, the stronger the association between an increase in second language proficiency and a positive change in (a) *attitudes* towards the host culture, and (b) *identification* with the host society.
- H5: The higher the degree of *openness*, the stronger the association between an increase in second language proficiency and a positive change in (a) *attitudes* towards the host culture and (b) *identification* with the host society

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

The data used for this study was collected in the Netherlands. Respondents were Dutch language course participants and newly arrived international psychology students. While the first group explicitly chose for learning the Dutch language, the second one started a study taught in English. Yet, though for their study knowing the Dutch language was not mandatory, it can well be assumed that during the first months in the Netherlands, second language proficiency would be a relevant variable for predicting change in integration within the Dutch society. Furthermore, not only from the participants of the language course, but also from the international psychology students, progress in second language proficiency can be expected because they just arrived in the Netherlands and progress in second language proficiency typically occurs shortly after arrival.

Data was gathered at two time points. Between September and the beginning of October 2011, respondents filled in our first questionnaire. The second questionnaire was filled in about three months afterwards. The Dutch language course participants were asked by their teachers to voluntarily participate in this paper and pencil survey. Participation by the international psychology students was also voluntary, with the difference that they earned student credits when they participated and that their questionnaires were conducted online. For both groups completion of the questionnaire took about 15 minutes. A total of 353 respondents participated in the first data collection. 52 % of them ($N = 183$) also participated in the second data collection. The respondents who intended to stay in the Netherlands permanently were removed from the dataset because for them the process of integration might develop differently compared to the (remaining) temporary immigrants. Merging the remaining data resulted in a total of 111 international psychology students and 56 language course participants who participated in both data collections. Due to missing data of four respondents, the data of 163 respondents was used for the final analyses.

Out of all participants, 72% were female, and 64% were born in Germany (other participants came from 31 different countries, with a maximum of 5 respondents per country). All respondents finished secondary school. At least 25% of them also finished a higher educational level. The mean age was 23. The vast majority (97%) of the participants came to the Netherlands for work or study, the remaining 3% (temporarily) migrated to the Netherlands because the partner went there or was already there. The mean years of residence in the Netherlands was only 0.42 years, revealing that, as intended, the sample comprised of people who were still newcomers to the Netherlands.

3.2.2 Measures

Unless stated otherwise, all measures were the same at both time points (t1 and t2) for the language course participants and the international psychology students.

Second language proficiency was measured with the commonly used 4 item self-assessment (e.g. Chiswick and Miller 1995, 2002; Van Tubergen 2010). Specifically, respondents were asked “How well can you understand Dutch?”, “How well can you speak Dutch?”, How well can you read Dutch?” and finally “How well do you write Dutch?” (t1 $\alpha=.86$, t2 $\alpha=.88$). The seven-point Likert scale ranged from “not at all” to “very well”.

Attitudes towards the Dutch culture were measured by asking respondents to what extent they liked (a) Dutch food, (b) Dutch clothing, (c) Dutch humor, (d) Dutch music, (e) traditional Dutch celebrations, (e) the way Dutch people treat each other (t1 $\alpha=.66$, t2 $\alpha=.72$). The five-point Likert scale ranged from “not at all to “very much”; higher scores on this scale indicate more positive attitudes.

Identification was measured by asking respondents to what extent they agreed to the following four statements: “I feel a strong attachment towards the Netherlands”, “I’m happy to be living in the Netherlands”, “I’m proud to be living in the Netherlands”, “I feel similar to people from the Netherlands” (t1: $\alpha=.74$, t2: $\alpha=.78$). The five-point Likert scale ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Higher scores on this scale indicate stronger identification.

Social initiative. An abbreviated form of the original Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001) was administered at the first time point to measure multicultural personality traits. Again respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) to what extent they agreed with postulated statements. Social initiative was measured with five statements, for example: “I take initiatives”, and “I keep to the background”; ($\alpha=.64$).

Openness is a higher order factor of the personality traits cultural empathy and open-mindedness ($\alpha=.80$). In total 12 items were used to measure these two traits. Example items of *cultural empathy* items were “I understand other people’s feelings” and “I have insight into human nature”. Example items of open-mindedness are: “I am interested in other cultures” and “I am intrigued by differences”. Pearson’s correlation between the factors social initiative and openness was .39 ($p<.01$).

3.2.3 Statistical analyses

Multiple regression analysis was used to answer the research questions. In the first analyses (see Table 3.3), the hypotheses with respect to attitudes towards the Netherlands were tested. In the second analyses the hypotheses with respect to identification with the Netherlands were tested (see Table 3.4).

As is common, in our preliminary analyses we controlled for gender, educational level and age. In addition, we controlled for the English language proficiency and Germany as country of origin (yes or no). The English language proficiency was included because this language is spoken by many Dutch people and can therefore also be influential for immigrants' cultural integration in the Netherlands. Germany as a country of origin was included as control variable because many respondents in this study originated from Germany. The German language and culture is relatively close to the Dutch language and culture compared to other countries of origin which are in the dataset. Thus the Dutch language proficiency, the cultural integration, and the relation between these two main variables might develop differently for German immigrants.

Both in the preliminary correlations and in the regression models the control variables were not significant (except for gender in two models). In the regression models, the main results did not change and the adjusted R^2 either remained the same or decreased when the control variables were included. Given these results and the fact that there are no further theoretical reasons for including these control variables in our analyses, the control variables were omitted from the final analyses.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Descriptives

Descriptive statistics of the original data are shown in Table 3.1. At time point 2 the mean second language proficiency was significantly higher than at time point 1. This indicates that overall, as expected, the respondents made progress in terms of second language proficiency ($t(162)=9.65$ $p<.001$). Also, in between data collections, a slight increase can be seen in the mean identification with the Netherlands and a slight decrease in attitudes towards the Netherlands. Both changes, however, are not significant (identification, $t(162)=1.24$ $p=.11$; attitudes, $t(162)=-.58$ $p=.28$).

The correlations given in Table 3.2 show a strong and significant relation between attitudes towards the Netherlands and identification with the Netherlands. This corresponds

with the fact that these variables are both considered as indicators of the cultural integration. At the same time, the correlation coefficients are not extremely high, which implies that the two indicators are distinctive.

At time 2, second language proficiency appears to be significantly, but weakly, correlated to identification with the Netherlands. No significant correlation is found between second language proficiency and attitudes towards the Netherlands at any time point.

With respect to multicultural personality traits, social initiative appears to be positively and moderately correlated with identification with the Netherlands. Openness correlates positively and moderately with attitudes towards the Netherlands. Openness is also weakly, but negatively, related to second language proficiency at time point 1, which is in the opposite direction as one would intuitively expect.

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics of independent and dependent variables ($N=163$)

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Attitudes t1	1.33	4.5	3.10	.60
Attitudes t2	1.17	4.83	3.08	.65
Identification t1	1.5	4.75	3.31	.61
Identification t2	1.5	4.75	3.36	.65
Dutch t1	1	6.5	2.79	1.11
Dutch t2	1	6.25	3.42	1.09
Social initiative	1.8	4.8	3.22	.54
Openness	2.75	5	3.85	.42

Table 3.2 Correlations for dependent and independent variables ($N=163$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Attitudes t1							
2. Attitudes t2	.71 **						
3. Identification t1	.54 **	.50 **					
4. Identification t2	.49 **	.59 **	.73 **				
5. Dutch t1	-.05	.00	-.02	.02			
6. Dutch t2	-.05	.05	.13 *	.20 **	.72 **		
7. Social initiative	.10	.06	.32 **	.24 **	-.03	.04	
8. Openness	.18 *	.24 **	.16 *	.13	-.15 *	-.12	.11

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (one tailed).

3.3.2 Main results

Table 2.3 shows the multiple regression results with attitudes towards the Netherlands at time 2 as dependent variable. Attitudes at time 1 is consistently included as predictor, causing all other predictors to be concerned with the (possible) change in attitudes in-between the two data collections.

The first model shows that a change in the Dutch language proficiency (Dutch t2-t1) is not significantly related to a change in terms of attitudes towards the Netherlands. Hypothesis 1a can therefore be rejected.

Results of the next model which is concerned with the influence of the two social-perceptual personality traits, show that whereas social initiative is not significantly related to change in attitudes towards the Netherlands, openness is. The higher the degree of openness, the more positive the change in attitudes towards the host culture. In line with this it can be concluded that hypothesis 2a is not supported by the data while hypothesis 3a is.

The third model shows a significant relation between the dependent variable and the interaction of change in second language proficiency and social initiative. Simple slopes analysis was done to be able to interpret this interaction effect (see Figure 3.1). For ease of interpretation change in attitudes (time 2 minus time 1) was used as dependent variable. This shows that whereas for immigrants with a high degree of social initiative high progress in terms of second language proficiency is accompanied by a positive change in attitudes towards the host culture, for immigrants with a low degree of social initiative, this is not the case. This is in line with hypothesis 4a. Even more, the former results indicate that the relation between increase in second language proficiency and a more positive attitude towards the host country is not just stronger for immigrants high in social initiative; being high in social initiative even appears to be crucial for the relation to exist. After all, no main effect between progress in second language and change in attitudes was found.

In contrast with the results on social initiative, the interaction effect of change in second language proficiency and openness is not significant. Therefore hypothesis 5a is rejected.

Table 2.4 shows the multiple regression results with identification towards the Netherlands at time 2 as dependent variable. Identification at time 1 is consistently included as predictor, causing all other predictors to be concerned with the (possible) change in identification in-between the two data collections.

The first model shows that the change in Dutch language proficiency is significantly related to a change in terms of identification with the Netherlands. Hypotheses 1b which states that an immigrants' increase in second language proficiency is associated with an

increasing identification with the host society is thus supported by the data.

The next model shows that the degrees of social initiative and openness are not related to the extent of change in identification with the Netherlands. This applies both to the possible main and to the assumed interaction effects in combination with an increase in second language proficiency. All remaining hypotheses are therefore rejected.

Table 3.3 Regression results with attitudes at time point 2 as dependent variable (N=163)

	Model H1a		Model H2a/3a		Model H4a/5a	
	B	SE Beta	B	SE Beta	B	SE Beta
(Constant)	.68	.19 ***	.75	.19 ***	.73	.19 ***
Attitudes t1	.77	.06 ***	.75	.06 ***	.75	.06 ***
Dutch t2-t1	.06	.04 .07			.05	.04 .07
Social initiative			-.02	.07 -.02	-.05	.07 -.04
Dutch t2-t1 * Social initiative			.19	.09 .12 *	.17	.08 .11 *
Openness					.19	.09 .12 *
Dutch t2-t1 * Openness					-.04	.10 -.02
Adjusted R ²	.50 ***		.51 ***		.52 ***	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one tailed).

Table 3.4 Regression results with identification at time point 2 as dependent variable (N=163)

	Model H1b		Model H2b/3b		Model H4b/5b	
	B	SE Beta	B	SE Beta	B	SE Beta
(Constant)	.86	.20 ***	.81	.21 ***	.89	.21 ***
Identification t1	.76	.06 ***	.77	.06 ***	.74	.06 ***
Dutch t2-t1	.08	.04 .10 *			.08	.04 .10 *
Social initiative			.02	.07 .01	.01	.07 .01
Dutch t2-t1 * Social initiative			.01	.09 .01	.12	.08 .08
Openness					.01	.09 .00
Dutch t2-t1 * Openness					.09	.10 .05
Adjusted R ²	.54 ***		.52 ***		.53 ***	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (one tailed).

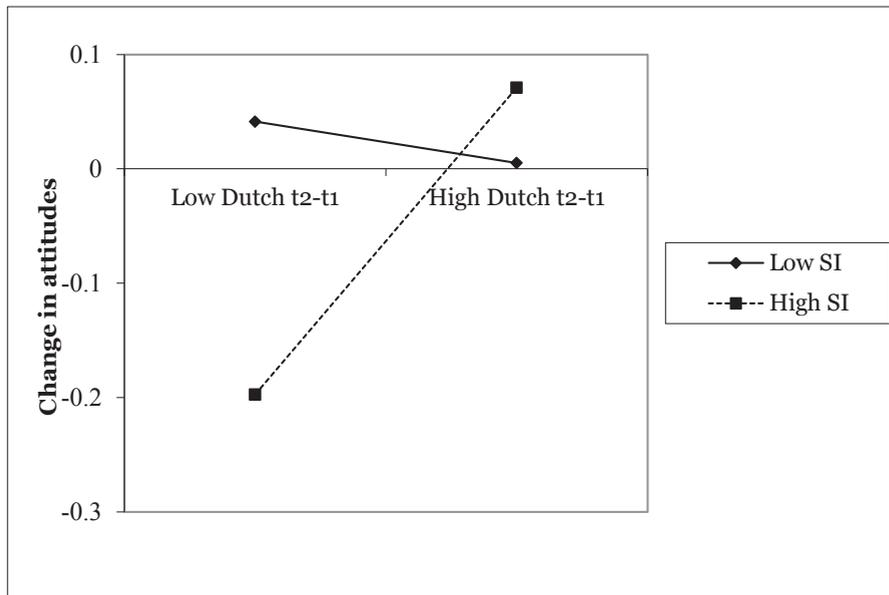


Figure 3.1 Simple slopes analysis of change in attitudes taking into account progress in Dutch and degree of social initiative

3.4 Conclusion and discussion

The immense migration that many countries are facing asks for effective policy directed at integrating immigrants in the host society. Nowadays, in many Western countries immigration policy and subsequent integration programs have a strong emphasis on fostering second language acquisition. In the current study we examined the underlying assumptions of such integration programs. Firstly, we examined whether an increase in second language proficiency is indeed associated with an increasing positive orientation towards the host society or, in other words, with immigrants' cultural integration, as findings from cross sectional research suggest.

Secondly, we examined whether policy that aims to increase cultural integration by means of second language courses indeed works well for all immigrants. Based 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) we argued that the degree to which an increase in second language proficiency is associated with an increase in cultural integration may differ between immigrants with different (trainable) personality traits.

To test our hypotheses, we used longitudinal data (two time points) from temporary immigrants who just arrived in the Netherlands and/or followed a Dutch language course at the time of the data collection. The analyses provided evidence for both the role of second language proficiency and personality traits in the cultural integration of immigrants. At the same time, findings differed for the two indicators of cultural integration; attitudes towards the Netherlands and identification with the Netherlands.

Whereas progress in second language proficiency (Dutch) appeared not to be directly related to a positive change in attitudes towards the host culture, it was associated with a positive change in identification with the host society. These results are partially in line with hypothesis 1. Immigrants who learn a second language do not necessarily become more positive in their attitudes towards the host culture, but do experience a positive change in identification with that society. Thus, although our descriptives showed no significant change on the mean level of either indicator of cultural integration, implying that some participants have improved while others have declined, a visible link was found between progress in second language proficiency and a positive change in identification.

An explanation for these differing findings for the two cultural integration indicators is that immigrants who learn the second language might increasingly feel like they belong to the host society and are happy to be part of it (identification), while they are not actually willing to adopt aspects of the Dutch culture into their own daily lives (attitudes). A positive attitude seems to be more specific and to go much further than identification which is a more general feeling of belonging. However, despite the diverging content of these two measures, based on earlier literature and on the reliable high correlations of the present study, both are legitimately perceived as indicators of cultural integration.

Another possible explanation for the different results regarding our two indicators of cultural integration relates to our hypotheses regarding the possible role of individual difference variables. Specifically, social perceptual personality traits (social initiative and openness traits; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013) may differentially affect the two aspects of cultural integration.

In our examination of the direct relation between these social-perceptual traits and cultural integration (hypotheses 2 and 3) we found that the social perceptual trait *openness*, but not *social initiative*, was significantly related to a positive change in attitudes towards the host culture. This indicates that immigrants who are less judgmental towards members of the host society and better able to empathize with them are also more willing to adopt aspects of the host society's culture in their daily life. With respect to our second indicator of cultural integration, identification with the host society, neither the degree of openness nor social

initiative were relevant predictors of positive change. This overall low impact of the social-perceptual personality traits is not in line with earlier research on the predictive value of multicultural personality traits (including social-perceptual traits) for a wide range of indicators of integration (e. g. Hofhuis et al., 2012; van der Zee et al., 2004; Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007). Especially the absence of a relation with identification with the host society is surprising, since social-perceptual traits are assumed to enable individuals to see connections between different identities and, thus, to facilitate the formation of a complex identity (identification with both the home and host society: van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013). However, previous research did not simultaneously investigate the impact of multicultural personality traits and progress in second language proficiency on cultural integration. Also, it did not consider a possible interaction effect of multicultural personality traits and language proficiency, which could explain the lack of main effects between these traits and cultural integration. In fact, we found at least partial support for such interaction effects.

Testing our hypothesis regarding a possible moderating impact of immigrants' degree of social initiative (hypothesis 4), we indeed found that progress in second language proficiency in combination with a high degree of *social initiative* was related to more positive change in *attitudes* towards the host culture. Thus, only for immigrants high in social initiative a positive change in second language proficiency is accompanied by a positive change in attitudes, that is, a higher willingness to appreciate and adopt aspects of the Dutch culture in the daily life. A possible explanation for this finding is provided by Intergroup Contact Theory, which assumes that positive contact between members of different groups leads to improved attitudes towards each other's group (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Plausibly, immigrants who learn the second language, but are weak on social initiative will not actually use this language to initiate any cross-group interaction, such as asking questions, starting a conversation or responding to invitations to common activities with members of the host society. Accordingly, these immigrants will not substantially increase their contact with (members of) the host society, not get to know their customs and traditions and thus also not improve their attitude towards that society as a whole. Likewise, immigrants who are not very proficient in speaking the second language, but who do have a high degree of social initiative, will have a hard time to get in contact with the host society, and thus are also not prone to change their attitudes towards that society. However, immigrants who *both* make progress in their second language proficiency and have a high degree of social initiative have a high chance to get in contact with (members of) the host society and, thus, to develop more positive attitudes towards the host culture and adopt

aspects of that society. For the second indicator of cultural integration, identification with the host society, the positive link between second language proficiency was not moderated by social initiative, but was equally strong irrespective of this personality trait. This may imply that for the mere feeling to belong to the host society and to be happy about that, the actual contact is less important than for actually having a positive attitude towards specific aspects of that culture and the willingness to adopt them.

The analyses with respect to the possible impact of *openness* (hypothesis 5), yielded no significant interaction effects: neither for attitudes towards nor for the identification with the host society the positive association between an increase in second language proficiency and cultural integration was moderated by immigrants' degree of openness.

3.4.1 Limitations and future research

The current study took earlier cross sectional research on second language proficiency and cultural integration one step further by examining this topic longitudinally. However, due to the limited number of respondents, no test of causality was done, that is, we cannot straightforwardly argue that progress in second language proficiency actually leads to a higher extent of cultural integration. The only study we found on this topic that actually did test causality, indeed offered support for the notion that second language proficiency leads to more identification with the host country rather than the other way around (Hochman & Davidov, 2014). However, in contrast with our study, in which a reliable change in second language proficiency was found, that study found only very little change in respondents' language proficiency over time. Therefore, in order to be able to perform tests of causality, future research on this topic would benefit from performing longitudinal research with a substantial representation of immigrants, of whom (like in the current study) a change in language proficiency can be expected.

The present study was conducted with temporary immigrants, also called sojourners (e.g., Wilson et al., 2014). As noted in the literature, sojourners might differ from permanent immigrants. Sojourners are often considered as 'internationally mobile third culture individuals', who on one hand easily learn about new cultures, but on the other hand might not actually internalize these cultures (Barker, 2015 based on Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Greenholtz & Kim, 2009; Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012). Although our findings do not actually lead us to think this is the case in the current study, to test generalizability of our findings, future research on this topic among permanent immigrants is certainly worthwhile.

Given that for neither the international students nor the participants of the language courses multicultural personality traits were discussed or actively trained, we felt safe to assume that these traits have remained stable during the period in which our study was conducted, and that it would therefore be sufficient to measure them at one time point only. However, in order to definitely rule out that during the time frame of the study respondents may have fluctuated in their scores on the relevant personality traits, it seems recommendable for future research to measure these traits at all time points.

Another point that might need consideration in future research is that change in second language proficiency can take place from different starting points, and may, therefore, bear different meanings. Thus, on the 5-point scale of second language proficiency as used in the present study 2 points progress in between measurements can for some respondents be caused by a shift from 1 ('not at all') to 3 ('little'), while for others it can be caused by a shift from 3 ('little') to 5 ('well'). It cannot be ruled out that these divergent forms of progress, both resulting in the same difference score, may relate differently to the (change in terms of) cultural integration. Therefore, future research should either only include respondents who, at the first point of measurement, are highly similar in second language proficiency, or should have such large samples that it is possible to include initial language proficiency as a predictor variable.

Finally, as is common, in the current study respondents' self-assessments were used to measure second language proficiency. However, a recent study shows that this subjective way of measuring second language proficiency can differ substantially from more objective measures of second language proficiency (like test scores) (Van Niejenhuis, Van der Werf, & Otten, 2015). Therefore, in future research it may be worthwhile to also use more objective measures of second language proficiency.

3.4.2 Policy implications

The current study distinguishes itself from earlier work by examining second language proficiency, integration and personality traits simultaneously. Another asset is its longitudinal character. Both aspects have led to important insights. As expected from correlational research, the present study indicated that, within a relatively short time frame, an increase in second language proficiency is related to a positive change in terms of identification with the host society and attitudes towards the host culture. This is in line with typical immigration policies and subsequent integration programs with a strong focus on learning the second language. However, our findings also suggest that such focus on second

language acquisition is not a “one size fits all”-approach. This conclusion is based on the finding that an increasing second language proficiency only goes together with a positive change in attitudes towards the host culture if immigrants also have a high degree of social initiative. Another notable finding is that, in the time period that this study was conducted, immigrants with a high degree of openness became more positive in their attitudes towards the host culture, regardless of the progress they made in terms of second language proficiency. Thus, next to second language learning, results from this study suggest the importance of social perceptual personality traits in cultural integration. Given that these traits are considered as trainable, our study suggests that policy makers should consider including attention for and a training of social perceptual personality traits in combination with a formal language teaching program in integration programs (see van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013).

