

Older Arab Immigrants and Linguistic Interaction in Germany

المهاجرون العرب المتقدمون في السن ومشكلة التفاعل اللغوي داخل المجتمع الألماني

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Abstract:

This article investigates a great debate in social sciences that put a special spotlight on the social integration of old Arab immigrants in the German society. Because most of those immigrants face difficulties in their ways of linguistic integration into the host community. In fact, this complex phenomenon is due to two main reasons, which are the difficult of the German language (especially dialects), and the unwillingness of the native people to deal with others tongues.

Keywords : older Arab immigrants, language, cultural identity, integration, discrimination, German society.

ملخص:

تعالج هذه الورقة العلمية قضية هامة أحدثت ولا زالت تحدث جدلا حادا بين صفوف الدارسين الاجتماعيين وهي مسألة اندماج المهاجرين العرب المتقدمين في السن داخل المجتمع الألماني، خاصة و أن معظم منهم يجد صعوبات في عملية الاندماج اللغوي أو الخطابي مع أفراد المجتمع المضيف. و في حقيقة الأمر يمكن أن نرجع هذه الظاهرة السوسiolغوية إلى عاملين هامين: أولا صعوبة اللغة الألمانية من حيث نطقها و تركيب مفرداتها (خاصة اللهجات المستخدمة في الحياة اليومية) و ثانيا عدم رغبة الكثير من أفراد المجتمع الأصلي في التحدث بلغات أخرى غير لغتهم الأصلية. من خلال هذه الصورة الواقعية تبرز قيمة دراسة العلاقة التبادلية بين مفهومي اللغة و الهوية، خاصة و أن أغلب المهاجرين العرب (من ذوي الأعمار المتقدمة طبعاً) إلى دولة ألمانيا عاجزين عن التحدث باللغة الرسمية لهذه الدولة أو حتى بلغات القارة الأوروبية الأخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المهاجرون العرب المتقدمون في السن، اللغة، الهوية الثقافية، الاندماج، التمييز الاجتماعي، المجتمع الألماني.

INTRODUCTION

This paper represents particularly a research of language contact among people into the German society. Over this period (especially since 2015) as well interest in migration spread in all the social sciences (such as linguistic ethnography, sociology, history...); because it characterizes postmodern societies, and represents a globalization phenomenon. In this entry the focus is on the special needs of older Arab immigrants in Germany, who have received less research, practice and policy attention.

There are few studies and so far there has been no theory about the learning difficulties that older Arab immigrants face in the German society. Hence, this study is important because it tries to shed light on an essential issue that highly influences the current and future lives of thousands of immigrants (including refugees) in Germany. In contrast, most of social studies have focused on the migration of the youth, and on their difficulties on the way towards the new countries.

This sociolinguistic study put a special spotlight on the language, and its correlation with the social integration of immigrants, because language represents a key element in the cultural identity.

We can have a main question, which is: why German society in particular?. This study focuses on the German population, because this European country represents a monolingual community. In other words, the German language is spoken by the majority of the people there, and especially during the daily discourse. Hence, the immigrants in Germany are facing several difficulties to integrate into this society, essential whom cannot speak this language like older Arab one.

1. Concept of language

Language consists of a set of symbols and characters that make up the tools of knowledge. It is considered one of the most important means of friction, understanding and communication in various areas of life between people in society, and without it, the cognitive activity of individuals is impossible.

Any language in the world is closely related to thought, as human ideas can always be shaper through a linguistic form even in the case of inner thought. Language also has many functions in a person's life. It is the basic material of our existence and of our social system.

Language distinguishes man from others creatures, as language is the way to communication, understanding, transmission of ideas, religions and beliefs. It helps to transform ideas from simple psychic imagination into practice. Language is a heritage, as the richness of language is the logical result of the richness of culture. Understanding the history of any nation or culture is based on understanding of the language of this nation.

Language is an essential tool for intercultural dialogue, which in turn is required for integration. Based on the statistics of the European commission on the integration of immigrants, the successful integration measures of migrations are, employment ,education, active participation in society.

Language is vital for achieving these objectives in order to avoid ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences. It is therefore necessary for migrants and refugees to learn the language of their host countries. Language learning encourages openness between people and makes them ready to discover the culture of others (Ouael,S2022:92).

In Germany, the learning of the German language by immigrants and refugees is mandatory and free of charge. The launch of language learning programs should aim to build a more cohesive society and create opportunities for migrants and are a prerequisite for their survival.

2.Language and identity

2.1 Definition of identity:

Generally, identity is the stable and fixed aspects of selfhood: things that you check off on census forms such as: race or ethnicity, nationality, social class, sex, and age. Identities are stable features of persons that exist prior to any particular situation and dynamic and situated accomplishments, enacted through talk, and changing form one occasion to the next. Norton (2000:5) uses the term identity to refer to how a person understands her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed over time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. Identity is therefore a site of struggle, while Thorn Borrow(2004:56) says that identity, whether on an individual, social, or institutional level, is something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives, through our interactions with others.

Individual's identities must be understood with reference in the larger social structure in which they live, because societies not only give us strong messages about whom we can be and to what we can aspire, they can actually forbid our participation in given social networks. A person's identity construction cannot be

separated from the distribution of resources in society. The work of the sociologist Goffman has been showing that the self is constructed entirely through discourse, making our language choices of paramount importance to our identity construction. In fact, he states that personal identity is defined by how others identify us.

2.2 Language as an element of cultural identity:

Chambers says that language is a system of visual, auditory, or tactile symbols communication, and the rules used to manipulate them (Chambers 2004: 475). Language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, feelings and emotions, and values features of a community, but also represents a basic expression of social and cultural identity.

Language is an important element which influences cultural and intellectual aspects of human life. Not only language creates several communication among people but also it makes bilateral relation between different groups and societies. In the same context, we can say that language is one of the most significant elements of social identity which gives a feeling of dependence or independence, superiority or inferiority and power or weakness. It can specify our social level and our position.

Around 1950, due to the rapid economic growth and the shortage of low-skilled workers in Germany, the government recruited foreign workers from the so-called “guest worker” countries such as Italy, Spain, Turkey, Morocco to work as semi or unskilled workers.

Recently, the government adopted new immigration law to promote the inflow of skilled immigration to fill the shortage of workers that arises due to an aging population and low fertility rate. So, in 2012, Germany made effort to attract highly-skilled non-EU nationals to fill the occupation of a shortage of skilled labor. As of 2019, 21,2 million people living in Germany are either immigrants or their descendants, and the Turkish community are the largest migrants group in Germany.

2.3. Language as identity in the Arab community

Historically, the term “Arabs” was used for tribes that lived on the Arabian Peninsula and its borders to the North, for hundreds of years before Islam. After the emergence of Islam, some Arabs moved, transferring their religion and language, to the newly conquered territories. Arabic became the language of the local populations and Islam became their religion.

Al-Husri defines the Arab as anyone who belongs to an Arab country and speaks Arabic, regardless of his religion, official nationality, ancestry and the roots of his family. The relationship between language and national identity has always been, and is a very controversial issue in shaping the collective identity of a nation or any community. The participation of language in defining the national identity of any nation shows its necessity language, as defensive and sometimes reactionary tool of the educated elites of the Arab nationalist movements in order to protect the cultural and social fabric.

3. Germany as a host monolingual society :

3.1 A great Arab immigration in Germany

Till the end of 1981, the Federal Republic of Germany was still not a country of immigration. The pressure of public opinion to restrict the number of incoming foreigners and the latest hostility acts towards foreigners constantly has increased.

The immigration of Arabs in Germany is one of the important challenges and results in the phenomenon of transmission of a segment of the Arabs to Germany in large groups to make a change in the unity of the cultural identity of the Arab community (population consists of the Arab community living in Germany is equal to 300,000), and almost 16 million individuals of migrant descent living today in Germany represented almost one-fifth of the total population.

Recent years have witnessed a clear interest in studies and research on the question of identity, and this field has attracted much attention from many governmental officials. It should be noted that the concepts of identity, integration and coexistence are the most controversial concepts which require more debate in Germany.

For the events of the 11 september 2001 in America and the terrorist bombings in Madrid and London, all caused a shake-up within the European communities. This in turn, led to the increase of racist practices towards Arabs and Muslims in various European countries. In addition to that, the events revealed by the individuals belonging to second and third generation immigrants.

3.2. “Mother tongue” and the one-German-nation:

The “one nation, one language” ideology means the idea that a nation-state should be unified by one common language has held sway (dominate) in European history from the rise of the nation-states in the eighteenth century up to present. The term “mother tongue” is often used as a way of thinking of its speakers, and thus the different “mentalities” and national characters are connected with the use of different languages.

The “mother tongue” is always determines thought, social behaviour and exhibition or control of affection and emotions. For example, to subtract power from the Slovenian minority, German speakers claim that the slovens cannot feel particularly proud of the language they speak, since is not a “real language”. In this case, the use of a language is fundamentally a strategy to attribute or detract visibility to/from an “ethnic” group.

People in German community explain this specific knowledge by saying that “the Others” need to know my language, because my language is the superior one. Hence, we can find indices of implicit prestige in their speech such as: “my language is useful to find a job” “my language is more international than theirs”.

The German-speaking community located on the Western side of the former German-German border expresses harsh judgements about “the Other over there” identified with the language spoken.

Related to the study of Augusto(2003), the majority of the German people think that they don’t have any problem when they are “over there”, because all the “Others” know theirs. They considered this feeling as a part of the DNA of each individual (as a strategy for justifying the present ignorance of the “Others”).

It should be noted that, the “one nation, one language” ideology is still widespread in the common people of Europe (both on the Western and Eastern sides), when people have vision of language as a differentiator of identity and culture. And they consider minority languages and local varieties as “endangered languages”.

4.The role of language in the social integration of Arab immigrants in Germany

4.1. definition of social integration:

The immigrants can maintain some elements of their own culture identity and the same time acquire new elements of the new culture of the host community. This can be done by uniting and belinding the two cultures or by creating a new certain culture which is, in fact, a mix between the two culture (Hassan,A; Mamoon,M; Walid,A 2012).

Immigrants' integration is a complex multidimensional construct, referring to integration into the economic, health, educational and social contexts. Multiple factors contribute to how smooth immigrants' integration occurs, including their experiences, their physical and mental health, or social support. There is in general a lack of understanding of the diversity and the range of experiences immigrants bring with them. Protective factors that can support their social integration include key resilience characteristics such as a personal agency, beliefs that life has meaning, goal direction, sense of purpose, and motivation (Mihaela,R2018). Studies on obstacles to immigrant integration in the European Union indicated that some of the major impediments to integration they experienced at both the personal and institutional levels (Mestheneos 2002:306).

Working with immigrants needs a multi-professional approach of physical, emotional, social, and legal aspects (Turner,and Herlihy2009:323). Health care professionals must familiaze themselves with the cultural background and gain an understanding of their immigrant communities (Kramer 2017).

4.2.cultural identity of older Arab immigrants in Germany:

As older Arab immigrants leave their countries (Tunisia, Syria, Iraq..) they are forced to abandon old definitions of who they are, and to find new ones. At the same time, they are confronted with inventories of identities that are imposed on them through public discourses and practices (De Fina 2006:351).

This sociolinguistic research aims to analyze the role of language practices in the domains of health and work, to understand how language practices in these domains are shaped both by the dynamics of face-to-face (Erving Goffman)

encounters and by the constraints of the political policy(see Valdes and Angelelli2003:58).

In short, in comparison to the host populations, older Arab immigrants in Germany have had a life time of disadvantage and desperation, including poor health care and housing conditions, few opportunities to learn the local language, and very often the insults of cultural discrimination(Warners,A and Friedrich,K2004:312).

In the host society there is a risk that older immigrations will be seen as speechless because they are unable to speak the language of the host country. The linguistic identity of older immigrants in Germany is very complex for a number of reasons: the language shift they experience due to their immigration and the biographies of their languages are influenced by the language situation and language policy in the countries of origin.

Knowledge of the language is seen as a key issue in integration, while the host society is seen as a kind of guarantee of successful integration. Usually older Arab immigrants in German community are willing to learn the language of the host society if the lessons are adopted to their needs(Ouael,S2022:96).

According to the **Federal Office for Migration and Refugees**, the number of immigrants who are older than 40 years in 2017, was 74619, or almost 10 per cent of the total number of immigrants. Every refugee in Germany has to a language school, and learn the German language up to the B1 intermediate level. This obligatory language course is called integration course.

Learning the language for older immigrants in Germany is very important due to many reasons; for example, the job opportunities are highly related to learning the language. Moreover, learning the language is highly important for understanding the culture of the host society, building social networks such as friendship and handling daily routines like shopping or going to the doctor (Ahmad,AI2019).

Older immigrants suffer more than the younger ones from losing their own culture and their social lives, so they are more likely to return or to try to their home countries. However, it is not easy in the case of refugees compared to immigrants because they will lose their right to asylum if they return.

Furthermore, older refugees suffer from losing their social status, becoming lonely and feeling isolated, but the unhealthy and stressful German lifestyle and the bad climate were the main drivers for the return for older immigrants (Razum and Al,2005:724).

Newcomer elders' lack of formal employment, independent income and access to public assistance make them financially dependent on their adult children. They become isolated, lonely and bored, and they generally express disappointment by unmet expectations of family life in a new country. Rather than positioning themselves as respected elders valued for their knowledge and wisdom, immigrant elders experience role loss (Sadarangani, and Jun 2015:114).

Older immigrants often have little social interaction outside the family and find the closed-door culture of Western society strange. They also worried about their health and dying in exile, and the burdens they represented to their families (Bazzi and Chemali 2016:57). Moreover, there has been little research done concerning the language-learning difficulties that older immigrants face, even through the inability to learn the language of the new country can leave bad effects on the lives of older immigrants.

Furthermore, for elderly immigrants, the problems created by the lack of German knowledge go far beyond the inability to acquire and understand information about the German health-care system, to learn about personal safety and civil rights, to bank and shop, and to use public transportation (Gozdiak1988:19).

Older Arab immigrants in Germany are still a relatively small group of the population, but their members have increased in the last years, and they will increase further (Schimany and baykara-Krumme2012:60). In the same context, the situation of older Arab immigrants is characterized by a concurrency of migrant-specific and age –specific strains. Therefore, the question arises: what exactly are the migration-specific aspects of aging? Krumme (2012:258) differentiates between two aspects: first, the context of origin and cultural change and second, the migration experience and minority situation.

Regarding to the context of origin and cultural change (Krumme 2012:259) Arab older immigrants face, for example, different challenges than do older native Germans. This is quite important because immigrants often come from countries

where family structures and cultures are very different from those in Germany. If the Arab immigrants were socialized in collectivistic cultures, in which the sense of solidarity, dependency, and family belonging is much stronger than in individualistic societies like Germany (Hofstede, 2001), it can cause greater feelings of loneliness for older Arab immigrants even if the extent of social integration is comparable to that of older natives.

In addition to that, a person's age at immigration is most important for the implications of the experience, because it makes a huge difference if people immigrate when they are young and get older in the country of destination, or if they are already older. However, the immigration experience is seen as a critical life event which often involves negative (physical and mental) implications because of the separation from friends and family members and the need for orientation, adjustment, and integration in a new social and familial networks.

If the family members can immigrate together or the immigration leads to existing social and ethnic networks (in the case of chain immigration), the negative experiences of separation and loss are much less.

The living situation of older Arab immigrants has not gotten much attention in the Federal Republic of Germany. However, since the second family **report of Federal Ministry for Families**(2000), the interest in the topic has clearly increased, the living situation of older people was considered explicitly, not only was the topic covered by experts on the writing commission of the report itself, but also several papers regarding the living and health situation of older immigrants in Germany were added to the report. Nevertheless, the availability of data for analysis covering older immigrants in Germany is still extremely limited.

4.3.The impact of linguistic discrimination on the living of older Arab migrants in Germany:

In the German telephone survey (2017), respondents were asked their linguistic attitudes in Germany. All sixteen German corresponded Federal states were represented, the number of respondents from each state to the relative population size of each state. The items included the languages Arabic, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian and Turkish. The results of the German survey 2017 shows that languages are not equally rated : the language that is liked by most of the German population is French.

The results of the German survey(2017) reveal that some languages are liked and others are not. The language that is liked by most of the German population is French (32 per cent), it is followed by Italian, English and Spanish (so-called Romance languages and languages of culture and prestige).

Concerning regional dialect of German, Bavarian dialect plays a prominent role even within the conceptual framework of language. In contrast, languages are named as disliked languages are Russian, Arabic and Turkish. These three languages happen to be the perhaps most prominent immigrant languages in Germany. The pattern of evaluation has been relatively stable over the past ten years with some small changes concerning the rise of Spanish as a liked language and the increase of Arabic as a disliked language. Another obvious difference in the set of disliked languages concerns Arabic. It was almost absent in German survey (2008): ten years later it comes second after Russian. This coincided with a sociopolitical situation influenced by the high influx of refugees after 2015. In addition, a number of high-profile criminal incidents are related to this situation, such as the mass sexual assaults on women by men of Arabic and North African appearance in Cologne and other German cities during the public New Year's Eve festivities of 2015 and 2016. This, has generated an ongoing debate about how one can define successful integration of immigrants into German society.

The central aspects of this part of the text are very evident; they concern migration and especially integration. Because language is supposed to be used as a proxy indicator for cultural integration, essentially society such as German (Adler,A2019:246).

There are several examples of how attitudes towards languages have an impact on behavior. To name only a few, research focusing on regional varieties of German has shown that people are more likely to move house to dialectal regions. These dialectal regions can also explain with whom is more likely to trade (Lameli and Al2015:295). Other research indicates that the way someone speaks can have economic impact namely, there seems to be a correlation of dialectally accented speech with level of wages.

According to research by Grogger (2019) people speaking with a regional accent earn significantly lower wages than those who do not. Also, studies on the housing market arrive at similar results; speakers a depreciated language or variety

makes it more difficulties getting a viewing appointment and finally renting or buying an apartment. In another context, it has been shown that accents and spoken varieties have an impact on juridical evaluation; that is, language-based evaluation of witness or defendants may lead to certain verdicts in courtrooms (Roessel,2018:540).

The **German Aging Survey** (2017), shows same difficulties regarding the integration of older immigrants in the German labor market. People with a immigration background are often unemployed than are native Germans. This survey reported that the rate of unemployment was 9 per cent for immigrants in German community, which is clearly above the unemployment rate of native Germans (6 per cent).

Even 20 years after their re-unification, there are still huge differences between Eastern and Western Germany regarding the regional distribution of people of immigrant background. In 2013, of the 16.5 million people with a immigrant background in Germany, the majority (97 per cent) lived in the Western Federal states. After retirement, one's living space in increasingly import, because older Arab immigrants spend more time at home. Thus, the living quality and the living facilities are huge relevance for their subjective well-being. Moreover, the living situation is also a good indicator of the integration of Arab immigrants since the quality of the apartment or the house and the neighborhood is strongly correlated with the living standard and the social prestige (Schopf and Naegele 2005:388). Furthermore, older immigrants live in smaller apartment and houses. In addition, older Arab immigrants in German community are less often house owners than are native Germans, only 29 per cent of the labor immigrants of the age of 50 years or older, but 66 per cent of natives own houses.

In addition to that, in regard to their living environment, older Arab immigrants are more disadvantaged than natives. They live more often in neighborhood with air pollution, noise nuisance, and a lack of green spaces. This is not only because of their lacking economic possibilities but also because of linguistic discrimination related with the housing market. The majority of older Arab immigrants in need of care get it from female family members at home, very often without the support of professional care. Living in a senior-citizen or nursing house is still an exception for older Arab immigrants, even though in some big cities and for some

immigrants groups alternative types of housing have been developed (Steinbach, A 2017 :14).

The question on language is remarkable in several aspects (see Adler 2018). First, there is the wording of the question. Instead of eliciting data on native of first languages, it focuses on the language spoken in the community of the household, thereby excluding single-person households, in which the inhabitant might not have another person to talk to on daily basis. Further, the question is formulated in the singular complemented by the use of the restrictive adverb (mainly predominantly), only on answer is allowed.

This means that even if several languages are spoken (on equal basis) in the household, only one of those can be named. Thus, multilingualism virtually cannot be represented by the answer. Multilingual constellations are very diverse and language repertoires of multilingual individuals may even differ within the same household. Reducing this diversity to one single language per household is both audacious and an oversimplification.

This kind of approach to language, however, may be due to a monolingual perspective on language matters in the design of the question, in which the monolingual setting perceived as being the language norm in many European nation-states is used as a point of reference (Gogolin 1997:40).

Germany shares with Turkey a position as countries that host the largest number of Syrian refugees in their respective regions. However, the timing and the magnitude of refugees inflows that the two countries have faced, as well as their legal and political responses to the issue of reception and longer term integration, differ considerably. The number of Syrian refugees in Germany increased from 1.5 million in 2014 to 2.8 million in 2016. Together with those registrations has not yet been completed, the total number of Syrian refugees is estimated to be 3 million.

Discrimination against older Arab workers on the German labor market must be seen against the background of the recent history of immigrations in which it has been primarily workers with low educational and vocational qualifications that have arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany.

It should be noted that, the access to the labor market, even in the presence of equal qualifications, is significantly impeded by direct discrimination related to the

nature of language spoken by older workers. These foreigners will, in seeking employment, regularly be confronted with xenophobia and racism. For example, the unemployment rate for foreign workers has, as a whole, been significantly higher than the figure for workers who are Federal German nationals.

Foreign workers continue to perform primarily “blue-collar” jobs and many of these entail very high physical workloads. In particular, high percentage of foreigners are to be found in those sectors of the economy affected by the crisis. The situation of the foreign work force is reflected in pay level. Calculations indicate that Arab workers earn 76 per cent of German average pay levels.

Furthermore, the health care and subjective well-being of older Arab immigrants in Germany are, for the most part, not as good as for native Germans. In spite of better health at younger ages, older immigrants in comparison to older natives in general are sick more often, get infectious diseases more often, and have a higher rate of injuries and occupational diseases as well as more early retirement, and reductions in earning capacity. In addition, older Arab immigrants are affected by many chronic diseases earlier and more severely than natives.

It must be taken into account that older Arab immigrants in German society are by far not a homogeneous group but are, on the contrary, very heterogeneous. Individual and cultural values, as well as special needs of people with and without immigrant background, will become important characteristics in future health services.

In the same context, subgroup comparisons demonstrated that the Arab older immigrants showed (with Turkish ones) the highest degree of symptoms for both mental health complaints, whereas the Spanish immigrants had the lower degree of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

According to Bermejo (2016), the association of depressive and anxiety syndromes with socio-demographic and migration-related factors as well as the cultural background (Bermejo.I, 2016:8). For both mental health disorders there is a considerable degree of explained variation. Major factors that led to an increased probability for anxiety or depression were the fact of being retired, a lower level of school qualification and lower level of wellbeing in Germany.

The cultural background was only a relevant factor explaining depressive symptoms, with older Arab immigrants showing a higher likelihood of having a depressive disorder. In addition to that, there is a significant indicator related to the length stay in Germany and the difficulties of German language-speaking. On other hand, differences in help-seeking behavior between immigrants groups might also have influenced the results. From the transcultural literature, it can be assumed that feelings of loss, culture-related values, expectations and attitudes, as well as the failure of achieving life goals may also codetermine the development of mental health disorders (Bhugua2005:250).

In summary, results of many studies concerning mental health of older immigrants in Germany can be interpreted as a clear indication that the cultural background is an important independent factor regarding the emergence of mental health syndromes in older immigrants.

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