09

Linguistic road works ahead:
a commentary on language, integration
and unfulfilled obligations

09

Linguistic road works ahead: a commentary on language, integration and unfulfilled obligations

Axel Fanego Palat & Nico Nassenstein

1. Challenges: On responsibilities

While numerous studies, including those within the fresh framework of this issue, deal with specific regional contexts of linguistic aspects of migrants' integration, critical perspectives on (applied) multilingualism and bureaucracy, migrants' daily language management in the family and in public, as well as their experience and evaluation of (the host) society's expectations, there are numerous open questions that have not yet been answered[1]. Intended as a critical commentary, this afterword asks academia to react to the debate on language and integration. What is the actual practicability and realizability of linguistic findings and decisions (in immigration offices, for mass media, in public discourse etc.)? And how can linguistics try to link current movements and debates around integration with academic insights into fluid multilingualism, dynamic language repertoires and, for instance, with recent findings

in the field of raciolinguistics (Alim & al. 2016, Rosa 2018, etc.)? Here, as authors, we do not intend to provide complete answers but only to suggest potential directions that could be taken at disciplinary bifurcations, and at times to point out unwanted halts at apparently dead ends in the field. Observing the developments from an Africanist view on the discipline, academic (re)actions are long overdue, and yet, carefully implemented steps seem never to have been as clumsy as today.

The promotion of language to a key or indeed to *the* "key to integration" (Esser 2006: i) has, despite a growing body of scholarly literature, shown to be a topic of complicated political dispute, a matter of public controversy, and, in particular, it has become subject to a media discourse that may teach us a lot about prevailing perceptions of language in society among the German public. Its perspective, as gleaned from online comments to a newspaper article in *Zeit Online* from 12 April 2019 with the title *"Immer weniger Zuwanderer absolvieren erfolgreich Deutschtest"* [Fewer and fewer immigrants successfully complete the German test], can seemingly be narrowed down to a few (expectedly) polarized positions and harsh statements, here summarized, intentionally oversimplified and bold:

"who's to blame? language courses or the willingness and education of migrants?"

"reaching B1 is not challenging at all"

"for anyone who plans to live here this is not enough"

"why integrate somebody who has to leave again anyway?"

The fact that only half of migrants enrolled in language classes in 2018, i.e. 172,471 persons, had accomplished the required level of German language tests (level "B1" of the reference model; ibid.) implied that integration on a linguistic level had obviously failed. Increasing numbers of people passing the lower A2 level, in contrast, did not excite the public to the same extent. More than ever, the intertwined relationship of language and integration is discussed in news feeds. It is subject to political discourse and dominates non-academic discussions. At the same time, discussions of actual linguistic aspects around migration and integration in Europe are scarce, less attractive, or considered quixotic or unworldly. And there is yet another difficulty: despite the focus on integration in recent private and federal initiatives, with innovative programs and recruited specialists, most officials – with or without immigration biographies themselves – cannot give precise answers as to what a "successful linguistic integration" would actually look like, what the host community expects it to be, or what it means for applied everyday languaging (Dombrowsky-Hahn & Littig, this volume). The host community, as measured by dominant media discourses and street corner talk, seems to be equally unsure about this vague concept and its successful application. It is not surprising that academics, including linguists, often do not see that they have a responsibility to bring their expertise to the debate, but remain oddly silent – while potentially having something to contribute.

García (2017: 12-13) problematizes this issue, summarizing that since the mid-20th century sociolinguists have seen speakers and language as forming a creative "assemblage", with one needing the other, and vice versa. She

credits the early sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, e.g. Labov, Fishman, Gumperz and Hymes, for acknowledging that "language is a deeply personal and social affair", and post-structuralists like Mignolo, Makoni and Pennycook, to name but a few postcolonial and poststructuralist thinkers, for understanding that languages were invented as objects and tied to nationalist ideas. This view has complex consequences. If language is no longer tied to nation but to speakers, who then counts as a "native speaker"? Highly mobile and multilingual speakers do not fulfil the criteria to be categorized as native or "mother tongue speakers" of a specific language, as claimed by García, who argues that this serves as a category that is "just another way to keep power in the hands of the few and exclude those who are different" (p. 14). Stressing the translingual behavior and practice of virtually every speaker, regardless of which language (s)he speaks, she seeks the answer in approaches toward translanguaging (conceptualizing language as fluid multilingual practice and discarding the notion of rigid language boundaries), rejecting the idea of "successful integration" based on measuring someone's acquisition of a dominant national language, or on his/her acquisition of "autonomous structures or boxes that are L1, L2, L3" (p. 15):

> History all over the world has confirmed that a shift to dominant language practices has not led to the structural incorporation of minoritized groups in the dominant society's economic, political, and social life. Perhaps the most important example of this is the history of enslaved people who were brought from the African continent to the Americas […]: Their complete relinguification has not led to their structural incorporation; they remain victims of racism […] (García 2017: 14)

It is not with the simple adoption of a dominant official or national language that practices of exclusion or ostracism stop; racism and Othering go much deeper than that. It is undoubtedly true that ideas of an idealized successful linguistic integration are still influenced by the notion of a nation state that was invented a few centuries ago, and to patterns of mobility that appear old-fashioned when compared to Blommaert's (2010: 1) globalized world, a "tremendously complex web of villages, towns, neighbourhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways". Language too, appearing as a clearly demarcated object, attribute or obtained qualification, seems static and fixed in these discourses on linguistic integration, and coincides more with antiquated ideas of tying language to specific places rather than with Blommaert's (2010: 5) globalized concept of "language-in-motion [rather than language-in-place], with various spatiotemporal frames interacting with one another", or with Pennycook's (2011: 884) idea of language becoming "dislodged from its traditional places and functions", focusing rather on "mobile resources than immobile resources". More generally speaking, notions of an acclaimed "disinvention" of (national, clearly demarcated, ethnicized) languages (Makoni & Pennycook 2007) or of superdiversity (Arnaut & al. 2016) are not included in these discourses.[2]

---

[2] Elsewhere (Nassenstein, Hollington & Storch 2018: 18-19), colleagues have claimed that even these new approaches to language-in-motion, with their emphasis on a superdiverse ethnic and linguistic fabric of neighborhoods and cities, are more of a Northern (i.e., originating from the Global North) than a genuine Southern idea, where superdiversity (Vertovec 2007), or, in a modified view, *surmodernité* (Augé 1992), has been the prevailing normality for centuries.

While these ideas are emergent within academic discourses, and at times are only theoretical concepts that may be discussed by linguists but that are not very practical when conveyed and transferred to a broader public and brought before larger audiences (see, for instance, Wolff's 2018 critical remarks on the approaches of "languaging" and the fluidization of language in terms of their apparent lack of pragmatism on a metadiscursive level where languages remain as named entities), they still have the potential to inspire thinking and to contribute to the debate. Fluidity, multilingual messy performance, the abolition of a one speaker-one language model, the idea of language concepts as culturally-bound and as largely independent from hegemonic models developed in imperial or colonial contexts – all these are critical starting points for an application-oriented science that does not shy away from dialogue with hardened political and politicized positions. But how and where should we start, given the difficult and controversial self-reflection within linguistics, and particularly within African linguistics[3]? Maybe right here, with an issue of *The Mouth* on *"Language, Migration and Integration"*. The manifold perspectives on the topic become clear when studying the overview of chapters: the contributions collected in this issue are as diverse and multi-faceted as the problems they touch upon, and as the unanswered questions that the topic brings with it.

Integration means *exchange* and reflects historical cohabitation: linguistic integration can, in its most literal and pragmatic sense, be broken down into actual processes of contact, mutual influence, and the adoption of cultural and linguistic practices, e.g., as shown for Dutch contexts (Kossmann, this volume) and for the Guinean capital Conakry (Diallo, this volume). Integration is *applied contextual knowledge* of implementing language(s) and of languaging; the (meta)discourse on integration has its place in everyday language use in family contexts where multilingual policies often mirror – or oppose – public language policies and reflect institutional decisions on an individual level (Littig, this volume). As this impressive volume with diverse insights on the topic shows, integration also has a *creative side*: multilingual versatility, juggled repertoires and emergent ways of speaking are practiced by migrants for variable communicative purposes in new surroundings, e.g. by Cameroonians in Italy (Siebetcheu, this volume). In other contexts, linguistic integration reflects *bureaucracy*: migrants deal with bitter experiences and critical encounters in liminal communicative situations, e.g., violence experienced in German institutions (Jansen & Romero Gibu, this volume), migrants' interactions with mediators in police work (Kolloch, this volume), or their integration and experiences of educational disadvantages (Brizić & al., this volume), exclusion and discrimination.

Numerous questions often remain unanswered, whose answerability we see as being at least partially among the responsibilities of

---

[3] Advances in linguistics with a focus on critical (sociolinguistic) theory and epistemology, on (de)coloniality and race have in recent years acknowledged the discipline's own deficiencies and inadequacies in terms of lists and classifications of languages, especially in non-European contexts. In subfields and subdisciplines with a colonial or imperial history, e.g. African linguistics, a range of studies has highlighted the burden of the discipline's contradictory heritage. Only a few serious attempts have been made to remodel and rehabilitate the scope of linguistic studies. There are currently some clearly formulated tendencies but few incentives (see, e.g., Storch 2020) to pursue this endeavor with more rigor. For a broader overview of a critical decolonial approach in linguistics, see Deumert, Storch & Shepherd (2020).

linguists as engaged intellectuals in society (as long as they are included in these discourses). Some of the most pressing ones are:

1. Definitory problems: What actually is successful linguistic integration, considering the pragmatism of language users' efficient communication without full "proficiency" (see also Dombrowsky-Hahn & al. forthcoming)?

2. Who defines measures and regulations of success and on what basis, and who evaluates the results? Are these entirely external processes (by bureaucrats and administrative staff) or do they include self-reflexive judgments by migrants as agentive speakers (and communicators)?

3. What role needs to be adopted by language practitioners, teachers, intercultural coaches, linguists and scholars from neighboring or related disciplines to advocate fluid language use, debunk myths about monolingualism and ascribed multilingualism, and help to redefine expectations and regulations with insights and views from their lived experience or from the fields of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and linguistic anthropology?

4. How are languages (e)valu(at)ed? To what extent is the measured success of an "integrated" speaker of the German language dependent upon his/her individual migrant background, his/her appearance, cultural stereotypes etc. – and has thus more to do with the public's very individual positive or negative judgments of proficiency and cultural assimilation than with objective criteria, i.e. is thus merely based on personal stance?

The fourth question insinuates already that immigrants from different countries of origin and with diverse language repertoires do not all face the same challenges. In the summer of 2020, numerous print and online media reported that every fifth child of kindergarten age did not speak German at home (see, for instance, the Instagram posts by the intercultural radio program Cosmo, as part of the public service broadcasting ARD, Fig. 1). While this does not sound too bad, the problem is not necessarily about an individual child's multilingual repertoires or socialization practices or the use of another language than German at home, but that it hints at a widespread cultural bias and a fear of specific languages as not being conducive to linguistic integration. Taking a closer look at common perceptions and evaluations around immigrant language uttered in public, it becomes clear that not all languages are equally categorized and evaluated. The linguistic background of a child that speaks English with immigrant parents from the UK, a child of French parents or a Dutch-speaking child from the Dutch-German borderlands being schooled in Germany would be less likely to be considered a threat to "successful integration" than that of a child being socialized in Turkish, Arabic, Pashto or Tigrinya. Multilingualism is not always a profitable asset but can be used (politically) to confuse and to threaten, and to spark fear of alienation and potential language decay. Piller (2016: 4) outlines speakers' disadvantages in the context of linguistic diversity and migration and their lived socioeconomic inequalities:

[L]inguistic diversity, too, is a factor in inequality that we should strive to redress. Language is an important aspect of our social position and the way we use language – be it in speech, in writing, or in new media – can open or close doors. For sociolinguists this is, in fact, old news. [...] However, our understanding of the relationship between language and inequality in the highly linguistically diverse societies of the early twenty-first century is less systematic.

Piller's critical picture of the intersection between linguistic diversity and social justice in contemporary societies underlines the very divergent interpretations of "multilingual performance", and also those of "linguistic integration". To what extent is linguistic integration understood here as cultural and linguistic adaptation or assimilation, to what extent as self-abandonment, and to what extent merely as the acquisition of basic communicative skills for more efficient interactions? The complexity of the issues and the hardened attitudes involved bespeak the responsibility of linguistics to contribute to this debate, too.

Figure 1: Discussions around multilingualism and integration (Instagram, 2020)

https://www.instagram.com/p/CE19-HzKa9l/?igshid=1tqqsgxcv7nys (last accessed 27-01-2021)

While we outline certain "unfulfilled obligations" and encourage linguists (and other professionals dealing with language) to take action in specific fields, we also recognize the crucial ambivalence of their roles, which range from being strong advocates to controlling bodies. One considerably disputed engagement of linguists is their continued involvement in the process of determining the origins of asylum seekers, which has given rise to heated exchanges as to where engaged responsibility ends and bureaucratic instrumentalization starts. Reportedly, linguists who assisted in Belgian asylum procedures, processing applications by numerous Banyamulenge, a Congolese community from Eastern DR Congo with a long settlement history on what is today Congolese soil, repeatedly categorized them as "Rwandans" – due to the striking similarity of Kinyamulenge (which is actually a variety of the Kinyarwanda-Kirundi continuum) with the standard language used in Rwanda, and due to the lack of linguistic descriptions for Kinyamulenge which could have underpinned its status as a language associated with the DR Congo rather than Rwanda. Banyamulenge activists based in the Netherlands then started an information campaign in 2015 to spread awareness of this apparent misunderstanding. Similar problems arise when different varieties of Arabic are lumped together, when Hindi is confused with Urdu, or Dari with Farsi. This typically results from tying fluid and dynamic language use to na-

tion states and their clear boundaries, or from relying on outdated, deprecative or misleading information, especially on non-European languages. While language tests such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) may seem less extreme than the Banyamulenge case described, they also contribute to a decision that determines speakers' administrative fate. All those involved therefore have to question their own positionality, impartiality and ethical standards.

Also, seldomly have those who are expected to "integrate" themselves actually the chance to voice their reactions and opinions – or share their narratives on language acquisition and integration. At times, it may even seem as if the linguistic integration of migrating individuals was more of a societal issue than of a personal biographical matter, or of a personal destiny. Here, we see societal responsibilities.

2. Theory and pragmatism: Where does the path of de-essentializing language lead to?

Critical multilingualism studies (Lüpke & Storch 2013, Blackledge & Creese 2010, Phipps 2019, the journal *Critical Multilingualism Studies*[4]), languaging debates and studies that deal with the fixity and fluidity of linguistic systems and with critical approaches to named and demarcated 'languages' (Otsuji & Pennycook 2009, Sabino 2018, Jaspers & Madsen 2019, to name but a few) have shown that an individual's languages are not always what they

---

[4] See [https://cms.arizona.edu] (accessed 15 November 2020). The journal has existed since 2012 and deals with various topics in the fields of "critical multilingualism". In a more recent piece, the editors-in-chief explain the focus on critical multilingualism as being based on the multilingual turn at the end of the 20th century and as motivated "in a large part by a desire to turn monolingual language ideologies on their head, what these and other articles appearing in CMS over the past seven years make clear is that multilingualism has served as a heuristic by which scholars, policy makers, educators and others could 'explain away the messy in communication, make it ownable, controllable, and tidy' (Hollington & Storch 2016, CMS 4:2, 2014: 3)" (Warner & Gramling 2019: 1-2).

seem. Conceptualizing 'multilingualism' is a complex task that cannot be reduced to simply viewing a person as having acquired numerous languages during their lifetime. Their use in interaction, their semiotics, ideas around register variation, and their being "part of a complex and densely woven fabric, with holes in it and changing colours and embroidery" (Lüpke & Storch 2013: 346), and ultimately the underlying language ideologies, all do matter. And, although it may be superfluous to mention it, the ways languages are expected to be mastered and employed often diverge from their actual usage, and the discrepancies between prescriptivism and descriptivism give rise to debates and heated exchanges on correct and incorrect realizations, which also include discussions on the necessity of de-essentializing language, and of freeing it from antiquated corsets, so to speak. Alison Phipps (2019: 1), engaged in integration work herself[5], writes, in her important recent work on "decolonising multilingualism", that

> [h]ow languages are learned and taught, the political economy of the organisation of language curricula and language policies favour the world's colonial and imperial languages – English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian, Portuguese and to a lesser extent Italian and German. Through specific conceptions of multilingualism and language pedagogy a raft of peacebuilding, interpreting, intercultural dialoguing policies have been attempted, largely serving Western democracies, but these have remained radically impervious to the languages which have not been part of the colonial projects. To be sure, there have been attempts to shore up local, community and indigenous languages, especially in some of these Western democracies [...].

As has already been tentatively addressed before, linguistic integration builds upon language policies that are (understandably) rooted in the concept of a nation state with one official language and specific recognized minority languages. The minority languages are acknowledged or listed according to numbers (of their speech community), and several languages (Turkish, Russian, Arabic, Kurdish etc.) seem to have a more prominent status on the national agenda than others, which also follows an apparent logic. However, the way in which language policy is woven around the issue of linguistic integration also has colonial and imperial traits, at least where African languages are concerned and when it comes to ways of teaching and learning languages. In the Global South (and beyond), many speakers acquire languages in more informal ways, which diverge from European models of more formalized language acquisition in language schools, adult education centers, or as part of integration courses – with a pragmatist view of 'language' that includes the use of creative multilingual and translingual practices and multimodal language use.

Furthermore, the theoretical idea that language is something that is often unbounded, that is no longer tied to a specific territory and needs to be de-essentialized, or more critically, even to be "disinvented" (Makoni & Pennycook 2007), is not very useful for bureaucrats in registration offices. Therefore the question arises: What is potential usage-based

---

[5] Alison Phipps has been serving as the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow since 2017. See [https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/unesco/] (last accessed 15 November 2020).

knowledge that may serve as key orientational information derived from these theoretical notions on alternative approaches to 'language' in everyday office life? What are the practical implications and advantages of a theoretical redirection of integration for migrants in bureaucratic contexts?

To us it seems that the concept of linguistic integration reflects the difficulties in bringing together theoretical debates and insights from (socio-)linguistics and the practical concerns of those dealing with more "applied" issues. The latter group covers a broad variety of stakeholders indeed, ranging from academics in applied linguistics to language practitioners, officials, educators, politicians, service providers and – last but not least – those who navigate between different language ecologies: migrants, refugees, asylum seekers. To many of them the theoretical rejection of normative notions concerning language, language practices and linguistic identities may appear to be of little practical use. Yet it would be precipitate to discard the far-reaching theoretical suggestions that seem so contrary to lay understandings of language-related phenomena as largely irrelevant to the wider public. First of all, each and every individual aspect that is scrutinized in the debates among critical multilingualism scholars is found in everyday conversations on language-related needs and limitations with regard to migration. We believe it is safe to state that de-essentializing ideas about language not only characterizes theoretical thinking, but is actually what drives the constant popular discourse on language and migration. The much-debated significance of linguistic integration illustrates this aptly. The concept of "linguistic integration" epitomizes how limited essentializing ideas about language are, both

in expert and lay understandings. It connects both. What makes it such a powerful discursive theme and tool is that its meaning is made up of different components. Each of these on their own is complicated or even controversial, but as a compound concept, linguistic integration seems to be logical, self-explanatory and significant to many, irrespective of the fact that they may ultimately have rather different ideas of what it actually means.

Integration in the context of migration and international mobility is clearly a controversial concept. It is inherent to all contested categories that they cannot be measured in a straightforward way. Since our understandings of what integration means differ, any potential indicator that may appear useful and reliable in certain regards will turn out to be of little value in others. Zooming in on *linguistic* integration may suggest that we are dealing with a more specific concept implying a higher chance of coming to grips with features that necessarily characterize this particular type of integration. Be careful though:

First of all, linguistic integration is not necessarily a "sub-set" of possible (kinds of) integration. Rather than specifying integration, and thereby somehow apparently reducing the complexity of that which needs to be taken into consideration, adding the modifier "linguistic" makes matters more complicated. Intersecting two complex concepts ("all things linguistic" and "all that relates to integration") does not reduce the task at hand to a more manageable or straightforward one.

We should not commit the mistake of specifying the concept (here: "linguistic") in a way that would lead to an overestimation of language as a relevant factor in integration. This particular specification carries the tacit

assumption that once one masters the linguistic challenges in international mobility and migration, the rest will automatically follow suit.

By placing so much emphasis on the alleged linguistic prerequisites for integration, language learning takes center stage. As such, this is certainly a useful approach. It is hard to imagine any kind or degree of integration without communication across what are conventionally understood as language boundaries on a fairly common and everyday basis. And this will require some language-oriented practices of adjustment to an unfamiliar linguistic environment. Language learning is part of that process, but a narrow understanding of learning a new language fails to capture the complexity of linguistic integration. We may easily end up reducing language-related well-being in a new environment to proficiency in the host society's dominant language.

With these thoughts in mind as a cautionary measure, we may now perhaps proceed to wonder about how to study integration, and in particular linguistic integration.

3. Methods and constraints: How to carry out adequate research on integration?

When considering both the unfulfilled obligations and the responsibilities of linguists in the field of linguistic integration (Section 1), as well as the underlying theoretical notions and the difficulties of realizing them, we cannot help but ask how we should research linguistic integration and operationalize methods. We see a potential roadmap in turning away from mere measuring of learning "success", good proficiency and mastery in a foreign language toward learners' language biographies.

In recent years, language biographies have gained increasing popularity in socio-linguistics and linguistic anthropology as a more holistic way of comprehending an individual speaker and learner's trajectory as a journey, during which very different linguistic resources may be acquired in diverse contexts and under differing circumstances. This leads to a repertoire directly shaped by biographical traits, and also explains learning strategies, peculiarities in a person's acquisition patterns and, for instance, a person's experience with formalized language learning in a classroom atmosphere. These biographies have, among others, been researched by Franceschini & Miecznikowski (2004); methods have been outlined by Busch (2016); and the approach has also been combined with other more multi-modal methods (Busch 2018, and others). These methods are based on qualitative interviews that unfold speakers' biographies and reveal the different contexts of language acquisition processes as lived experience.

However, it must be pointed out that we do not only want to document the language learning of the individual as a cognitive challenge, coupled with the corresponding personal biographical experience. Rather, we express the assumption that we are also dealing with collective, culturally-mediated experiences and practices of communities. This is where the personal narratives of migrants come into play, which can pave the way for more suitable methods. Migrants' narratives, or their "small stories", have been at the center of interest of scholars such as Ana de Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou for some years now. Georgakopoulou (2007, etc.) researches "small stories" in order to understand the connection between telling identities and social identities,

based on very subjective autobiographical voices in shorter recordings, reflecting everyday interactional contexts. De Fina (2003, etc.) focuses on identity constructions in narratives in immigrant discourse, a direction that we also suggest following in the context of linguistic integration. She writes:

> [L]anguage, and in particular narrative, displays its power to voice experiences, to bring about shared understandings of life events, to shape and transform individual and collective realities. [....] The focus of the analysis is on the connections between the local expression of identities in narrative discourse and the social processes that surround migration. (de Fina 2003: 1)

De Fina suggests that these larger social processes around migration are more easily approached from very personal accounts and that stories and memories are much more than only being narrated subjective experience but that they can also make outsiders understand "aspects of the representation of the self [of a migrant] that are not apparent through statistics, questionnaire or sample interview" (p.4). De Fina argues that "narrative discourse is particularly illuminating of ways in which immigrants represent the migration process and themselves in it" (p.5). This is what we suggest for the practical implementation of policies in academia relating to linguistic integration.[6]

The conceptual cornerstone of any research concerning linguistic integration will then have to take into account certain crucial points. In the first two sections of this concise commentary, we emphasized one particular theoretical change which has affected the fields of multilingualism studies, language and superdiversity, and the linguistics of migration and mobility very significantly: the increased awareness that it is necessary to de-essentialize notions of language.

That this does not just result from a post-structuralist desire to indulge in deconstructing anything beyond recognition is made evident by the discursive success of the concept of "linguistic integration". The paraphrases given at the beginning of our short text illustrate diverse stances regarding the usefulness and feasibility of linguistic integration. Diverse as they are, they hinge on particular understandings of integration, and on assumptions about what makes integration successful.[7] If linguistic integration is at stake (both as a social process to be achieved and as a concept whose academic usefulness is to be shown), we need to understand what causes linguistic integration to be perceived as being successful or not, both from the angle of migrants and from that of the matrix society.

Why may language biographies, interviews and migrants' narratives be necessary or useful techniques leading toward a more satisfactory linguistic integration? Language learning can be understood as a collective cultural practice, rather than as only a cognitive task on an individual basis. This hypothesis implies quite significant consequences – particularly for the (overgeneralizing) assumption that

---

[6] We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for useful comments on the topic, suggesting this both for academic contexts and also popular media.

[7] As pointed out by one reviewer, the problem lies in the disappreciation of cultural and linguistic multifacetedness. (S)he therefore suggests for the matrix society to put efforts in overcoming linguaphobia and aiming to integrate itself actively in a "new" emerging society as well. We are grateful for this constructive comment.

cultural communities act and react differently when confronted with the task of re-orienting linguistic competence, including the learning process of a new language. At the heart of considerations about language learning must therefore be the question of how to go beyond didactic, contrastive-linguistic, error-testing investigation (which sees language learning as a cognitive challenge) to include cultural patterns, cultural experience and different responses to the need to learn. Here we propose to include not only biographies but also narratives. Although closely related in nature, these are distinct genres (and biographies undoubtedly contain narrative components).

The techniques outlined so far emphasize interviews and narratives. These imply the involvement of a researcher in a dialogue with an individual whose experience of linguistic integration and language learning is documented through narrated self-report and reflection. We would like to "up-scale", recognize certain patterns of behavior, and – very importantly – we want to understand how (ideally successful) linguistic integration happens. We can safely assume that it will require communicative competence, but we can only observe this outside 1:1 dialogues. The obvious choice is to rely on ethnographic techniques and (participant) observation in addition to interviewing. To the extent that this is possible, this is what we suggest implementing as a primary methodology in the field of linguistic integration. One significant limitation is that language behavior is prone to be particularly easily affected by the very presence of a researcher, often an outsider,

and hardly ever a usual participant in the kind of communicative and learning situations to be observed. Moreover, language learning differs from other cultural techniques or routine tasks that "cultural insiders" are well versed in. It is incremental but slow. It is a protracted and intermittent process, haphazard as to how it unfolds over time. If we want to move from the rich and high resolution (potentially longitudinal) description of individual cases to getting a hunch about collective understandings of language behavior, language ideologies, and their impact on language learning, we still need additional ways to approach what we are after.

However, we would also like to point out that ultimately, in addition to the very dialogical interview methods (i.e., a researcher interviews the informant, who then provides biographical and perhaps culture-specific narrative), communication as an everyday social phenomenon should be accompanied by methods of participant observation, in the best ethnographic manner.[8] Maybe more performative and participatory approaches (rather than participant observation) to research on linguistic integration could produce more promising results that are beneficial for both sides? The degree of determination of one Kurdish-speaking woman's daughter in school (Brizić & al., this volume), her loud voice, might point us in that direction; we can glean from a voice like hers (both in terms of loudness and in terms of what this voice claims, what it states that it is entitled to) that participation could work. Equally, the impressive multilingual repertoire of the Nigerian student and

---

[8] But here, too, of course, we deal with certain limits: The paradox, or dilemma, of the observer also becomes apparent here, and language learning processes in real time are by no means suitable for observation. Real "participatory" approaches can help. This may include participation in classrooms, in language activist programs, and in many other contexts – rather than relying on longitudinal observation.

his effortless juggling of different languages, or rather his translanguaging, could, when approached from a more participatory approach, be seen as potential rather than as an obstacle to learning German, allowing for more openness in the classroom. The fairly conscious effort at family language policies as outlined in Littig's contribution (this volume) also goes in a similar direction. But what about the softer voices, those voices whose impact is not so much via extrovert loudness, but through introvert subtlety? For instance, our experience with Berber speakers from North Africa is strangely ambivalent: on the one hand, there is not a small degree of political awareness, a sense of cultural community, of belonging rooted in a shared language (notwithstanding the significant diversity among them), and a notable public activism. At the same time, our research experience shows that intricate divisions and fragmentations are part of speakers' identity-building, which therefore confront outsiders with a problem of evaluating language ideologies appropriately. Migrants' narratives, stemming from speakers of one language from the same area, may not all be uniform and may reveal salient differences. Hasty overgeneralizations are therefore as out of place as listening to manifold single voices. We must therefore advocate for careful and speaker-oriented directions, taking into account language users' language ideologies and their knowledge beyond epistemologies shaped by outsiders – but at the same time we emphasize that researchers need to proceed pragmatically and in goal-oriented ways. Treading lightly and employing specific care in including emic perspectives of speakers and communities is therefore more important than ever.

In the long run, integration policies will show which methods and innovations lead to more appropriate teaching and learning modalities. What is certain is that linguistics has a place in all this (and it would be absurd if this were not considered when remodeling current concepts of classes, tests and policies), and the insights we are currently gaining with regard to the complexities of implementing linguistic integration will inspire new research and results in linguistics, too. Questioning our own role in processes of linguistic integration may be a first, long overdue step toward the major road works that lie ahead.

References

Alim, H. Samy, John R. Rickford & Arnetha Ball (eds.). 2016. *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Augé, Marc. 1992. *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité.* Paris: Le Seuil.

Arnaut, Karel, Jan Blommaert, Ben Rampton & Massimiliano Spotti (eds.). 2016. *Language and Superdiversity.* New York & London: Routledge.

Blackledge, Adrian & Angela Creese. 2010. *Multilingualism: A Critical Perspective.* New York: Bloomsbury.

Blommaert, Jan. 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Busch, Brigitta. 2016. Methodology in biographical approaches in applied linguistics. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 187. [https://heteroglossia.net/fileadmin/user_upload/publication/ WP187_Busch_2016._Methodology_in_biograp.pdf] (accessed 10 November 2020).

Busch, Brigitta. 2018. The language portrait in multilingualism research: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Working Papers in Urban Languages & Literacies* 236. https://www.academia.edu/35988562/WP236_Busch_2018_The_language_portrait_in_multilingualism_research_Theoretical_and_method-ological_considerations (accessed 10 November 2020).

De Fina, Anna. 2003. *Identity in Narrative: A Study of Immigrant Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Deumert, Ana, Anne Storch & Nick Shepherd (eds.). 2020. *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics: Knowledges and Epistemes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dombrowsky-Hahn, Klaudia, Axel Fanego Palat, Sabine Littig & Nico Nassenstein. forthcoming. Jenseits des Referenzrahmens: Erfahrungen afrikanischer Migrant*innen mit sprachlicher Integration im Rhein-Main-Gebiet. In Jürgen Erfurt & Peter Reimer (eds.), *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie (OBST) 98. Afrikanische Sprachen in Europa – Langues africaines en Europe*.

Esser, Hartmut. 2006. Migration, language and integration. *AKI Research Review* 4. Berlin: Social Science Research Center, Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration. http//www.wzb.eu/zkd/aki/files/aki_research_review_4 (accessed 17 October 2020).

Franceschini, Rita & Johanna Miecznikowski. 2004. Wie bin ich zu meinen verschiedenen Sprachen gekommen? In Rita Franceschini & Johanna Miecznikowski (eds.), *Leben mit mehreren Sprachen, vivre avec plusieures langues. Sprachbiographien, biographies langagières*, pp. vii-xxi. Bern: Peter Lang.

García, Ofelia. 2017. Problematizing linguistic integration of migrants: The role of translanguaging and language teachers. In Jean-Claude Beacco, Hans-Jürgen Krumm, David Little, Philia Thalgott – on behalf of Council of Europe (eds.), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants*, pp. 11-26. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Georgakopoulou, Alexandra. 2007. *Small Stories, Interaction and Identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Jaspers, Jürgen & Lian Malai Madsen (eds.). 2019. *Critical Perspectives on Linguistic Fixity and Fluidity: Languagised Lives*. London & New York: Routledge.

Lüpke, Friederike & Anne Storch. 2013. *Repertoires and Choices in African Languages*. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton.

Makoni, Sinfree & Alastair Pennycook. 2007. Disinventing and reconstituting languages. In Sinfree Makoni & Alastair Pennycook (eds.), *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, pp. 1-41. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Nassenstein, Nico, Andrea Hollington & Anne Storch. 2018. Disinventing and demystifying youth language: Critical perspectives. *The Mouth* 3: 9-27.

Otsuji, Emi & Alastair Pennycook. 2009. Metrolingualism: Fixity, fluidity and language in flux. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 7.3: 240-254.

Pennycook, Alastair. 2011. The sociolinguistics of globalization (review). *Language* 87.4: 884-887. Phipps, Alison. 2019. *Decolonising Multilingualism: Struggles to Decreate.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Piller, Ingrid. 2016. *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice. An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rosa, Jonathan. 2018. *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Learning of Latinidad.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sabino, Robin. 2018. *Languaging without Languages. Beyond* metro-, multi-, poly-, pluri- *and* translanguaging. Leiden: Brill.

Storch, Anne. 2020. Accomplished works and facts: The family tree project of Africanistics. In Ana Deumert, Anne Storch & Nick Shepherd (eds.), *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics: Knowledges and Epistemes*, pp. 129-149. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vertovec, Steven. 2007. Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30.6: 1024-1054.

Warner, Chantelle & David Gramling. 2019. Introduction to the issue: Welcoming new editors-in-chief. *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 7.3: 1-6.

Wolff, H. Ekkehard. 2018. Multilingualism, translanguaging, and linguistic super-diversity: An Africanist's perspective on 'language'. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 27.2. Online version: https://www.njas.fi/njas/article/view/333/317 (last accessed 22 June 2020).

Zeit Online. 2019. Immer weniger Zuwanderer absolvieren erfolgreich Deutschtest. 12 April 2019. https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2019-04/integration-deutschkurs-fluechtlinge-bamf-einwanderer?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2F (last accessed 20 October 2020).