

A Study on Language Acculturation of Korean Descendants in Germany

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Abstract

In this study, language is discussed in the context of acculturation, within which the significance of language and bilingualism is explained. According to Berry's acculturation strategy, it is postulated that a classification can be drawn between four different types of language acculturation. This study inquires into how Korean descendants in Germany come to exhibit what types of language acculturation patterns they manifest. The research questions are 1) How do Korean descendants in Germany acculturate themselves to German society with regard to language? 2) To what extent does the knowledge of two languages have positive effects, and what determinants are important in language integration? This study is conducted of the conditions for language integration according to different factors. Binary logistic regression is applied, using language integration as the dependent variable. Language integration is significantly predicted by all variables, including: mother's reason for immigration; parents' place of origin; gender; mother's level of education.

Keywords: acculturation; integration; bilingualism; Korean descendants

1. Introduction

Language is simultaneously an intellectual resource whose possession or lack by individuals is highly significant in determining the structure of any given society. This is due to the fact that disparities across individuals with regard to language ability exercise a substantial effect upon educational and employment opportunities. The knowledge of a second (host) language involves not only all aspects of language skills, but also immigrants' application in public or private situations. The extent to which the descendants of immigrants hold full nationality in their host country is the crucial barometer of legal incorporation, and the degree to which they adopt the second language is one of the most powerful indicators of cultural and social incorporation (Penn and Lambert, 2009: 11).

Those with poor speaking competency in the second language do not enjoy much of a chance of making the acquaintance of natives, with contact being a prerequisite for intense relationships, friendships, love and marriage. Social relationships rarely exist for their own sake: instead, they represent social capital, which serves as the basis for obtaining useful information and receiving support in emergency situations, in turn facilitating access to other social spheres, such as the labour market, the educational and health systems, etc. (Plewnia, Albrecht and Rothe, 2012: 33). On the other hand, the first (origin) language plays a major role in the everyday lives of immigrants (Esser, 2006: 7-11). Recognizable effects of the first language embedded in social relationships exist (Esser, 2006: 55-56).

In this study, language is discussed in the context of acculturation, within which the significance of language and bilingualism is explained. According to Berry's acculturation strategy, it is postulated that a classification can be drawn between four different types of language acculturation. Proficiency and use of first and second language are generally regarded as key indicators of acculturation and are employed in most measures of acculturation in migration society (see e.g. Berry et al., 2006; Birman and Trickett, 2001).

This study inquires into how Korean descendants in Germany come to exhibit what types of language acculturation patterns they manifest. For this purpose, the following question rising is possible. How do Korean descendants in Germany acculturate themselves to German society with regard to language? To what extent does the knowledge of two languages have positive effects, and what determinants are important in integration?

II. Theoretical Perspectives and Advance Research

1. Defining Bilingualism and Multilingualism

There are many ways to narrowly define bilingualism and multilingualism that result in the emphasis of different aspects and perspectives. A very general definition is offered by Esser refers to proficiency in two languages, whether learned simultaneously or in succession (Esser, 2006: 47).

The case in which a second language can match or even surpass the first language is likewise discussed. The notion aired by Skutnabb-Kangas (1992: 48), that “definitions of majority and minority bilingualism as an educational goal differ significantly” holds particular relevance. Therefore, any practical attempt to apply a definition must consider the context of the situation, which is, in this study, immigration. The most popular interpretation relates to the high-level use of several languages, particularly the native language, in expressing identity through language and its related culture (Slawek, 2007: 11-14).

Accordingly, true bilinguals are typified by the ability to relate to two symbols for each object, thus enhancing their understanding and cognitive flexibility, supporting their ability to competently communicate in different languages (Portes and Schauffler, 1994: 651). Subsequent studies have generally supported their pioneering study; for example, an analysis of a national sample of high school students in the United States found a positive correlation between academic achievement and bilingualism among Hispanic youths (see Fernandez and Nielsen, 1986). Similarly, significant differences were discovered to exist between the academic performance of true bilinguals and others (defined by the local school system as possessing fluency in English) (see Rumbaut and Ima, 1988).

Given the current trend of globalisation and multiculturalism, it is commonly assumed that the previous pattern of linguistic assimilation, evident among the descendants of the European immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is no longer valid. Bi- or multilingual skills are significant and empirically more widespread than monolingual assimilation (Esser, 2006: 15). Current language assimilation patterns offer distinctions from those of the early twentieth century, but they do not appear to pose a threat to the second language as the language cementing the nation and its culture. In short, bilingualism has become increasingly widespread in the modern era.

2. The Important Issues on Language Acculturation

Based upon Berry's acculturation theory, language acculturation is classified into four different types. Accordingly, differences in linguistic aspects can be classified as ‘language marginalisation’ (limited bilingualism), ‘language separation’ (monolingual separation), ‘language assimilation’ (monolingual assimilation) and ‘language integration’ (competent bilingualism). Given the acquisition of the second language, the language shift from the first language occurs almost automatically, thus causing significant problems when language integration is involved (see e.g. Bean and Stevens, 2003: 166; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996: 230). An explanation of language integration beyond the language assimilation of second language acquisition relates to the question of the acquisition or maintenance of the first language (Esser, 2006: 47). For the immigrants' descendants, learning the first language is often voluntary and the decision whether to learn is influenced primarily by attitudes toward their ethnic culture (see e.g. Phinney et al., 2006).

Immigration conditions are considered especially important, as it is assumed that the development of language integration is largely influenced by the time of entry into the host country (see Esser, 2006; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Portes and Schauffler, 1994). A low entry age enables potential contact with the second language environment (Esser, 2006: 56-58), while a higher entry age and a stronger tendency for first language retention combine to lower the tendency for first language shift (see Bean and Stevens, 2003; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996).

Parents of highly socio-economic status might wish to transmit the first language, and, in order to achieve this goal, they make available a greater number of opportunities for their children to enter the cultural mainstream. Therefore it is to be expected that the family's socio-economic status should exert a positive effect upon second language proficiency, along with an insignificant impact upon first language retention (Portes and Schauffler, 1994: 12-13).

The likelihood of transition from second language incompetence to language assimilation decreases with increasing ethnic concentration, whereas the likelihood of transition to language integration increases with the presence of first language friends (Esser, 2006: 58).

On the other hand, assuming that immigrants already possess a certain competence in their first language, the extent to which language integration must be explained is reduced to the problem of detailing the process of second language acquisition (Esser, 2006: 47).

In the case of the United States, the second generation, which was born and raised in the United States, is highly likely to speak English proficiently, with the exception of second generation Hispanic children (see Alba, 2004). The trend of language assimilation is notably higher among a few Asian groups, typically those hailing from countries where English is either an official language or widely spoken (Alba, 2004).

Based on self-assessments of German language competence, several studies report a high level of proficiency in German for the descendants of immigrants, at least for oral communities (Heckmann and Worbs, 2001; Weiss and Trebbe, 2001; Seifert, 2000). On the other hand, the use of origin languages is significantly higher among Turks compared to natives of the former Yugoslavia (Penn and Lambert, 2009: 12).

III. Empirical Results

For this research question, first of all Using SOEP data collected between 1984 and 2010, changes in the German proficiency of immigrants over time are examined; furthermore, the language acculturation of immigrants in Germany is investigated. Regarding this language acculturation of Korean descendants in Germany, the tripartite model of individual factors, structural factors and ethnic communities is considered for the analysis. After presenting this result, estimates are derived from a binary logistic regression, with language integration serving as the dependent variable. Conversely, differences between individuals with respect to their level of language acculturation are calculated.

1. The Increase of German Language Ability of Immigrants

Before discussing the language acculturation of the Korean descendants, however, a synoptic view of the language acculturation patterns of immigrants in Germany (i.e. undifferentiated by ethnic group) is undertaken. Has the ability of the average immigrant to speak German changed over time? Insight into the changing level of ability of immigrants to speak German over time can be gleaned from an examination of the SOEP conducted in 1984, 1997, 2005, and 2010.

Table 1: German Language Ability (Speaking=(S), Writing=(W)) of Immigrants between 1984 and 2010, in %

	1984		1997		2005		2010	
	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
Not at all	4.4	29.1	1.5	13.1	1.7	12.3	0.8	3.7
Hardly	18.0	24.8	11.1	18.9	10.4	17.1	4.9	10.0
Some what well	34.5	22.1	26.5	23.6	21.0	21.3	14.7	18.9
Very well	28.7	14.7	36.1	25.5	32.0	23.7	29.6	26.0
N	3,048	3,034	2,468	2,466	1,552	1,546	1,732	1,732

Source: SOEP, survey waves of 1984, 1997, 2005, 2010, own calculations

Table 1 shows the German language ability of immigrants in the time period between 1984 and 2010. Language ability varies with regard to both speaking and writing. The question posed was designed to measure respondents' personal judgements of their German speaking and writing skills. Responses were coded into a five point scale, ranging from 'not at all' to 'very well'. The information was subdivided into the categories 'speaking' and 'writing'. From the data, it can be seen that the general level of fluency of the immigrant population has advanced over time.

Differences in German language levels between 1984 and 2010 were pronounced, with 49.9% of the respondents answering 'very well' to the item measuring speaking ability in 2010, compared with only 14.3% in 1984. It must be noted, however, that those with an immigrant background in Germany tend to possess better speaking than writing skills. Since 1984, the percentage of those born or arriving in Germany at a young age has gradually increased; at the same time, there has been a reduction in the number of immigrants coming to Germany as adults. Intuitively, one would expect that this increase in the number of immigrants arriving in Germany at a young age should exert a positive influence upon German language acquisition.

More concretely, an excessively high entry age would seem to be ruled out here, largely because the requisite second language acquisition appears unlikely to occur.

Table 2: German Language Ability (Speaking=(S), Writing= (W)) of Those Arriving before Having Reached Age 10 between 1984 and 2010, in %

	1984		1997		2005		2010	
	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
Not at all	0	1.0	0	1.1	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.1
Hardly	1.3	6.2	1.1	5.5	0.6	3.6	0.1	0.7
Some what well	11.0	19.5	8.8	15.5	4.5	11.8	2.0	4.9
Very well	38.6	35.7	37.8	36.7	32.9	36.7	15.8	20.1
N	49.0	37.7	52.2	41.2	61.7	47.3	81.9	74.1
	308	308	362	362	337	338	698	700

Source: SOEP, survey waves of 1984, 1997, 2005, 2010, own calculations

Table 2 shows the German ability of those born or arriving in Germany before the age of ten. Compared with Table 1, a marked decrease can be noted between 1984 and 2010. In 1984, the percentage of individuals who identified themselves as being ‘well’ or ‘very well’ fluent in German in terms of speaking skills was 87.6%, whereas in 2010 it reaches 97.7%; a difference thus persists, but is noticeably diminished. Therefore, the recent improvement in the German ability of immigrants can be attributed to the trend towards lower entry ages. The language ability of German immigrants who arrived at a young age is generally superior to that of their adult counterparts, which is also reflected in the fact that the second and third generations typically show an increased ability to learn German.

2. The Tendency of Language Acculturation

In the 2010 SOEP, respondents were asked to rate their ability in both German and their origin language on a scale ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘very well’. Figure 1 illustrates the language acculturation of immigrants aggregated by age, ranging from 18 to 39.

Figure 1: Language Acculturation (Speaking=(S), Writing=(W)) of Immigrants, Ages 18 To 39, In % (N(S)=767, N(W)=764

		German language	
		No	Yes
First language	o	Marginalisation	Assimilation
		S=0.7	S=22.9
	s	Separation	Integration
		S=9.3	S=67.1
	W=3.1	W=36.4	
	W=12.7	W=47.8	

Source: SOEP, survey wave of 2010, own calculations

1. Marginalisation: Immigrants who identify themselves as speaking and writing at levels ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘somewhat’ in both their first language and in German are classified as demonstrating marginalisation. With respect to speaking ability, 0.7% of immigrants can be thus classified; with respect to writing ability, this category contains 3.1% of all immigrants.
2. Separation: Immigrants who respond ‘well’ to ‘very well’ for their first language, but ‘not at all’ to ‘somewhat’ for German are classified as demonstrating separation. With respect to speaking ability, 9.3% of immigrants can be so classified as separation; with respect to writing ability, the percentage is 12.7%.
3. Assimilation: Immigrants who admit speaking and writing their first language in the range from ‘not at all’ to ‘somewhat’, but who feel that they speak and write German ‘well’ or ‘very well’ are classified as demonstrating assimilation. With respect to speaking ability, 22.9% of immigrants can be thus classified; the percentage with regard to writing ability is 36.4%.

4. Integration: Immigrants who self-identify as speaking and writing both languages ‘well’ or ‘very well’ are categorised as demonstrating integration. 67.1% of immigrants can be so be classified with regard to speaking ability, whereas the total for writing ability is 47.8%.

The speaking ability of immigrants is much higher in both language assimilation and integration (90.0%) than in either language marginalisation or separation (10.0%). In terms of writing skills, the same trend is discovered (language assimilation and integration: 84.2%; language marginalisation and separation: 15.8%). Writing skills are thus slightly less prevalent than speaking ability in both language assimilation and integration.

From Figure 1, it can be concluded that immigrants in Germany may be described primarily under the categories of language assimilation or integration, as their German fluency is, in general, much higher than their proficiency in their first language. Therefore, whether the pattern of language acculturation is integration or otherwise depends upon their ability level in their first language. The level of language proficiency in the group from 18 to 39 is, in general, quite high. This is to be expected; however, the SOEP questionnaire merely reflects personal judgements of respondents regarding their language ability. Due to this shortcoming in the SOEP design regarding the measurement of language ability, this study utilises the Goethe Institute language test as a benchmark. Compared with the SOEP questionnaire, the Goethe Institute language scale produces answers that tend to be more accurate, and, in order to achieve this aim, the scale is necessarily wider.

Thus, in order to test the language acculturation of Korean descendants, respondents were queried regarding their language levels in both German and Korean, using a hierarchical scale ranging from one through seven. The level descriptions are as follows:

- Level 1: I have no knowledge of German (Korean) language.
- Level 2: I can understand and use everyday expressions as well as simple sentences and phrases aimed at addressing specific needs.
- Level 3: I can understand the general context if the syntax is easy and regularly encountered at work, school, leisure, etc.
- Level 4: I can understand the main information from difficult texts of both concrete and abstract topics; I understand specific discussions in specialized fields.
- Level 5: I can understand a variety of demanding, longer texts and recognize implicit meaning.
- Level 6: I can understand practically everything that is easy to understand by reading and hearing.
- Level 7: German (Korean) is my mother tongue; I can understand it like it is my native language.

The key difference in determining language ability rests in the qualitative leap that occurs between levels four and five: level four pertains to understanding only the gist of a text: not every single word is comprehended. Higher language level is defined here as the range from five to seven; these levels are equated with first language ability. The language levels in the Goethe Institute language test contain a mixture of speaking and writing, yet the respondents are allowed to select only one answer. The SOEP measures the fields independently, and, as a result, in order to be able to make comparisons with the SOEP, it must be decided which language field to use. The detailed descriptions of the levels facilitate a more precise appraisal of one’s ability. In discussing language acculturation, the writing field in the SOEP data is employed in drawing comparisons to data from this study. Because the higher levels of the questionnaire used in this study are focused on textual understanding, and due to the fact that, in the SOEP data, speaking ability is more widely displayed than writing ability, writing ability is held to be the better predictor of accurate language ability.

1. Marginalisation: Respondents in this study identifying themselves as having language ability at levels one to four in both German and Korean are classified as demonstrating marginalisation.
2. Separation: Individuals whose responses range from five to seven for Korean, but only from one to four for German are classified as demonstrating separation.
3. Assimilation: Individuals who answer that their Korean language ability is in the range of one to four, but who claim to possess German language ability in the range of five to seven are classified as demonstrating assimilation.
4. Integration: Respondents who self-identify as having language ability at levels five to seven in both German and Korean are classified as demonstrating integration.

Figure 2: Language Acculturation of Korean Descendants, in%(N=348)

		German language	
		No	Yes
First language	No	Marginalisation 1.5	Assimilation 55.9
	Yes	Separation 8.0	Integration 34.6

Figure 2 shows the language acculturation of Korean descendants in the sample. 55.9% of these individuals can be predominantly characterised by assimilation. Comparing this figure with the SOEP data(see Figure 1), it is clear that this figure is higher than for other ethnic groups(36.4%). On the other hand, the percentage of Korean descendants exhibiting language integration is 34.6%, while a mere 9.5% of the individuals in the sample can be classified as displaying either language marginalisation or separation. Although Asians are predominantly characterized by language assimilation in the United States (Esser, 2006; Alba, 2004), language integration is relatively high in Germany. However, the language integration of Korean descendants (34.6%) is lower than that of other immigrants (47.8%). One reason for this difference can be the low proficiency of Korean descendants in their first language relative to the language proficiency of other ethnic groups in their respective native tongues. Another possible explanation can be that the disparity is an artifact of the methodology employed here, whose limitations are described above. It should be noted that, in the following analysis, the marginalisation and separation classifications are combined due to their relatively small proportions.

3. Korean Communities and Language Acculturation

It is assumed that higher ethnic community participation during childhood should positively influence the type of language acculturation manifested.

34.8% of those who did not participate in Korean language courses are classified as demonstrating integration. On the other hand, 62.3% of Korean descendants who participated in Korean language schools during childhood can be classified as displaying assimilation, compared with 34.5% who exhibit language integration. Also of note is the exceptionally low combined total for marginalisation and separation within that group (3.2%). Even though the difference between language acculturation and participation in Korean language schools is very highly significant(CV=0.22), the nearly identical percentages for participation and non-participation indicate that the initial assumption, i.e. that Koreans who take language courses should be more apt to demonstrate integration as their acculturation pattern, must be rejected.

This result can be explained by the fact that Korean language classes are held only once a week and that most Korean schools overseas are established voluntarily by Koreans, as the Korean government does not provide adequate funding to establish schools.

The government provides support for only a portion of the operating costs, with an average subsidy totaling approximately US\$150 pro school, occurring under the auspices of the Overseas Koreans Foundation. In reality, such schools keep their doors open through the sacrifice of Koreans, and operate without professionally trained teachers and sufficient public space (Mok, 2010: 307).

Table 3: Language acculturation of Korean descendants by community participation during childhood, ages 18 to 39, in %

		Language acculturation				
		N	M+S	A	I	
Participation in Korean language schools	Disagree	89	22.5	42.7	34.8	$\chi^2=31.6$
	Neutral	11	18.2	45.5	36.4	CV=0.22
	Agree	220	3.2	62.3	34.5	p<0.001
Participation in Korean churches	Disagree	72	15.3	59.7	25.0	$\chi^2=11.2$
	Neutral	18	22.2	44.4	33.3	CV=0.13
	Agree	229	6.6	55.0	38.4	p<0.05

Thus, it is expected that the Korean language schools at that time were not effective in improving the acquisition of the Korean language among the community's youth, and it is assumed that the Korean descendants who attended such language schools should show a lack of command of the Korean language. Therefore, despite hopes to the contrary, attending a Korean language school is not supposed have produced effective results for Korean descendants with regard to their ability to converse or write in Korean.

With regard to Korean churches, 25.0% of Korean descendants indicating a lack of participation in Korean churches display integration, whereas 59.7% display assimilation. On the other hand, 38.4% of all Korean descendants who acknowledge having participated in Korean churches as a youth demonstrate integration as their type of language acculturation, while 55.0% show assimilation. The difference between language acculturation and participation in Korean church is significant, yet the strength of association is weak (CV=0.13).

4. Effects on Language Integration

In order to approach the question as to how language integration appears in individuals, the impact of various characteristics, some potentially restrictive, upon language integration is analysed. The dependent variable is 'language integration'; the estimates are derived from four binary logistic regression models.

Table 4: Effects on Language Integration, Logistic Regression Coefficients, Ages 18 To 39 (N=309)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Mother : non-guest worker	1.670***	1.595***	1.546***	1.288***
German-Korean		-1.682***	-1.760***	-1.641***
Female			.596*	.621*
Mother: 'Lower education'				-.639*
Constant	-3.280	-1.250	-1.964	-.744
Nagelkerke-R ²	.178	.244	.262	.279

Table 4 presents the results from four binary logistic regression comparing 'language integration' and 'not language integration', which encompasses the other forms of language acculturation. As a point of comparison, in the first model, only the effect of the mother's reason for immigration is examined. The estimate reveals that Korean descendants whose mothers arrived in Germany outside the context of guest worker programs are more likely to exhibit language integration. This effect weakens in the next models. A further finding is that children of German-Korean families are far less likely than those whose parents are both Korean to demonstrate language integration, yet this is of minor relevance in the overall empirical account. In model 3, females are found to be more likely to be of the language integration type than males, and the effect of the mother's reason for immigration is diminished, while, on the contrary, the effect of the parents' origin is strengthened. In Model 4, the level of education of the mother is taken into account. Korean descendants whose mothers do not possess university degrees are less likely to exhibit language integration. In this final model, the other effects weaken further, with the exception of gender. All effects in the model prove statistically significant, however, with the model explaining 28% of the variance.

Language integration is significantly predicted by all variables, including: mother's reason for immigration; parents' place of origin; gender; mother's level of education. Viewed in composite, similar aspects are relevant in both the perception and evaluation stages. The individual factors and the socio-economic status of the mother prove to be of central importance for the emergence of language integration.

Remarkably, the effects of the mother's reason for immigrating and the parents' countries of origin persist in different models. The reason the mother immigrated in particular exerts an especially very strong impact at the perception and evaluation stages.

To sum up, the opinions of well-educated parents appear to have gradually changed over time; with integration increasingly being viewed as more desirable and necessary than assimilation. It is expected that mothers with higher levels of education teach their children their first (origin) language, following a similar pattern to that of the Korean language schools established across Germany after 1970. In relation to the immigration reason of the parents, it is expected that those who arrived in Germany as guest workers were unable to spend adequate time with their children, focusing instead on eking out a living in Germany while remitting funds to their family in Korea. Moreover, their first priority was to adapt to the host society; accordingly, the goal of maintaining Korean culture and language was not considered especially important, and such thinking could be expected to have influenced their children. In the case of educational achievement, even children whose parents arrived in Germany as guest workers achieve high marks in school. Korean immigrants who immigrated during the period in which guest worker programmes existed considered educational achievement to be of vital importance for upward social mobility; therefore, learning Korean must be held conceptually separate from educational achievement in general.

IV. Conclusion

Immigrants pursue social mobility or assimilate into host society primarily by means of educational achievement. In order to effectuate such upward social mobility into host society, second language acquisition is usually necessary. However, in well-formed ethnic communities, e.g. Chinatowns in the United States, it is possible for members of those ethnic groups to live with virtually no knowledge of the host country language. However, to obtain employment in the host society, or to study at a state educational institution, second language ability is required. Here a question arises with regard to first language retention and second language acquisition. Proficiency and use of the first and second languages are generally regarded as key indicators of acculturation and are used in most measures of acculturation in migration society (see e.g. Phinney et al., 2006; Birman and Trickett, 2001). Accordingly, language acculturation is classified within a four-part schema divided into marginalisation, separation, assimilation, and integration. Korean descendants in Germany tend to manifest either language assimilation (55.9%) or integration (34.6%). This means that most Korean descendants speak German at native-speaker level, with the presence of language integration (German and Korean bilingual) being determined by their Korean proficiency. It should be noted that the rate of language integration within the sample is lower than comparable figures for other ethnic groups.

More surprisingly, Korean language schools are proven unable to fulfil the role of a facilitator of Korean language acquisition among Korean descendants. Korean descendants who attended Korean language schools show a pattern of assimilation that does not differ significantly from the other group. If the Korean government wishes to increase first language retention among Korean descendants, it must invest more in Korean language schools overseas: language integration simply does not occur automatically.

This study is conducted of the conditions for language integration according to different factors. Binary logistic regression is applied, using language integration as the dependent variable. Language integration is significantly predicted by all variables, including: mother's reason for immigration; parents' place of origin; gender; mother's level of education. All things considered, similar aspects are relevant in both the perception and evaluation stages. The individual factors and, especially, the socio-economic status of the mother are of particular importance for the accurate prediction of language acculturation type. Remarkably, the effects of the mother's reason for immigration and the parents' countries of origin persisted in different models. The mother's reason for immigration exert an especially strong impact at the perception and evaluation stages.

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