Cultural and linguistic integration from the network perspective

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Introduction

Migration can be seen as a productive process facilitating cultural and linguistic contact. When settling in a new country, migrants bring with them socio-cultural skills and their native language, and interweave them with the host country culture and language on a personal as well as a larger societal level. In a "cultural mosaic" that represents a multicultural and multilingual society, each immigrant and their experiences contributes a small piece to the larger structure (Day, 2018; Palmer, 1976). *Acculturation*—changes in attitude, values and identity—and *enculturation*—the process of socialization to and maintenance of the norms of a culture (Kim & Alamilla, 2007)—work in tandem to enable people to learn and adapt to their host country, and language learning is generally seen as one of the most crucial factors for successful integration (Seong, 2011).

Seunghun Lee and Machi Niiya in their study "Migrant oriented Japanese language programs in Tokyo" detail the complex relationship between host country expectations and immigrant realities regarding language learning programs in Japan. While both sides ultimately have the same goal—immigrants' acquisition of Japanese—how to achieve that result depends on various responsibilities on both sides: advertising the programs in a language that most immigrants can navigate, but also considering the economic and social opportunities afforded by the target group. Motivation to take language classes can be low in some immigrant groups, but individuals need to recognize the need to acquire Japanese and prioritize language learning to some degree.

In a similar vein, the article by Amy Hutchinson, "Collaborative witnessing: A North Korean's immigration experience in South Korea" shows that difficulties with cultural and linguistic integration can occur even when cultural distance and linguistic differences are relatively minor. The Korean peninsula shares a common history and language. However, regional variations have

developed in the past, and North Korean migrants to South Korea face cultural barriers and linguistic challenges in their everyday lives.

As both articles illustrate, the establishment of cultural and linguistic forms of contact with the host country and its people are of paramount importance for migrants trying to adapt and accommodate to their new surroundings. While these contacts may be sources of problems or even conflicts at first, over time migrants stand to gain immensely by immersing themselves in the host culture and language. The majority of research on acculturation and enculturation has demonstrated that successful integration and language learning are highly dependent on the types of social relationships immigrants form.

A new line of research has emerged recently that uses network analysis (or graph theory) to chart immigrant movements (Bilecen, Gamper, & Lubbers, 2018; Fotouhi & Rabbat, 2012), social relationships of immigrant groups (Rae, Holman, & Nethery, 2017) and historical migration movements (Mills *et al.*, 2018). What is underrepresented in the literature to date is the charting of social networks on the individual level in relation to acculturation and language learning, i.e., the use of ego-centric networks to make visible the social, cultural, and linguistic relationships of individual immigrants, compare those networks to one another, and draw conclusions as to which network structure may predispose an individual to better cultural and linguistic integration in a host country. Network-theoretical computations can quantify immigrants' social experiences and allow predictions concerning the probability of acculturation and language learning. Figure 1 shows what such a network-centered approach to immigrants' cultural and linguistic experience would look like in two hypothetical networks centered on immigrant "a" (in the middle). By tracing a's contact with other immigrants (in blue) and people from the host country (in green), the strength of the relationships (thickness of links), and the interrelatedness of the social contacts, hypotheses can be formulated based on the assumption that cultural and linguistic influence flows along network links.
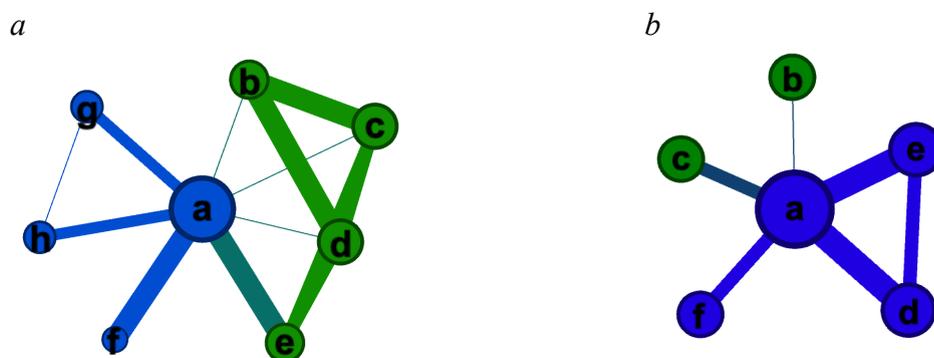

Figure 1. *Network structure is predicted to influence probability of cultural and linguistic integration.*

Network-theoretical concepts are relatable to the number and types of relationships a person has (*degree* and *weighted degree centralities*), which people are in the social network (*network communities* according to fellow-immigrants, people from the host country), and the extent of embeddedness of a person in their social network (*clustering coefficients*).

Social networks have had their place in language contact research since the Milroy's (Milroy & Milroy, 1978, 1985; Milroy, 1987) description of linguistic variation in relation to social network structure, where they demonstrated a correlation between language use and the language users' integration into local social networks. The network approach was found to be a superior approach for

explaining linguistic variation (in their case Belfast dialect) than solely investigating sociolinguistic variables, such as socio-economic class of the speakers. Their core finding that

> *closeness to [….] speech norms correlates positively with the level of integration of the individual into local community networks* (Milroy, 1980, pp. 133–134)

need not be restricted to linguistic variation on the first-language level but might as well be applied to immigrants' language learning in the host country. In such a framework, immigrants' social networks are indicative of their language contact with the host language, allowing network-derived hypotheses to be tested, including for instance the question of whether more numerous and closer relationships with people from the host country are predictive for language learning success or whether tight embeddedness of an immigrant in closely-knit social groups of fellow-immigrants (from the same or different countries of origin) may impede cultural and linguistic integration.

Network theory has only begun to be applied to social relationships in migration contexts and much work is still ahead of us in terms of validating the methodological approach to such complex and multi-faceted issues as cultural and linguistic integration. We hope that our idea presented here will motivate researchers to incorporate network science in future studies on the social aspects of migration, potentially offering new perspectives on the social dynamics underlying pull factors for integration and language learning in migrants.

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