

The Role of Language in the Social Integration of Arab Immigrants and Refugees in the EU

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Abstract

The present research deals with the specific aspect of the intercultural issue involved in the social integration of Arab refugees and migrants, namely the issue of language in relation to European societies and Greece. Its concept and conception as an intercultural feature in relation to migration and refugees will be studied. Its usefulness, competence, and influence in different societies and the role it plays in the social integration of migrants and refugees will be analyzed. The importance of the Arabic language for this research is directly linked to Arab immigrants and refugees and is the tool for transmitting Arab culture over the centuries and between generations. It is also the means of communication and the meeting point between Arab peoples. The study of language is a broad and complex study, but it must be mentioned because of its importance in social integration, as most refugees and migrants come from Arab and Muslim countries, which speak different languages.

Keywords

Language, Integration, Refugees, Immigrants, Arabs, European Union

1. Introduction

1.1. The 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 shaped 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. It expresses the thoughts, needs and things that happen in our consciousness, about the memory of man through time and then helps to build dialogue and participation. It reflects public social life and private thought.

Language as a set of authoritative references expresses the spiritual, and emotional states of a person. Language is a social institution, shaped by society, and plays an important cultural role. One of its basic functions is that it preserves the heritage that peoples possess, stimulates emotions and ideas, documents social bonds through communication between people, transmits information and is considered a means of highlighting thought and expression of emotions.

Noam Chomsky, referring to the concepts of language competence and linguistic filling, stressed that each language produces its propositions through which, linguistic expression is and what is not. While he named linguistic creativity as the ability of each native speaker to produce and understand a theoretically infinite number of sentences. Language to develop and evolve as a linguistic expression with an individual and collective background, it needs the study of the characteristics of the environment. Chomsky recognizes the biological origin of language, but on the other hand, it does not exclude its social substance. He stresses that language is a system of rules, knowledge of language is the language ability, and if one is interested in learning what language is, one should first learn the nature, origin and use of language.

1.2. The Meaning of Language

Language distinguishes man from other creatures, as language is the way to communication, understanding, transmission of ideas, religions and beliefs. It helps to transform ideas from simple psychic imaginations into practice, it helps to express different feelings. Language is a heritage and a host, 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 and ownership of the language of this nation.

Language is a mirror of the values of a nation. The greater the number of its speakers, the greater its importance. It is a force for society as it helps it to evolve at all levels. Over time it regenerates and matures. It also helps in the development of the sciences. Language therefore creates fertile ground for the development of many sectors in society.

The emphasis on the importance and role of language is not exclusive to the hermeneutic approach, but is highlighted in its contribution to the formation of different discourses about social reality, with the modern philosophy of language, psychoanalysis, and in the study of social and political phenomena.

As Kostas D. Dinas points out in his writings (*Language and Society—Society and Language*), Hymes considered that Chomsky's concept of linguistic fulfillment was very limited and therefore developed the concept of communicative ability, which presupposes the knowledge of certain rules of social content that

allow the user of a language to achieve an effective communication.

Communicative ability refers to a person's ability to communicate within a framework of space, time, purpose and manner. Communication ability is directly related to the environment in which communication takes place.

1.3. The Influence of Language on Society

In a society, language guarantees the identity of the group and its cohesion, determines who will have access to the achievements and privileges of modern life. It is a means of communication and expression in human societies, it transmits to others' ideas, events, thoughts, opinions, experiences and feelings. It is a symbol of identity. Through language we learn to perceive society and the environment. It is deeply linked to human thought. By using it language we manage to transmit culture.

Language works to maintain the unity and cohesion of society by performing the role of connecting one generation and another, and by revealing the customs of society and its cultural levels. The relationship between language and society is inextricable, as they are two sides of the same coin since there is no society without language and no language without society. However, this relationship has changed somewhat in the light of the enormous scientific and technological development in which we live today and which has contributed significantly to the shift in the direction of language and to the deviation from the correct course as a means of communication and interaction.

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 immigrants are, employment, education, active participation in society.

Intercultural dialogue 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. In addition, discovering other people's cultures can help change stereotypes or attitudes about people who belong to other cultures.

It should be noted that there is an imbalance in the ability and degree of difficulty in learning languages among vulnerable groups and therefore in integration. Differences in the ability to learn and understand are found between children, young people and adults, as children learn the language more easily and quickly than adults and form friendships with classmates, which facilitates and accelerates their integration.

When learning a second or later language, the process is difficult, because often immigrants are not aware of the cultural habits associated with the language they are learning, which are acquired through their socialization, which will help them to understand the mentality, the way of thinking, the development of ca-

reer orientation towards the Labour market, as a result of the vigilance of their social inclusion, while for their second generation the situation is much easier. In Germany, the learning of the German language by refugees is mandatory and free of charge, as has been mentioned in the present survey, while unfortunately in Greece only refugee children learn the Greek language through access to education. The launch of language learning programmes should aim to build a more cohesive society and create opportunities for migrants and are a prerequisite for their survival.

1.4. Language as Identity in the Arabs

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. For the non-Islamized Copts of Egypt, and the scattered Berbers tribes in North Africa, the acquisition of the new identity as Arabs was validated through knowledge of the Arabic language. Some Arab scholars consider that the one who considers himself as An Arab is the one who Arabic is his mother tongue.

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. Fishman believes that history and language are the first two needs of a nation. He considers them two sides of the same coin. Sometimes language is a more powerful factor in the identity of a people than religion, territory or political state.

Language, as a determinant of national and cultural identity, was sometimes a defensive and sometimes reactionary tool of the educated elites of the Arab nationalist movements in order to protect the cultural and social fabric.

Arab nationalist movements emerged and developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the Arab world was under the yoke of the Ottoman and then the French Empire in Lebanon, Syria and the northern Arab countries of Africa. National identity was one of the most powerful factors that triggered the innate identity of interest in the Arab world.

It is worth noting that linguistic identity as a special intercultural feature, in many cases acts as an element of discrimination of ethnic identity and strengthening of nationalism. Using immigrants or refugees their national language in their daily lives for communication and integration into the refugee local population, they reinforce in this way the racist perceptions of the natives and their social isolation.

1.5. The Importance of Language in Arab Societies

The Arabic language is the language of the Qur'an, which is the holy book of Muslims, and originated from the Arabian Peninsula. Its importance is governed by the strengthening of communication ties between the Islamic nation and the Arab nation. It clarifies ideas and expresses emotions, and is considered one of the oldest languages that retained its full words, structures and grammar. Of its advantages, considered an important tool of acquaintance for millions of people distributed around the world, it was a means of transmitting Arab culture through the centuries to the generations that gradually became connected to each other.

Arabs still speak a language with ideas and feelings that unite them, characteristically recording their thoughts and feelings over time. It managed to be the language of a human civilization in which all Arabs participated. It is the language of the Islamic religion that gives the ability to understand the Qur'an, helps in the perception of Arab customs. It is a language of science, politics, trade, labor, legislation, philosophy, logic, literature, art, and mysticism, and includes a spiritual environment between the past, the present and the future.

It is noted that, religion may be common in many nations but this is not unified, it may also have been observed negatively by some people in recent years. There are certain groups or communities that live in the same region that belong to the same political state and the same religion, but do not feel that they have the same national identity. For example, the Kurds in Iraq. Some nations that share the same language with other nations and do not share the same national identity, for example, the Spanish-speaking nations in South America do not have a national identity with the citizens of Spain.

The Arabic language as an identity for Arab societies, is about distinguishing them from other nations, although in modern times, globalization has made efforts to generalize the identity crisis as it declines, with the rise of the strongest cultures of politicians who have largely eliminated national identities.

1.6. The Role of Language in the Social Integration of Immigrants and Refugees

In the host society there is a risk that immigrants will be seen as speechless because they are unable to speak the language of the host country. However, immigrants are equally able to communicate with other people, perhaps in different languages because they come from countries that are multilingual, such as countries in Africa, Asia, or because during their migration they have had contacts with other people who speak other languages. Many of them are much more aware of linguistic issues, similarities or differences between languages, but even if they are not multilingual. Migrants, in the context of their integration, depend on various factors, such as the psychosocial situation, and the opportunities for language learning of the host and settlement societies.

The linguistic identity of immigrants is very complex for a number of reasons:

the language shift they experience due to their migration and the biographies of their languages are influenced by the language situation and language policy in the countries of origin.

The integration of immigrants and refugees into the host country requires special provision to enable them and their families to learn the language of the host country. Integration is governed by the adaptation of the legal, social and economic conditions, and includes respect for the languages and cultures of origin of the migrants and makes it necessary to develop educational programmes. The teaching of the mother tongue of immigrants, for example, lends itself mainly to facilitating their return to their countries of origin, not primarily because of human rights. Although, in some cases, legislation is restrictive in host countries, as regards immigrants' access to the mother tongue, and the issue of respect for the personality of languages and the interests of immigrants. But the European Commission in its efforts to integrate migrants into national education and training systems, from early childhood education and care to higher education, aims to integrate newly arrived migrants and prevent social exclusion and promote intercultural dialogue.

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 very immigrants are willing to learn the language of the host society if the lessons are adapted to their needs, for example a woman who takes care of her children at home, may not feel the need to learn the language and have no opportunity because she has to be present at home for her children, but this changes when kindergarten or school children enter, then they can attend classes effectively. Unfortunately, the process in many countries is carried out with standardized courses with almost no diversity and distinction.

People's language abilities vary greatly, depending on the context in which they live and work, and regardless of their learning experiences. In European countries, language learning and requirements for migrants differ in the levels of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

The Council of Europe has developed a toolbox to support Member States in their efforts to respond to the challenges posed by unprecedented migration flows in its work on the linguistic integration of migrant adults. The Council has developed the language policy programme which provides assistance to Member States in developing coherent and effective policies in line with the common values and principles of Europe, encouraging good practice and high quality in the provision of language courses and in the assessment of language proficiency.

2. Conclusion

Knowledge of the language system is useful to interpret the intentions, values, ideology and behavior of a society. The interpretation and understanding of the logic of a society are governed by the sociocultural framework, which will give people the ability to communicate, express, and share their needs, experiences,

and thoughts.

The linguistic alienation of refugees and migrants prolongs the course of their integration, while refugee resettlement programmes are considered a vital tool in the international protection system, but if the programmes do not include language learning, then they remain inadequate. Language is the primary key to people's communication, and language barriers cause refugees to weaken and complicate integration processes.

Language teaching shows a bridge between societies, as it is easy to isolate refugees and explore the distance in the countries of asylum, as misunderstandings or tensions may arise, but when communication channels are available and improved, differences can be resolved through peaceful coexistence and proper dialogue. There is no doubt that languages are a very important condition in the integration process, and language programmes for migrants should be very useful if complexities are taken into account their linguistic identities and different life situations. Immigrants should be treated as interlingual or multilingual during the preparation of the language programmes of the host country. For integration purposes, it is important to take into account the specificities of immigrants, which are determined by their history, and a social orientation is required that includes the situation of the family, the social, intercultural, psychological dimension, and the professional context.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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