

# Language Coping Strategies of Greek immigrants to Germany

Course code: AMU1500

Course name: Multilingual Map of Europe: identity and diversity

Name: Damianos Alexandridis, Michal Bankiewicz, Hanna Szczepanek

Date: 09/06/2021

## Introduction

Due to labour mobility, which is guaranteed by the Schengen Area, Europeans often decide to move to another EU country in order to find a well-paid job. Germany is one of the top destinations for EU internal migration, and many citizens from both eastern and southern EU member states choose this country to move to. In fact, since 2013, the migration from southern European countries, incl. Greece, has been on the rise (Batsaikhan et al., 2018).

However, people arriving to Germany may face some difficulties, esp. while having little to no prior knowledge of the German language. This puts them in an entirely new linguistic environment, which might make settling in a new country all the more difficult. Since the majority of those migrants are adults, they may find acquiring a new language challenging. As noted by Birdsong (1999), the age of L2 acquisition might have an impact on how successful it is, with older learners seemingly struggling more with acquiring not only the language-specific phonemes, but also grammatical structures (Newport, 1990; Dimroth, 2008).

Nevertheless, it is possible for a late learner to successfully acquire L2, given that the circumstances favour language acquisition (Birdsong 1999). Therefore, we were interested in studying the linguistic profiles of a few selected Greek immigrants to Germany in order to see how they adjust linguistically to living in a foreign country and how well they have been able to acquire a local language, i.e. German. This line of inquiry provided us with an example of how EU internal migrants cope with linguistic challenges inherent to immigration.

## Research questions

- 1) How do Greek immigrants cope with the challenges of living in Germany?

It is reported that there are many people who migrate to Germany for many reasons. As a consequence, their life changes and they have to deal with a new reality, with people speaking other

languages, with people who have other customs and in general they experience a new world in which they have to survive.

- 2) Is their L1 (native language) affected by the German language acquisition? If yes, how is it affected?

Immigrants in a country where the official language is German, with over 95% of the population speaking German as their first language, have a lot of problems to cope with (1). One is the new language that they have to learn and communicate with. However, there may be people who live as immigrants in a country and make money without necessarily knowing the local language. Moreover, there are also immigrants who try to learn the new language in order to assist them in future vocational rehabilitation. So, our team wanted to learn what case our participants belong in. If they belong in the 2<sup>nd</sup> case, we wanted to know whether the new language affected their Greeks (and how) or not.

- 3) Do these people find switching between languages difficult? In what circumstances they do so?

Another worth mentioning point is that these people will have to speak in both languages (their native =Greek and the new one=German) almost daily. After that, we wanted to see where and when code switching is taking place and what is the main reason for that.(see below)

## Methodology

The fundamental aim of our work was to investigate immigrants' linguistic profile and how it evolves during time and what circumstances put pressure on this. Having that in mind, we realized that one member of us knows 2 Greek couples who are Greek immigrants to Germany and we thought that this would be a good opportunity to get started with. Because of the quarantine and all these restrictive measures, we realized that we had to get the necessary insights both from databases/internet and from the participants. Our first communication happened between a

member of us (chatting in Greek) and the son of the one couple via what's app application. We decided to make a questionnaire, which was answered by all of them (4 persons) and we made an interview (via skype) which only one couple took part in. After questionnaire was completed, the interviews took place and participants was asked to give more detailed answers in specific questionnaire questions. Finally, after we collected all the necessary data we tried to explain it using articles/papers from particular websites.

## Findings/Discussion

About the questionnaire, all participants answered successfully all the questions and none of them had any misunderstood or needed any extra clarification. Actually, after interviewing them, they all congratulated us because they found our questions (both in the questionnaire and while interviewing) very interesting.

**Question 1:** What do you think about living in Germany?

- 3/6 participants found life in Germany normal.
- 2/6 participants found life there quite easy.
- 1/6 found life there quite hard.

According to the above data, none of the participants found life neither too hard nor too easy. Moreover, according to the collected data from the interview, that was because that family had already gotten in touch with some friends of them (who had been living for years there) and they helped them. In particular, that family had been informed about finding a job in Germany 1-2 years before leaving Greece, which is a good time period to get prepared for such a huge "travel". They also mentioned that, the fact that their son had been learning the German language since the primary school, was an extra help for his parents for basic communication e.g. shopping, find a place to go etc. Another thing that they first mention to this question was that they prepared the necessary papers (there is some paper work that is needed to be done in order to live in another

country legally) from the very first time they been there. They also said that if they didn't do it so early they should pay a lot of money to the German government.

**Question 2:** How many languages do you know (except from Greek)?

- 3 participants knew 2 more languages
- 1 participants knew 3 more languages

In particular 2 participants were aware of the German and the Russian language, 1 participant knew the German and the English language and the last participant knew German, English and Russian. Moreover the language status is presented on the table 1.

Table 1: It is presented the status of each language which corresponds to each participant.

Languages	Status
Greek	Very good-Excellent
German	beginner
Russian	Beginner
English	Very good

In fact  $\frac{3}{4}$  participants who knows Russian, has acquired Russian as L3 language in a very late stage of their life which make them late multilinguals with L1 is Greek, L2 are German and L3 is Russian. Actually, these people have another thing in common. They all learned Russian and German in an informal way.

About the Greek language, both know writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation. Actually, they said that they might have forgotten some Greek words because in Germany they talk in Greek only when with friends, with family and at some extent in work (they had been working in a Greek restaurant for years). As a result they only use some common and basic vocabulary.

**Question 3:** How do you find learning German? For how long have you been learning German?

All participants have been learning German the last 8-10 years.

- 2 participants found German language very hard to learn
- 1 participant found German language quite hard to learn
- 1 participant found German language normal to learn

Both participants who were interviewed said that German language is hard to acquire since they speak German only in some occasions and the rest day they speak Greek. As a result they forget the German language. Finally, they mention that it seems relative easy to understand German and especially the listening.

**Question 3:** Is/was your German education formal (courses, etc.) or informal (work, socializing)?

- 4 participants learned German in an informal manner.

As immigrants, they learned German only informally, in work and when socializing. The interviewers said that they do not have any German friend family, only Greek and they learned German only in work. Also they said that they know so basic things, that they only can have basic communication with others (go shopping, take orders from customers, etc.) and if they want something more they ask their children to translate.

**Question 4:** Do you think that Greek help you to learn German?

- 2 of the participants think that Greek language may helped them to learn German
- 1 participant think that Greek language may not helped them to learn German
- 1 participant strongly support that Greek language didn't helped them to learn German

About the people who were interviewed, one said that Greek did not help and the other that Greek may helped. The one who found some correlation between languages said that he could understand some Latin-based German words.

**Question 5:** In what circumstances do you use German?

- 2 participants said that they use German language only while hanging out with friends.
- 1 participant said that he/she uses German only in work
- 1 participant said that he/she uses German both in work and while hanging out.

**Question 6:** What language do you usually use more often?

- All 4 participants said that they use more often the Greek language.

Based on the previous data, almost all participants use Greek very often and as a result they prefer to talk in Greek. Moreover, since all of them use Greek almost perfectly, they do not want to use another language because it is not needed and when it does, their children take action (if parents cannot handle the case).

**Question 7:** Do you find it difficult (e.g. during a dialog) to switch from German to Greek and vice versa?

- 3 participants did not find it difficult to switch between languages because they said they got used to it
- 1 participant said that it is very difficult to code switch.

**Question 8:** Do you think learning German is affecting your Greek?

- 3 participants support that learning German doesn't affect their Greek acquisition
- 1 participant mentioned that there is an influence of the Germans against the Greeks

## Conclusion

This investigation had two objectives. On the one hand, we tried to collect such material through which we can analyze the L2 acquisition in adults and the possible affection in other languages. That is the reason we selected immigrants to deal with (not many people learn an extra language in their adulthood). On the other hand, we had to find the way to interpret these findings in a manner that is scientifically acceptable.

Looking at the report results, we can say that the methodology has been successful in answering our main questions. All 4 participants, found difficulty in learning German language as an L2, some of them switch between languages, whereas others do not and finally we observed a little affection on their L1 (Greek) since they do not use Greek language as before.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the sample participated is hardly representative, therefore, the project does not serve as evidence that the population of such immigrants, in general, possesses a “linguistic rule”.

## References

- Batsaikhan, Uuriintuya, Zsolt M. Darvas, and Ines Goncalves Raposo. (2018). *People on the move: Migration and mobility in the European Union*. Bruegel.
- Birdsong, D. (1999). Introduction: Whys and Why Nots of the Critical Period Hypothesis for Second Language Acquisition. In *Second language acquisition and the critical period hypothesis* (pp. 1–22). essay, Erlbaum.
- Dimroth, C. (2008). Age Effects on the Process of L2 Acquisition? Evidence From the Acquisition of Negation and Finiteness in L2 German. *Language Learning*, 58(1), 117–150. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9922.2007.00436.x
- Krutz A, Dahl A, Flognfeldt M. (2018). Enacting Multilingualism. *From research to teaching practice in the English classroom*, 31, 52-61.
- Newport, E. (1990). Maturation Constraints on Language Learning. *Cognitive Science*, 14(1), 11–28. doi:10.1207/s15516709cog1401\_2



(1) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european\\_languages/countries/germany.shtml#:~:text=The%20official%20language%20of%20Germany,%25%2C%20who%20also%20speak%20German.](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/countries/germany.shtml#:~:text=The%20official%20language%20of%20Germany,%25%2C%20who%20also%20speak%20German.)

## Appendices

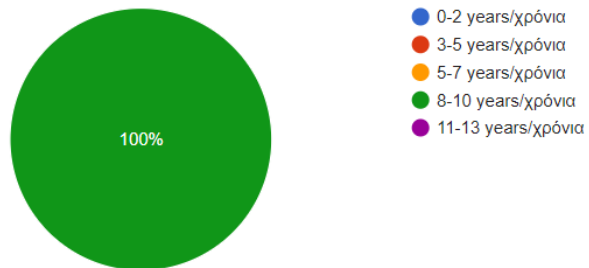
### 1. Survey questions

- Where do you come from?
- In which city do you live in Germany?
- What do you think about living in Germany?
- How many languages do you know (except from Greek)? What are those languages? How well do you know them?
- For how long have you been learning German?
- How do you find learning German?
- Is/was your German education formal (courses, etc.) or informal?
- Do you think that Greek help you to learn German?
- In what circumstances do you use German?
- What language do you usually use at work?
- What language do you usually use more often?
- Do you find it difficult (eg during a dialog) to switch from German to Greek and vice versa?
- Do you think learning German is affecting your Greek?

## 2Some survey responses

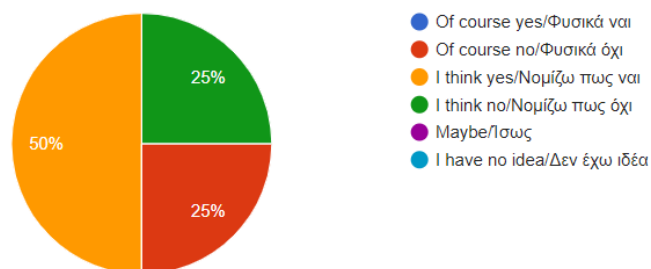
For how long have you been learning German?/ Για πόσο καιρό μαθαίνατε γερμανικά;

4 responses



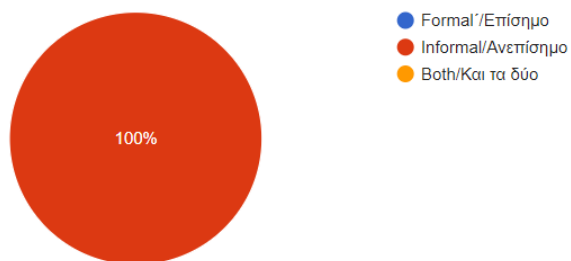
Do you think that Greek help you to learn German?/Πιστεύετε ότι η γνώση της ελληνικής γλώσσας σας βοήθησε να μάθετε την γερμανική;

4 responses



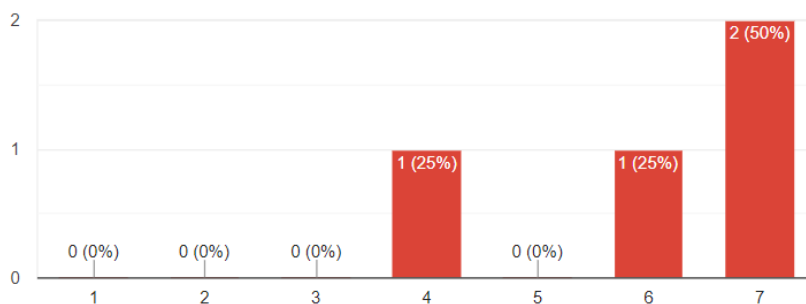
Is/was your German education formal (courses, etc.) or informal?/ Μάθατε την γερμανική γλώσσα με επίσημο τρόπο (πχ ιδιαίτερα μαθήματα, σε σχολείο κτλ) ή με ανεπίσημο (στην εργασία, σε προσπάθεια κοινωνικοποίησης κτλ)

4 responses



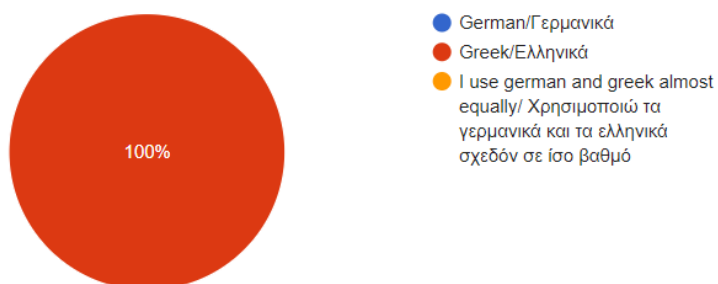
How do you find learning German?/ Πώς σας φάνηκε να μαθαίνεται γερμανικά;

4 responses



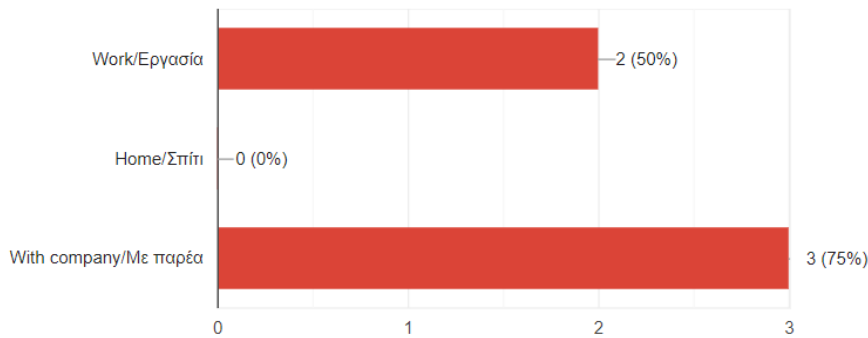
What language do you usually use more often?/Ποια γλώσσα χρησιμοποιείται συχνότερα;

4 responses



In what circumstances do you use German?/ Σε ποιες περιπτώσεις χρησιμοποιείτε τα γερμανικά;

4 responses



EXTRA QUESTIONS-Εpicur project



Damian Alexandridis

to

Hi Billy,

it's Damianos Alexandridis. The interview, as i told you, was very interesting and many of my teams questions were answered quite good. I leave some clarify questions below that i need you to answer if you like.

1) What was the main reason your parents and they other participants selected Brake to live in Germany, and not another city? Did somebody there help them find work at the restaurant?

2)Why did they all select Germany to immigrate?

3) Your parents work in a restaurant. What about the rest participants?

Thanks for your help.

Your friend,

Damianos



to me

Hi Damianos,

Answer1) The main reason my parents and the others moved to Brake was that they contacted a Greek Restaurant owner in Germany (Brake) and decided to work there. No nobody helped them to fly in Germany but as they arrived a lot Greeks helped them to understand the culture and how things are done in Germany.

Answer 2) Germany was always and to today is known as one of the most developed and modern countries in Europe. The financial system as overall the whr System is very Citizen Supporting and it gives their children a more educated and safer future .

Answer 3) The other two my uncles are still working in Restaurants but my parents are not working in a restaurant anymore.