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ARTICLE



Immigrants' behavioral participation and its relation with national identification: Perceived closeness to the prototype as a psychological mechanism

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological processes by which national language usage predicts immigrants' national identification. We proposed that national language usage, as a key aspect of behavioral participation, signals to immigrants their closeness to fitting the national prototype (operationalized as perceived similarities with receiving country and acceptance as national co-member). This in turn fosters stronger national identification. Additionally, we tested whether perceived language competence strengthens the link between language usage and closeness to the prototype. The hypotheses were tested using a cross-national survey ($N = 3794$) of Muslim migrants in Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. The results (using structural equation modeling) generally supported the predictions, offering evidence for the psychological mechanisms by which behavioral participation encourages identification with new groups.


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Immigrants not only try to make a contribution to their society of settlement but also try to develop a new sense of identification. Identification with the receiving country (or national identification) is a source of well-being (e.g. Phinney, 1992; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) and can have positive consequences for educational achievements (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006) and labor market outcomes (e.g. Nekby & Rödin, 2007). The goal of the current research is to go beyond the existing literature on immigrants' national identification (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012) by examining the social psychological processes by which national language usage can predict identification. We propose that participating in the receiving society by using the language of that society acts as a cue to immigrants, revealing to them that they are close to the prototype of the new group. More specifically, using the national language, first, helps to establish perceived similarities between majority members and oneself and, second, encourages the belief that one is accepted by majority members as a co-national. In turn, perceived similarities and belief of acceptance will predict host national identification. Furthermore, we tested whether the perception that one is using the language well (i.e. competently) enhances the psychological mechanisms that promote national identification. This allows us to ascertain the extent to which language utilization

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serves as a signal that one is close to the prototype of the new society. We tested our predictions using a large cross-national dataset of first and second generation Muslim immigrants living in Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland.

Participation in a new cultural group and identification with it

Researchers have identified not only various positive implications of immigrants' national identification but also promoting factors, such as length of residence in the new country (e.g. Abu-Rayya, 2009), education and employment (e.g. De Vroome, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2014), occupational status (e.g. Nesdale, 2002), social contacts (e.g. Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008), perceived discrimination (e.g. Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009), and perceived opportunities and acceptance (e.g. De Vroome et al., 2014). In addition, it has been argued that enactment of cultural codes, such as customs and language usage ("cultural integration") stimulate a sense of national belonging and commitment ("psychological integration"; Esser, 2003; Gordon, 1964). National identification should be more likely when immigrants enact and engage in the behaviors that are typical or expected of the receiving society, i.e. when they participate in the new cultural group (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2017).

The relationship between behavioral participation in the receiving country and identification with it was examined in research with immigrants living in Canada (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2017). In a series of two studies (one quantitative and one qualitative), it was found that behavioral participation in Canadian culture predicted greater identification with Canadians. Furthermore, the capacity of behavioral participation to predict and even promote identification with new groups was demonstrated in experimental research (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2018) as well as outside of the context of immigration (e.g. Cárdenas et al., 2018). Thus, there is accumulating evidence that behavioral participation in the receiving country predicts (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2017; Cárdenas et al., 2018), and possibly causes (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2019), national identification (see also Rosenthal, Bell, Demetrious, and Efklides (1989); Snauwaert, Soenens, Vanbeselaere, and Boen (2003); Wong-Rieger and Quintana (1987).

However, previous research did not focus on understanding the psychological mechanisms responsible for the relation between participation and identification. Thus, the psychological mechanisms triggered when individuals participate and engage in receiving society's cultural behaviors remain unknown. In the current article, we address this question by testing whether national language usage signals to immigrants that they are closer to the prototype of the receiving country, which in turn predicts higher national identification (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2018).

Prototypes and social identification

The social identity perspective specifies that individuals have prototypes about social groups that they use to understand the place of others (categorization) and of themselves (self-categorization) in their social environment (Hogg, 2005a; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1987). Defining oneself as a member of a group and being accepted as such depends on the degree to which one conforms to the relevant group norms and resembles prototypical in-group member (Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimmie, 2003; Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007).

For this reason, individuals are sensitive to the extent to which they personally fit a prototype (Hogg, 2005a) and seek information to confirm how well they conform to the group norm (Haslam, Oakes, McGarty, & Onorato, 1995). If they think that they are close to matching the group prototype they will more easily identify with the group (Reinhard, Stahlberg, & Messne, 2009; Turner, 1982). For example, bicultural individuals identified more with one of their cultural groups after being told that their score in a test was similar to the typical score of that cultural group (Schindler, Reinhard, Knab, & Stahlberg, 2016). Enacting or expressing typical group behaviors can be particularly valuable to infer the extent to which one fits within a group because behavior visibly demonstrates to oneself and to observers conformity and commitment to the group norm. This is especially so when the behavior (i.e. host society language usage) not only has an instrumental function (e.g. being able to communicate with host society members) but also makes the relevant social identity salient. For example, immigrants' using the national language with members of the receiving country are more likely to have instrumental reasons for doing so compared to when they use this language among family and friends of their country of origin. Therefore, we investigated national language usage in the latter contexts as a form of behavioral participation in the receiving country. Based on the literature, we expect that immigrants speaking the language of the receiving country with family and friends signal to themselves that they are closer to the prototype of the receiving country, in turn identifying more with the receiving nation.

Social identities are not like private beliefs or convictions that, in principle, can be sustained without expression and social recognition. Crucially, social identities involve the acknowledgment and acceptance by others. In other words, social identities depend both on the extent to which one self-defines as a member of a group as well as on how one is defined and treated by other group members (Deaux & Ethier, 1998; Klein et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2018a). Likewise perceived closeness to the prototype involves one's self-view vis-à-vis the prototype – such as perceiving that one is similar to most group members – as well as a sense that one is recognized by other group members as a prototypical in-group member – that one is accepted by fellow members as an in-group member. If enactment of behavior typical of the receiving country signals to the self and to others closeness to the prototype, this behavior should simultaneously increase the perceived similarity to host society members and stimulate the belief that one is regarded by them as a co-national.

Firstly, individuals' perceived similarity with a group is related to their perceived closeness to the group's prototype (e.g. Hogg & Terry, 2000; see also self-to-prototype matching, Rivas & Sheeran, 2003). In fact, perceived similarity between the individual and group members has been used to measure closeness to the prototype (e.g. Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002; Lonsdale & North, 2016). Furthermore, perceived prototypicality is experimentally manipulated by increasing or decreasing the similarity between the person and the social group (e.g. Hogg, Hardie, & Reynolds, 1995; Jetten et al., 2002; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997; Schindler et al., 2016; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). Thus, in the current study, we assessed closeness to the receiving country's prototype by examining the perceived similarities in attitudes between members of the receiving country and oneself.

Secondly, concerning perceived acceptance as in-group member, individuals who fit well the prototype of a group and conform to the group norms are more socially accepted. They are more liked and popular (Hogg, 1993), more trusted (Hogg, 2007), and their membership is rarely questioned (Hogg, 2005a; see also Jetten et al., 2002, 2003). Thus, the more a person fits a prototype, the more likely they are, and perceive themselves to be, accepted as in-group

members (Klein et al., 2007). Therefore, closeness to the receiving country's prototype was also assessed in terms of the belief that one is regarded a co-national by members of the receiving country.

Thus we test whether greater usage of host-national language with friends and family predicts greater perceived similarity with members of the receiving country and greater belief that one is accepted by them as a co-national, with both in turn predicting greater national identification (H1).

The role of competency: Providing a better signal of one's membership

If engagement in typical behaviors of a group functions as a signal for one's closeness to the group prototype, then being competent in the behavior should offer even stronger evidence of one's group membership. Specifically, if one is not only using the national language with friends and family but is also competent at doing so, this would offer further proof that one can indeed be a member of the host society. In contrast, if one is not a very competent conversationalist in the receiving country's language, then using the language might actually undermine the message of identification and backfire, highlighting instead one's lack of fit with the prototype.

Research has found a positive relation between migrants' language competency and national identification: the greater the perceived competence in host-country language, the stronger the identification with the host-society (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Cunningham & King, 2018; Martinez-Callaghan & Gil-Lacruz, 2017; Phinney, 2003). We extend the previous research by testing whether perceived competency in national language interacts with linguistic participation to predict closeness to the prototype. More specifically, we test a moderated mediation model in which perceived competency moderates the link between language utilization and the two mediators (perceived similarity and perceived acceptance), in turn predicting greater national identification (H2). Thus, by using perceived linguistic competence, the study offers a more elaborate test of the basic premise that participating in the new group by using its typical behaviors (i.e. language usage) signals membership in the new group to oneself and others.

The context of this research

The two hypotheses were tested using survey data collected among first and second-generation Muslim immigrants in three West European countries. Europe has experienced over the past decades a great influx of migrants originating from Muslim countries. Today Muslim migrants make up 5% of the European population and are considered the most prominent immigrant community (Hackett, 2017). In our current sample, most of the Muslim migrants were originally from countries where the language of the receiving country is not used, ensuring that the receiving country language is exclusively associated with the host society. Additionally, although there are clear and important religious and ethnic group differences within and between Muslim communities in Western Europe, their migration-origin status and common religion provide shared characteristics that are often used in Western European countries to delineate clear and bright boundaries of group membership, i.e. of who is and who is not a member of the receiving country (Alba, 2005). Thus, a focus on Muslim immigrants of first and second generation is particularly relevant and interesting.

Method

Participants and procedure

The data used in this analysis was collected within the Eurislam project, a research project within the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission (see Hoksbergen & Tillie, 2016). The goal of this project was to understand “how different traditions of identity, citizenship, and church-state relations have affected European immigration countries’ incorporation of Islam, and what the consequences are of these approaches for interactions between migrants, their offspring, and the receiving society” (p. 2). For the current purposes, a sample of $N = 3794$ Muslim migrants was used (of which 78.8% were first generation). The survey was originally conducted in six countries but we considered only the three countries in which all of the questions relevant to our hypotheses were asked: Belgium ($n = 803$), Germany ($n = 1028$), and Switzerland ($n = 863$)¹. For the data collection, a name recognition method (or onomastic method) was first used by examining digital phone book records identifying people of four origins (Moroccan, Turkish, Pakistani and ex-Yugoslav). Following this, polling agencies contacted participants and confirmed their origin after introducing the project to them. A standard computer assisted telephone interviewing procedure was employed (for full details see Hoksbergen & Tillie, 2016).

Measures

Of the five main constructs considered in the analyses, three were latent variables (national language utilization, perceived similarity, and national identification) and two observed variables (perceived acceptance as a co-national, and perceived language competency).

National language utilization

Four items were used to create the language utilization latent variable: how often participants spoke the language of the receiving country with their children, their partner, their siblings, and friends from their country of origin ($\alpha = .80$). The answers ranged from 1 (Always) to 5 (Never) and were recoded to facilitate interpretation, with a higher score indicating greater language utilization. The focus on language usage with members of the country of origin (instead of the receiving country) targets the value of language for national identity – as opposed to its instrumental value – while simultaneously excluding contact with members of the host society as a confounding variable.

Perceived similarity

Five items were used to construct the latent variable of perceived similarity with members of the receiving country. Participants were asked how similar or different they were to most people from the host society in relation to five topics: the values they taught their children, the way roles are divided between men and women in the households, the role of religion in society, sexual abstinence before marriage, and freedom of speech. Western European countries have strongly endorsed normative attitudes toward these topics (i.e. they are close to the prototype of these groups), particularly when compared to perceived Muslim values (e.g. Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). Thus, this measure captures the extent to which migrants see themselves as similar to host society members in attitudes key to host nation’s

prototypes. The response categories ranged from 1 (Very similar) to 4 (Very different) and were recoded so that a higher score indicates higher perceived similarity ($\alpha = .74$).

Perceived acceptance as co-national

A single item was used to measure the extent to which participants believe that members of the host society see them as co-nationals: "To what extent do people of <receiving country> origin regard you as a member of the <receiving country>?" (for a similar measure see Study 2a in Cheryan & Monin, 2005). The answers ranged from 1 (Very strongly) to 5 (Not at all) and this variable was also recoded.

Competency in receiving country's language

A single item measured perceived linguistic competency by asking participants to self-report "How often do you have problems with the <language of receiving country> language in a conversation?" (Lebrun, 2012; Thomson, 2016). Answers ranged from 1 (Always) to 5 (Never), and after recoding, a higher score indicates higher language competency.

National identification

Two items (5-point scales) were used to generate the latent variable of host national identification. One item asked participants the extent to which they see themselves as a person from the receiving country, and a second item asked how proud they were of being a person from the receiving country. Correlation between these two items was high ($r = .67, p < .001$) and a higher score indicates stronger national identification.

Control variables

Three control variables that could affect or account for the relations of interest were used in the current analysis: years spent in the receiving country, frequency of contact with members of the receiving country, and level of education in the receiving country. Greater time spent in receiving country allows migrants to participate more in it, learn the language, and identify with it, thus impacting the relations between our main variables. We controlled for years of residency by using year of birth and the age at which participants arrived to the receiving country. Frequency of contact with members of the receiving society was controlled for as intergroup contact has been found to predict immigrants' language usage and competence as well as their host national identification (e.g. De Vroome et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2008). Controlling for contact, thus, tests whether the hypothesized relations exist independent of the influence of contact. The latent variable of contact was generated by utilizing two items: how many acquaintances in their neighborhood and how many of their friends are members of the host society. These items ranged from 1 ([Nearly] all) to 6 (I don't have any acquaintances/friends) and were recoded so that higher number reflected higher contact ($r = .37, p < .001$). Participant's level of education attained in the receiving country was controlled for, as education in the receiving country can impact language competence, usage and host national identification (Abu-Rayya, 2009). Participants were classified based on the broad ICSED levels, namely having completed the primary ($n = 492$), secondary ($n = 1196$) or tertiary ($n = 696$) level, or not having completed school/still in school ($n = 125$). Since each of these represents a separate category, three dummy variables were created with primary level as the comparison category.

Lastly, while information on migrants' mother tongue was not available in the data (and therefore could not be controlled for), mother tongue for their parents was available. Sixty-four participants had at least one of their parents who had the same mother tongue used in the receiving country (e.g. German in Germany). The findings without these 64 participants parallel those with the whole sample and were hence kept in the following analyzes.

Plan of analyzes

Since data was collected in three countries (Belgium, Germany and Switzerland) differing in language and various migrant related issues (e.g. origin of the migrant population, number of immigrants, and immigration and integration policies), it was first tested whether the questions employed were interpreted in the same way by participants across the three countries. Following this measurement invariance test, we examined the means and correlations for the main (observed and latent) variables.

To test the first hypothesis on the mediating role of similarity and perceived acceptance in the relation between language usage and national identification, we used structural equation modeling in MPlus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). An ML estimator was used and the model controlled for contact with members of the receiving country, years spent in the receiving country and level of education. To test the second hypothesis, that competently enacting a behavior typical of a new group further predicts identification via higher perceived similarity and perceived acceptance, a second SEM model was tested, adding competency and its interaction with usage as independent variables. Because the median of perceived language competence was high (5), and somewhat negatively skewed ($-.975$), we used the MLR estimator which uses maximum likelihood estimates with robust standard errors (Wang & Wang, 2012). Lastly, two robustness checks were conducted to test whether the model generalizes across the three countries and across first and second generation migrants.

Results

Measurement model

Measurement invariance was tested for the three latent variables (language utilization, perceived similarity and national identification). The modification index for the configural measurement models suggested correlating two items from the latent language utilization variable (using language with children and with partner) and also correlating the two mediators. These two modifications were understandable content-wise and therefore applied. After these two modifications, metric and scalar invariant models were tested. The scalar invariant model has an acceptable model fit (see Table 1) allowing to test an overall structural model as well as making comparisons between the three countries.

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations between the main variables of the model. Most of the means of the main variables were higher than the mid-point of their scales, indicating that the current sample did use national language with friends and family, felt quite competent in their language skills, and had some degree of national identification. They also perceived more similarities than differences between members of the receiving country and themselves. The only variable that was below the

Table 1. Measurement model across country.

	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta \chi^2$ (df)	CFI/TLI	SRMR	RMSEA [95%]
Configural model	309.145 (117)***		.976/.966	0.047	.043 [.037-.049]
Metric model	366.571 (133)***	57.426 (16)***	.971/.964	0.052	.044 [.039-.050]
Scalar model	549.304 (149)***	182.733 (16)***	.950/.945	0.055	.055 [.050-.060]

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations between main factors and variables.

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. National language utilization	3.13 (1.04)	–						
2. Perceived similarity	2.28 (0.65)	.16***	–					
3. Perceived acceptance as co-national	2.97 (1.27)	.08***	.37***	–				
4. Perceived competency in national language	4.08 (1.12)	.29***	.27***	.25***	–			
5. Identification with receiving country	3.11 (1.08)	.15***	.51***	.51***	.31***	–		
6. Years in receiving country	22.73 (11.32)	.17***	–.03	–.02	.15***	–.02	–	
7. Contact with members of receiving country	3.11 (1.08)	.13***	.42***	.33***	.27***	.46***	.03	–

Note. *** $p < .001$.

mid-point is the perception that one is accepted as a co-national. Table 2 further shows that the associations between the different measures are in the expected directions with language usage, perceived similarity and perceived acceptance being positively associated with national identification.

Mediation analysis

To test whether national language usage predicts national identification via perceived similarity and perceived acceptance as a co-national, structural equation model was tested. Fit indices of the model were adequate χ^2 (103) = 507.646, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .038 [.035 to .042], SRMR = .036 (see Table 3; Hu & Bentler, 1999). As illustrated in Figure 1 and shown in Table 3, the hypothesized relations are significant. Specifically, language utilization predicts greater perceived similarity, which in turn predicts national identification. Using the language of the receiving country also positively predicts the belief that members of the receiving country regard participants as co-nationals, which in turn predicts national identification. Importantly, the indirect effects of language utilization on identification via perceived similarity ($Bab_1 = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.021, 0.051]) and being regarded as a co-national ($Bab_2 = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .026$, 95% CI [0.002, 0.032]) were both positive and significant. Thus, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

The moderating role of competency

To test the second hypothesis, language usage, perceived competency and their interaction were set to predict perceived similarity and acceptance (as well as national identification). Perceived similarity and acceptance in turn predicted national identification. This allowed us to test the proposed moderated mediation.

The results of this analyzes show, first, that competency and language usage interacted when predicting national identification (see Table 4). Thus, the direct effect of language usage on national identification was moderated by competency². Concerning the moderated mediation via similarity, the index of moderated mediation was significant ($Ba_1a_3b_1 = 0.013$, $SE = 0.005$; $p = .007$). As shown in Table 4, the interaction between language usage and

Table 3. Model of Mediation Analysis.

Independent variables	Dependent variables									
	Perceived similarity with host country (M1)			Regarded by members of host country as an ingroup member (M2)			Identification with host country (Y)			
	Unstandardized beta	SE	Standardized beta	p	Unstandardized beta	SE	Standardized beta	Unstandardized beta	SE	p
Host country's language utilization (X)	a_1	0.13	0.03	.13	<.001	a_2	0.06	0.02	.07	.023
Perceived similarity with host country (M1)		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Regarded by members of host country as an ingroup member (M2)		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Years in host country		–0.34	0.18	–.05	.066		–0.35	0.33	–.35	.271
Dummy education 1 (Primary, Tertiary, No Schooling = 0; Secondary = 1)		–0.14	0.01	–.04	.072		–0.30	0.13	.00	.987
Dummy education 2 (Primary, Secondary, No Schooling = 0; Tertiary = 1)		0.04	0.00	.14	<.001		0.05	0.01	.05	<.001
Dummy education 3 (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary = 0; No Schooling = 1)		0.00	0.00	.02	.396		0.01	0.01	.01	.161
Contact with members of host country: neighborhood		0.17	0.01	.41	<.001		0.26	0.30	.41	<.001

Notes: Numbers on italics are covariances. The covariances not presented on the table are as follow: Cov M1/M2 = 0.31, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov language/years in host country = 2.02, SE = 0.32, $p < .001$; Cov language/contact = 0.68, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 1 = 0.05, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 2 = –0.04, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 3 = 0.01, SE = 0.01, $p = .393$; Cov years in host country/contact = 0.23, SE = 0.18, $p = .208$; Cov years in host country/dummy education 1 = 0.20, SE = 0.12, $p = .135$; Cov years in host country/dummy education 2 = –0.89, SE = 0.12, $p < .001$; Cov years in host country/dummy education 3 = 0.14, SE = 0.05, $p = .009$; Cov contact/dummy education 1 = –0.01, SE = 0.01, $p = .327$; Cov contact/dummy education 2 = 0.03, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov contact/dummy education 3 = 0.01, SE = 0.00, $p = .097$; Cov dummy education 1/dummy education 2 = –0.13, SE = .00, $p < .001$; Cov dummy education 1/dummy education 3 = –0.02, SE = .00, $p < .001$; Cov dummy education 2/dummy education 3 = –0.01, SE = 0.00, $p < .001$.

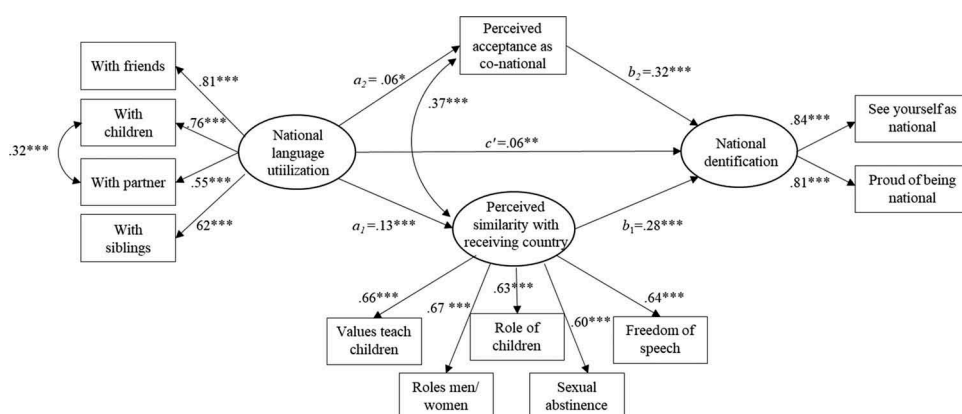


Figure 1. Mediation model with standardized betas. Control variables are kept outside of the figure for simplicity and can be found in Table 3.

competency predicted greater similarity. Similarity, in turn, predicted greater national identification. In order to further probe these findings, and given the non-normal distribution of competency, we compared participants who always, often or sometimes experienced difficulty speaking the language (1 to 3 is “lower competency”; $n = 817$) to those who rarely or never experience difficulty (4 to 5 is “higher competency”, $n = 1859$). Eighteen people did not answer this question and were ignored in these analyzes. We examined how the associations were different across these two groups. As expected and illustrated in Figure 2 (top model), language usage did not predict greater similarity for participants with lower competency, but usage did predict similarity for participants with high competency (bottom model in Figure 2)³. Thus, the moderating role of competency in the relation between language usage and national identification via similarity was confirmed.

In contrast, the results for being accepted as a co-national were not in line with our hypothesis, as the index of moderated mediation was nonsignificant ($Ba_1a_3b_2 = 0.007$, $SE = 0.005$; $p = .163$). This is also reflected in Table 4, where neither language usage nor its interaction with competency predicted acceptance. An examination of Figure 2 (top model) reveals that there was only a small and negative marginal effect of language usage on acceptance under conditions of low competence (in line with the non-significant interaction of the MLR analysis). Thus, our hypothesis on the moderating role of competency in the relation between language usage and national identification via perceived acceptance was not confirmed.

Comparing the structural model across countries

We subsequently tested whether the results of the moderated mediation model are robust across Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. To do so, we compared a model in which all associations were constrained to be similar across the three countries versus a non-constrained model. A comparison of these nested models revealed that the unconstrained model fit the data better, $\Delta \text{Loglikelihood} = 132.84$, $\Delta df = 22$, $p < .001$. Wald’s tests of parameter constraints were performed to test which paths were significantly different from each other. A Holm step-down procedure correction was used to correct for the Type-1 error inflation for

Table 4. Model of Moderated Mediation Analysis

Independent variables	Dependent variables									
	Perceived similarity with receiving country (M1)					Perceived acceptance as co-national (M2)				
	Unstandardized beta	SE	p	Unstandardized beta	SE	p	Unstandardized beta	SE	p	National identification (Y)
National language utilization (X1)	a_1	0.04	.049	a_4	0.08	.120	c'_1	0.07	<.001	
Perceived competency in national language (X2)	a_2	0.01	<.001	a_5	0.01	<.001	c'_2	0.02	<.001	
National language utilization * Perceived competency (X1*X2)	a_3	0.01	.006	a_6	0.02	.163	c'_3	0.02	<.001	
Perceived similarity with receiving country (M1)	—	—	—	—	—	—	b_1	0.04	<.001	
Perceived acceptance as co-national (M2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	b_2	0.02	<.001	
Years in receiving country	—0.55	0.18	.002	—0.77	0.32	.018	—	0.00	0.002	.681
Dummy education 1 (Primary, Tertiary, No Schooling = 0; Secondary = 1)	—0.02	0.01	.013	—0.01	0.01	.549	—	0.07	0.054	.023
Dummy education 2 (Primary, Secondary No Schooling = 0; Tertiary = 1)	0.04	0.01	<.001	0.03	0.01	.005	—	0.18	0.061	.003
Dummy education 3 (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary = 0; No Schooling = 1)	0.00	0.00	.315	0.01	0.01	.132	—	0.04	0.103	.683
Contact with members of receiving country	0.15	0.01	<.001	0.21	0.02	<.001	—	0.37	0.046	<.001

Notes: Numbers on italics are covariances. The covariances not presented on the table are as follow. Cov M1/M2 = .26, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov language/competency = .35, SE = 0.03, $p < .001$; Cov language/years in receiving country = 2.14, SE = 0.31, $p < .001$; Cov language/contact = 0.07, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 1 = 0.05, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 2 = -0.05, SE = 0.011, $p < .001$; Cov language/dummy education 3 = 0.00, SE = 0.01, $p = .337$; Cov competency/years in receiving country = 1.76, SE = 0.28, $p < .001$; Cov competency/contact = 0.19, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov competency/dummy education 1 = 0.04, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov competency/dummy education 2 = 0.03, SE = 0.01, $p = .005$; Cov competency/dummy education 3 = 0.01, SE = 0.01, $p = .132$; Cov years in receiving country/contact = 0.19, SE = 0.18, $p = .289$; Cov years in receiving country/dummy education 1 = 0.21, SE = 0.13, $p = .100$; Cov years in receiving country/dummy education 2 = -0.88, SE = 0.12, $p < .001$; Cov years in receiving country/dummy education 3 = 0.13, SE = 0.05, $p = .015$; Cov contact/dummy education 1 = -0.01, SE = 0.01, $p = .331$; Cov contact/dummy education 2 = .03, SE = 0.01, $p < .001$; Cov contact/dummy education 3 = 0.01, SE = 0.00, $p = .094$; Cov dummy education 1/dummy education 2 = -0.13, SE = 0.00, $p < .001$; Cov dummy education 1/dummy education 3 = -0.02, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$; Cov dummy education 2/dummy education 3 = -0.01, SE = 0.00, $p < .001$.

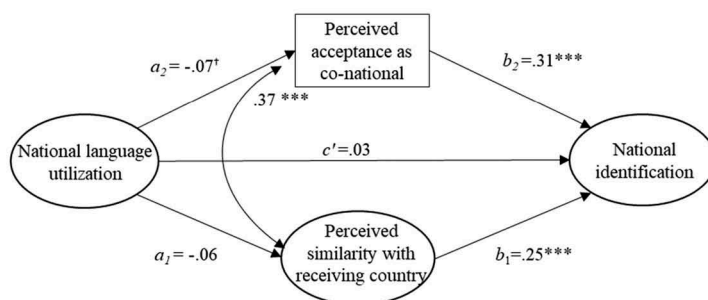
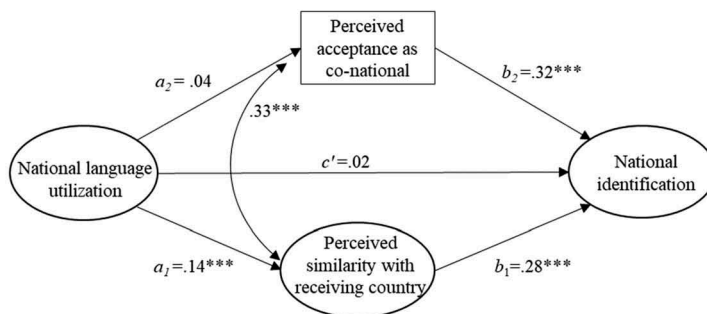
Lower competency ($n = 817$)**Higher competency ($n = 1859$)**

Figure 2. Mediation models separated for Higher competency and Lower competency (with standardized betas). Control variables are kept outside of the figure for simplicity and are presented in Table 4.

multiple statistical tests. In this correction, the corrected critical p value increases as significant differences are found. Thus, the initial critical p value is $p < .0015$ (.05/33) and if a test is smaller than this value, it is significant. For the next test, a more lenient correction is applied ($p < .0016$; or .05/32); if significant, a more lenient correction takes place until an obtained p value is no longer lower than the corrected critical p value. Wald's tests revealed three paths that were stronger in Germany than in the two other countries, and four paths that were different in Germany compared to the other countries.

First, for the different paths, in Switzerland, as in the general model, the link between utilization of national language and perceived acceptance as co-national was positive ($a_4 = 0.67$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$), but in Germany this relationship was negative ($a_4 = -0.27$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .015$; Wald's test a_3 Switzerland-Germany = 0.94, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, this negative link was not moderated by competency in Germany (in line with the general findings; $ba_6 = 0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .113$) whereas, in line with our second hypothesis, this language usage and competency interacted when predicting acceptance in Switzerland ($ba_6 = -0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$; Wald's test a_6 Switzerland-Germany = -0.18 , $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$).

Germany and Belgium differed in two other paths. Unlike in Germany ($c'_1 = -0.31$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .002$) and in our general model, in Belgium the link from language usage to identification remained positive after adding competency and the interaction ($c'_1 = 0.60$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$; Wald's test c'_1 Belgium-Germany = 0.91, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .001$). Moreover, in

Germany ($c'_3 = 0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .001$), as in the original model, the interaction predicting identification was positive, while in Belgium the interaction of usage and competence was negative ($c'_3 = -0.10$, $SE = 0.33$, $p = .004$; Wald's test $c'_3_{\text{Belgium-Germany}} = -0.19$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$). Here, language usage becomes a less relevant predictor of identification as competence increases.

As for the three similar yet stronger paths, the predicted link of perceived similarities on national identification was significantly stronger in Germany ($b_1 = 0.68$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$) than in Belgium ($b_1 = 0.29$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .002$; Wald's test = 0.39, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .001$), and in Switzerland ($b_1 = 0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$; Wald's test = 0.37, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .001$). The predictive link from competency to acceptance as co-national was also stronger in Germany ($a_5 = 0.25$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$) than in Switzerland ($a_5 = 0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .093$; Wald's test = -0.18 , $SE = 0.05$, $p = .001$). Overall, the four different paths and three stronger paths reveal minor differences between countries, as our general model remains relevant: language usage predicts greater identification via similarity, specially under conditions of high competency. The mediation via in-group acceptance is tenuous, and thus subject to greater country-level (and hence contextual) variability.

Comparing the structural model across generations

Considering how there can be important differences between migrants born in the receiving country (second or third generation) and those born in the country of origin (first generation), we examined whether the pattern of results was similar across these two groups of migrants. We again compared a model in which all associations were constrained to be similar across the two groups of migrants to an unconstrained model (where each generation's associations were free to vary). Comparing these two nested models revealed that the unconstrained model does not fit the data significantly better than the constrained model, $\Delta \text{Loglikelihood} = 2.962$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p = .936$. This indicates that the associations between the different constructs are similar among both generations and, thus, that there is no evidence of generational differences in the proposed mechanisms.

Discussion

A key issue for immigrants is to develop a new sense of national identification. This is not only important for their sense of well-being but can also contribute to their socioeconomical integration in the receiving country (Altschul et al., 2006; Nekby & Rödin, 2007). Research has examined various possible determinants of national identification (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012) but little is known about why participation in cultural practices of the receiving country is related to national identification. National language usage is often a key aspect of the national identity, making it likely that language usage contributes to national identification.

In the current study, we go beyond the existing research by proposing and testing whether language usage can signal to individuals their similarity with members of the receiving country and their acceptance by its members as co-nationals (i.e. their closeness to the prototype), which, in turn, are associated with increased national identification. The findings supported the hypothesis among Muslim migrants, giving evidence for the first time of the importance of perceived closeness to the prototype for the relation between behavioral participation and

national identification. By identifying the role of two processes that were theoretically derived from the social identity perspective (Turner, 1987) and testing them with non-student samples, the current findings make a novel contribution to our understanding of the psychological processes explaining why national language may be key in promoting national identification in migrant populations (Ryder & Dere, 2010).

The hypothesis that language usage acts as a signal of prototypicality was put to a more stringent test by investigating whether this is stronger for individuals with higher perceived language competence. Across generations and in all three countries, the findings supported the prediction that language usage positively predicted perceived similarity when migrants felt more competent in the national language (this model being particularly strong in Germany). However, in Belgium, language usage was a weaker predictor of national identification under conditions of high competency. Moreover, perception of competency moderated the mediation via being perceived as a co-national in Switzerland but not in Belgium or Germany. The reason for these country differences is not fully clear but they indicate that the role of language competency in the association between language usage and perceived acceptance is less clear and robust than for perceived similarity.

One possible explanation for this might be that feeling competent in using the national language with families and friends is less relevant for perceived acceptance as a co-national than for perceived similarities. A social identity requires competent enactment and validation by members of the new group (Klein et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2018b). Perceived acceptance as a co-national is likely to depend more on the actual reactions of members of the receiving country, which would require assessing language usage with them. This might be especially true for migrants who often possess other characteristics that delineate clear and bright boundaries of group membership, as with religion for Muslim migrants in Western Europe (Alba, 2005).

A second possible explanation for the country differences is the presence of country-level cultural and policy differences in, for example, the importance attached to competent linguistic behavior. Cross-national research has found that countries differ in terms of immigration, integration and diversity policies and religious institutionalization, which can impact identification with the receiving country (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018) and inter-group attitudes (Guimond, Crisp, De Oliveira, Kamiejski, Nour, Kuepper, et al., 2013). Some countries attach greater importance to competent language usage and this could translate into greater acceptance as a co-national.

Limitations and future research

The findings were obtained by using data of large samples of Muslim immigrants in three West European countries. This means that the research did not rely on small convenient samples, and the large sample size implies that there was sufficient statistical power to detect differences. Therefore, we can have confidence in the reliability and ecological validity of the current findings. However, the significant effects found are not very strong and the cross-sectional data prevent drawing strong conclusions about the direction of influence. Although our model was theoretically derived it is also possible, for example, that national identification influences perceived similarity or that there are mutual influences⁴.

Furthermore, some of the measures were limited. For example, in the current sample, national identification was measured with two items, making it impossible to consider

different aspect of group identification (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2014). Similarly, perceived acceptance and perceived language competency were measured with single items (see also Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Lebrun, 2012; Thomson, 2016). In collecting large-scale cross-national datasets there are almost always various researchers involved, requiring a trade-off between the number of topics covered and the number of questions that can reasonably be presented to participants. Thus, the advantages off collecting data among a large immigrant sample in different countries has to be balanced with the number of questions that can be asked. However, despite the somewhat limited measures, a clear and similar pattern of findings emerged across the two generations and the three countries.

In the dataset there was no information on why participants used the language of the receiving country with friends and family. If this was partly for displaying society membership (i.e. a form of social identity performance; Klein et al., 2007), its consequence for national identification might be different than if more instrumental reasons were involved. Thus, future studies examining when and why migrants demonstrate behaviors of the receiving country could further improve our understanding of why and when such behavior is associated with a changing sense of social self. Further, although the national language is often closely connected to the national identity (e.g. Cárdenas et al., 2018), the particular way in which the language is being used by migrants (e.g. whether it is passive, such as watching TV, or active, such as engaging in a conversation) can give further insight into when language matters for identification.

Lastly, while the focus of the current research is on the psychology processes by which engaging in typical behaviors of a receiving country predicts greater identification with it, there are of course various other factors that can predict greater or weaker identification. In the current analysis we controlled for length of residence, intergroup contact and level of education but not, for example, for religiosity which has been found to predict national identification among Muslim immigrants (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). However, although the second generation of Muslim immigrants tend to be somewhat less religious than the first generation (Maliepaard, Lubbers, & Gijsberts, 2010), we found no generational differences in the associations tested. This suggests that religiosity might be less relevant in language forms of identity performance. Future research could explore the possible role of religiosity in the relation between national language usage and national identification.

Conclusion

We have offered robust evidence that using national language can predict immigrants' national identification. Furthermore, we examined two mechanisms (perceived similarities with host society members and perceived acceptance) for why language usage is positively associated with identification, and that this depends on perceived language competency. The results illustrate for the first time the psychological mechanisms by which behavioral participation can encourage identification with a new group. These findings were obtained across three European countries and among first and second generation Muslim migrants who experience many disadvantages (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010; Peach, 2006) and are subject to discrimination (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). Thus, they may offer a path by which receiving countries and migrants may work together to promote national identification, and thus further integration.

Notes

1. The survey also included data from the UK. This data was not used because (1) one of the ethnic groups that was the focus of the survey (Pakistan) originated from a country in which English is commonly used, and (2) the scale analysis indicated a lack of measurement fit for the UK. More specifically, testing for configural measurement invariance showed that in the UK, four of the five items used to measure similarity had a very low explained variance on the similarity factor ($R^2 < .198$; fit of the model; $\chi^2(220) = 10,373.485$, CFI = .937; TLI = .921, SRMR = .065; RMSEA = .062 [.058-.066]). These findings are in line with other studies showing translation differences in the UK's questionnaire of the Eurislam project (e.g. Carol, Helbling, & Michalowski, 2015). Nevertheless, when the data from the UK was analyzed separately, similar results to those obtained in the current results sections were found.
2. Simple slope analysis showed that under low competency, language predicted lower identification (at a competency score of 1, unstandardized beta = -0.18 , $SE = 0.05$, $p = .001$), but it predicted greater identification under high competency (at a competency score of 5, unstandardized beta = 0.11 , $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$). Language did not predict identification under medium levels of competency (at a competency score of 3, unstandardized beta = -0.04 , $SE = 0.03$, $p = .172$).
3. The SEM model shown in Figure 2, where competency is a categorical variable and that compared high and low competency (by freeing paths a_1 and a_2 across the two groups) had an appropriate fit: $\chi^2(259) = 832.27$, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .041 [.038 to .044], SRMR = .052. For participants with lower competency, the predicted links between language utilization and the two mediating variables were non-significant ($\beta_{a_1} = -0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .180$; $\beta_{a_2} = -0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .071$). For participants higher in competency, the predicted links between language utilization and perceived similarity was significant ($\beta_{a_1} = 0.14$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), as was its indirect effect on identification ($\beta_{ab_1} = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.016 to 0.060]). Language utilization did not predict perceiving that members of the receiving country regard the participants as in-group members ($\beta_{a_2} = 0.04$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .133$) nor was there an indirect effect on identification ($\beta_{ab_2} = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .134$, 95% CI [-0.020 to 0.019]). These results reflect those of the MLR analysis.
4. Models with alternative directions of influence were not tested given recent recommendations warning against the usefulness of testing alternative models of mediation (e.g. Thoemmes, 2015), as they do not provide further information as to what model is statistically superior nor which model should be theoretically preferred.

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