

"Can you speak German?" a theoretical review of the importance of intrinsic motivation to learn a language among immigrant in Germany

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Abstract

Graham (1985) and Luckmani (1972) have developed the “theories of motivation” to explain how one learns a foreign language. They have separated “integrative” from “instrumental” motivation and come to the conclusion that the latter is often needed to achieve higher proficiency levels. While those theories have been broadly used, they lack a more social approach and seem to neglect the impact of group behaviour. Identitary issues also seem to have been ignored by those authors. By suffering prejudice, certain minority groups (especially racialized groups) can develop an “identity of resistance” (Ogbu 1998, 2004) as a way to cope with the situation. When this happens to immigrants, it can block (or hinder) the development of an integrative motivation (Graham, 1972), interfering with the process of learning the local language. In this article I will explore links present in the scientific literature on key aspects regarding language learning, identity of resistance and the experience of xenophobia.

Key words: immigration, language learning, identity, xenophobia.