Finisterra, XLVIII, 96, 2013, pp. 65-88

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG IMMIGRANTS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERETHNIC RELATIONS.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BILBAO, LISBON AND ROTTERDAM

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Abstract – Despite the increasing interest in exploring language proficiency among immigrants as a quintessential element for their economic integration in the host country, less attention has been devoted to the social impacts that destination-language proficiency may have on enhancing interethnic contacts between immigrants and the native population. This research aims to shed light on this latter topic, discussing if being a native-speaker immigrant in the host country or, for those immigrants who are non-native speakers, having a stronger command of the destination-language may increase their likelihood of interacting with the native population. Moreover, we question if there are significant differences in the interaction patterns between these two groups and the natives, presenting the cities of Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam as a territorial frame. The analysis is based on data gathered through the GEITONIES survey. The results obtained indicate that native-speaker immigrants generally tend to show more interaction with the natives. Nevertheless, for immigrants not sharing such cultural similarity, those with a higher level of second-language proficiency clearly show stronger bonds with the native population; in both cases this can also be related to individual, group or place related variables.

Keywords: Language proficiency, immigrants, interethnic contacts, social networks.

Resumo – Proficiência linguística entre imigrantes e relações inter-étnicas: análise comparativa entre Bilbau, Lisboa e Roterdão. Apesar do crescente interesse pela análise da proficiência linguística dos imigrantes enquanto elemento essencial para a sua integração económica no país de destino, menor atenção tem sido concedida ao papel que a proficiência linguística pode assumir no desenvolvimento de contactos interétnicos com a população nativa. Esta investigação procura examinar se ser imigrante nativo da língua do país de acolhimento ou, para os imigrantes que não partilham o mesmo idioma,

Received: August 2012. Accepted: March 2013

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possuir um maior nível de proficiência na língua do país de destino, influencia a probabilidade de interacção com a população nativa. Simultaneamente, questiona-se também a existência de um padrão de interacção diferenciado entre estes dois grupos de imigrantes e a população nativa, apresentando como quadro territorial as cidades de Bilbau, Lisboa e Roterdão. A análise quantitativa tem por base os padrões de resposta aos inquéritos aplicados no âmbito do projecto GEITONIES. Os resultados indicam que os imigrantes nativos da língua do país de acolhimento tendem, a possuir maior número de interacções com a população nativa. Não obstante, para os imigrantes que não partilham desta semelhança cultural, o maior número de relações inter-étnicas com os nativos encontra-se associado aos imigrantes com nível superior de proficiência na língua do país de destino. Esta tendência poderá ainda estar relacionada com factores de índole individual, associados ao grupo de pertença ou ao local de residência.

Palavras-chave: Proficiência linguística, imigrantes, contactos inter-étnicos, redes sociais.

Résumé – COMPÉTENCE LINGUISTIQUE ENTRE IMMIGRÉS ET RELATIONS INTER-ETHNIQUES: UNE ANALYSE COMPARATIVE ENTRE BILBAO, LISBONNE ET ROTTERDAM. Il semble que la maîtrise de la langue du pays d'accueil par les immigrés, comme facteur essentiel de leur intégration dans le cadre économique du pays et dans le développement des contacts inter-ethniques avec la population locale, ait été négligé. Cet article se propose d'en étudier le rôle: comment les immigrés qui ont acquis la langue du pays d'accueil dès leur naissance et ceux qui ne la possèdent pas encore, peuvent-ils développer leurs contacts avec les autochtones? Existe-t-il un système d'interaction différent entre ces deux groupes d'immigrés et la population autochtone de Bilbao, Rotterdam et Lisbonne? L'analyse se fonde sur les réponses aux enquêtes lancées dans le cadre du projet GEITONIES. Les résultats montrent que les immigrés pratiquant la langue du pays d'accueil à la naissance ont tendance à avoir plus de contacts avec les autochtones. Cependant, il est des immigrés récents qui pratiquant deux langues, ont plus de rapports avec les autochtones. Cette tendance peut dépendre de facteurs individuels, liés au groupe ou au lieu de résidence.

Mots-clés: Compétence linguistique, immigrants, contacts inter-ethniques, réseaux sociaux.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language constitutes a very powerful tool for effective social interaction and its fluency in various dimensions of communication, particularly those of oral nature, facilitates contacts and interchange among individuals. Embarking on the adventure of migration, immigrants are often confronted with the challenge of learning a new language which is not their first idiom of socialization and also frequently from a linguistic family very different from their own. A vast body of literature refers to the relevance of immigrants being able to communicate in the language of the destination country in order to enhance their prospects of a more successful and holistic integration in the host society (Dustmann, 1994; Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Chiswick, 2008; Boyd and Cao, 2009). Although the advantages on employment, housing, and access to health care and education are often highlighted, the possibility of amplifying social capital by enlarging their networks of contacts and opportu-

nities beyond their ethnic group is also a relevant dimension to consider in the analysis of language mastery and interethnic acquaintances. The more contact with other groups the less probable it will be that migrants lead parallel lives, an issue that has raised a good deal of concern and attention among politicians and policy makers (Spencer, 2007; Vertovec, 2007).

This article intends, therefore, to shed light on the relevance that destination-language proficiency may assume as an enhancer of the interaction dynamics between immigrants and the native population. In short, this paper addresses the issue of destination-language proficiency among immigrants and the level of interaction, measured by the number of interethnic contacts, with the native population as it constitutes the most significant fraction of intergroup contact and a primordial dimension of social integration in the host country.

Building upon this, we aim to further explore the following research questions and hypotheses: may we assume that being a native-speaker immigrant increases the probabilities of contact with natives of the host society? One might be tempted to respond affirmatively, but even for those coming from a country sharing the destination-idiom will the ability to fluently speak the language explain the degree of social interaction with the indigenous people? Secondly, may we presume that non-native speaker immigrants showing higher levels of second-language proficiency will establish contacts with natives more often than immigrants who do not have such high standards of accuracy and fluency? Moreover, are there significant differences in the interaction between these two groups of immigrants and natives living in Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam?

In order to develop these premises, and relying on data gathered through the GEITONIES survey, three European cities included in the project were analysed. The neighbourhoods selected within each city in the ambit of the project comprised: Mouraria, Monte Abraão and Costa da Caparica for the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA, henceforth referred to as Lisbon); Deusto, Rekalde and San Francisco for Bilbao; and Afrikaanderwijk, Westpunt and Schiemond for Rotterdam.

The paper is structured in four sections. We begin by discussing the relevance of destination-language command as human capital for the establishment of contacts between immigrant communities and the host society. In this section, a mixture of individual factors, together with others presenting a more contextual character, will be examined. Following the theoretical discussion, some considerations are drawn regarding the research design and methods: firstly, there is a brief depiction of the three case studies and, secondly, a short discussion on the data and methods used throughout this research. The third section, focused on the empirical results, presents a two-level analysis: primarily, a general overview of the patterns found and, subsequently, a detailed examination of those immigrants who have a larger interethnic network with natives. Finally, the major empirical findings will be discussed within a broader theoretical framework and their implications for understanding immigrants' language proficiency and interethnic relations will be debated.

II. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERETHNIC CONTACTS

1. Language proficiency among immigrants: overcoming challenges

Life in contemporary fast changing societies where daily exchanges of information are constant, as is the case in the most important immigrant hosting nations, demands a reasonable domain of the destination-language. Indeed, the level of interaction of immigrants, both with natives and members of other immigrated communities, greatly depends on the ability to command the dominant language (Wagner and Machleit, 1986). Nonetheless, this is not a homogeneous picture since two different groups are being considered: firstly, native-speaker immigrants mainly from former colonies and, secondly, individuals whose mother tongue does not share similarities with the destination-language.

For immigrants coming from countries where the official language, or at least the national language[i], is similar to that of the host society the effort of learning a new oral system of communication is much smaller. Due to this comparative advantage, these immigrants tend to have more opportunities in the labour market, mainly in sectors where communication constitutes an important tool such as commercial activities, personal and domestic services and hospitality (Malheiros, 2007; Fonseca, 2008; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009; Reis *et al.*, 2010).

An immigrant who struggles to understand the destination-language is extremely limited in his/her contacts and interactions with the host society, delaying the integration process[ii] given that it will be more difficult to find a better place to live, information on access to health care and education or social support. A considerable amount of research has also explored the relation between second-language proficiency, job and earnings, mostly showing that more fluent and literate migrants hold better positions in the labour market which often bring higher salaries and, consequently, greater socioeconomic proximity to the native population (Dustmann, 1994; Chiswick and Miller, 2007b; Chiswick, 2008; Boyd and Cao, 2009)[iii]. According to Allport's intergroup contact theory, this closeness results in a larger number of contacts due to the similarity in terms of group status (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew, 1998).

If an immigrant comes from a country speaking a different language than that of the country of destination, a greater investment has to be made in order to acquire the necessary skills. The major burden of this responsibility rests on the migrant's shoulders, with governments assuming different levels of commitment to this long-term investment, the results of which are not always immediately visible. In countries with a well-established tradition of hosting successive waves of migration like Australia, Canada, the UK and the Netherlands, there are numerous programmes, often sponsored by local authorities, targeting newcomers whose mother tongue is not the country's official language. In all of these countries the message is clear and stresses the need to learn the language in order to find a job, to understand the society and to communicate with others. The relevance of the issue

has led the Council of Europe to enact several recommendations and resolutions inviting "member governments to make greater efforts to enable all migrant workers […] to learn the language of the reception country" (Resolution (68)18[iv]; Council of Europe, 2008: 4). This economic-focused position makes clear the relevance of acquiring second-language skills in order to achieve a more successful social integration.

This latter concern is increasingly visible in the Netherlands where language mastery is considered a prime condition for social integration. The most recent philosophy contends that a student can learn the language either in an isolated setting or in an environment relevant for him/her, for example oriented towards the labour market (OECD, 2008; Suvarierol and Kirk, 2012). The courses available are mostly provided by private institutions contracted by municipalities and foreign citizens expected to fund their own classes. Moreover, those required to do the civic integration exam must attend the courses (Suvarierol and Kirk, 2012).

Notwithstanding the more recent experience in hosting foreign workers, Portugal has also developed a specific programme to facilitate language acquisition – Portuguese For All[v] – which includes classes of technical Portuguese targeting some of the main areas of employment involving communication with others like commerce, personal services and civil construction (Cabete, 2010; McHugh and Challinor, 2011). The attendance of the free-of-charge courses is not compulsory; however, the immigrants seeking to obtain Portuguese citizenship or permanent residence are obliged to pass a language exam.

In Spain, the Autonomic Regions are implementing language learning projects through a network of centres functioning at the neighbourhood level (Adult Persons Education Centres[vi]), funded by the Department of Education. In the specific case of the Basque region, some of the centres are run by the Department of Education of the Regional Government and offer free classes of Spanish and Basque languages. Local authorities also sponsor language learning classes oriented towards the labour market, but the recent economic crisis has led to severe budgetary cuts.

2. Language proficiency among immigrants and contacts with the receiving society: complementary factors playing a role in interethnic exchanges

Notwithstanding the fundamental role played by language proficiency in enhancing the number of contacts between immigrants and natives, these interactions also seem to be related to other complementary factors. According to the literature, some of these are embodied in the migrant while others are closely associated to the group of belonging or even to features of the place of residence (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Pettigrew, 1998; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). In this context, the understanding of the complexity inherent to language command among immigrants and the formation of interethnic networks may be enhanced by incorporating into the analysis other complementary factors.

At the individual level, having had exposure to the idiom of the destination country prior to migration, may provide a prompt and stronger command of the dominant language which becomes an essential resource for enhancing immigrants' interethnic contacts with the native population. Several authors have remarked on the importance of this, comparing data from groups with different exposure to the language and culture of the host society. Using information on Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish and Moroccan migrants residing in the Netherlands, Martinovic *et al.* (2009) show that members of the first two national groups have more interaction with the Dutch population than the others. One of the reasons is the familiarity that the Surinamese and Antilleans have with the Dutch language, also the official language in these two territories, sharing long-standing historical relations with the Netherlands. Moreover, Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk (2006) highlight the similarity between the Surinamese, Antillean and Dutch educational systems. This may act as an enhancing factor in terms of transfer of diplomas and recognition of degrees, and thus, of incorporation in the labour market and in Dutch society in general.

The situation of PALOP[vii] and Brazilian citizens in Portugal holds similarities with that described for Rotterdam. Indeed, despite small phonetic, lexical and semantic differences between speakers from different countries, those mastering the language have generally more contacts with Portuguese natives (Fonseca *et al.*, 2012).

The same analogy could be made in respect to the Latin-American migrants residing in Spain who, speaking Spanish fluently[viii], are better able to communicate with natives. Nevertheless, this Iberian country shows a particular linguistic reality due to the relevance of regional languages, such as Basque, Catalan or Galician. In the case of Bilbao, this may hinder the contact of Latin-Americans with the Basques who may favour the Basque language for communication. What is more, the Latin-American parents tend to orient their offspring towards Spanish speaking education models, leading to a possible isolation of these children by hampering the opportunities of contact between them and the native (Basque-speaking) population (Leonardo *et al.*, 2008).

Language proficiency does not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, a set of quite important factors for language mastery may be related to educational level and socio-professional status. A considerable body of literature demonstrates that the higher the schooling level of the migrant and the more prestigious his/her professional group, the more opportunities will exist for interethnic contacts over time (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Pettigrew, 1998; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009; Fonseca *et al.*, 2012). According to Allport's contact theory, the explanation resides in the equal group status with more educated migrants often having a more universalistic view on life, attributing less relevance to ethnic group membership, and showing a higher exposure to the cultural values and traditions of the host society. In this context, more educated individuals present themselves in a more favourable position to establish contacts since they often tend to have higher language skills. Although language mastery is important to facilitate communication with others, the absence, or at least

the presence of low levels of prejudice, may also constitute an important condition to reach out to others and establish contacts with people perceived as "different". Indeed, persons with strong negative views of other groups are more likely to avoid contact in social activities (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Gilchrist and Kyprianou, 2011). Education, especially among school children, may be a tool to change preconceived ideas about foreign-born persons and those seen as culturally very different in a negative sense. Moreover, it also increases the chances of contact between families, especially when there is a common idiom. Yet, as noted by Allport (1979), the frequency of contact by itself is not enough to reduce prejudice and encourage interethnic relations.

Several authors also mention the quality of the encounters and their attendant circumstance as very important factors, rather than the number, to establish meaningful contacts that may contribute to improve destination-language skills and lead to changes in behavioural attitudes (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Pettigrew, 1998). Leisure events are the best moments for these optimal meetings because individuals choose to be with others out of their own free will and are not constrained by the rules of the place of work or study. These voluntary social networks can truly assess the importance of interethnic contacts for migrants.

The period of residence in the host country is also a remarkably important factor to consider when tackling the degree of language proficiency. Two main reasons can be pointed out for this: firstly, the longer the period that immigrants are living in the host country, the more potential opportunities for learning the destination-language may exist and, as a result, for social contact and interaction (Martinovic *et al.*, 2009; Fonseca *et al.*, 2012). For instance, having undergone their socialization process in the destination country, marked by a great exposure to the language and culture, especially in school, led many second-generation offspring, or those incorporated in the receiving society at a very early age, to be bilingual, or even multilingual, and familiar with customs and cultural practices (Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Chiswick and Miller, 2007a; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Being able to build bridges[ix] between the receiving society and the community of origin, due to their language skills and diversified social networks, the children of immigrants can play an essential role in bringing together groups who do not have much contact, often living parallel lives, despite their geographical propinquity (Gilchrist and Kyprianou, 2011). Secondly, longer periods of residence in the host country, associated with a high fluency regarding the dominant language, may potentiate encounters between immigrants and natives which may in turn influence marital choices and increase the number of mixed marriages, spurring interethnic contacts through the partner's social networks and reinforcing the links between different ethnic groups. This is particularly salient in the case of the Surinamese in the Netherlands, who show higher levels of intermarriage with the native Dutch (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006).

Finally, the ethnic composition of an urban settlement, including the proportion of natives and migrants and the diversity of ethnic origins present, may also influence the probability of developing social interchanges through the host country's

official language and, therefore, establishing interethnic contacts. Indeed, the migration literature is rich in examples showing that, in areas with a small proportion of foreigners combined with a considerable presence of natives, interethnic relations may be potentiated as there are more opportunities for interaction, language learning and mutual knowledge (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Vervoort *et al.*, 2011; Gijsberts *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, literature also highlights that immigrants tend to reside in places where co-ethnics are already present, which may reduce their need to develop destination-language competences (Warman, 2006).

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Following the theoretical discussion and conceptual outline, it is now important to devote further attention to the case studies selected, as well as to the data and methods used throughout this research. Bearing in mind the two questions initially posed: *i)* do native-speaker immigrants have more interethnic contacts with the native population?; *ii)* does second-language proficiency among immigrants influence their levels of contact with natives, a set of 893 valid questionnaires – 298 for Bilbao, 300 for Lisbon and 295 for Rotterdam – applied within the GEITONIES project was used[x].

1. The case of Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam

Even though these three cities illustrate diverse realities from a migration standpoint, they share a common ground arising from the fact that Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands all had a colonial past which resulted, *inter alia*, in the arrival of immigrants from Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch speaking countries since the second half of the 20th century (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006; Malheiros, 2007; Aierdi *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, these countries (and cities) also host other foreign-born immigrants who do not share such a similar cultural past and, therefore, seeking to learn the destination-language in order to accelerate their integration process.

In the case of Bilbao, immigrants arriving from Spanish-speaking countries (chiefly Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador), and also from Romania and Morocco, are among the largest groups, accounting for more than half of the foreign population living in the city. In descending order, Bolivians represent 17.2% of the overall number of foreign-born residents, followed by Colombians (13.2%), Romanians (8.0%), Moroccans (7.2%) and, lastly, Ecuadorians (6.5%) (Setién *et al.*, 2010).

Lisbon, for its part, concentrates remarkable figures of immigrants from the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP), who came to Portugal, and particularly to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA), since the mid-1970´s. In 2010, this group represented 36.1% of the overall foreign documented population in the LMA

followed by other relevant groups such as the Brazilians (28.4%) and the Eastern Europeans (18.2%) (SEF, 2011).

In comparison with the two previous southern European cities, Rotterdam presents a longer and more complex migration past. Immigration to this city increased significantly after World War II, partially as an inheritance of the colonial past of the Netherlands (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006). As a result, the most relevant foreign group found in the city is the Surinamese (9%)[xi], followed by the Turks (8%) and the Moroccans (6%) (Milttenburg *et al.*, 2010).

2. Data and methods

Anchored in the abovementioned research questions, two hypotheses were outlined: *i)* immigrants who are native-speakers have a stronger propensity for interacting with the native population; *ii)* non-native speaker immigrants showing higher levels of second-language fluency are more prone to develop interethnic contacts with natives.

Building upon the GEITONIES data, four groups have been defined: the first corresponding to native-speaker immigrants, and the remaining categories distinguishing between those showing high, medium or poor second-language skills. Due to the subjectivity and variability arising from the open question concerning first language – "which language do you consider to be your first language?" – only those immigrants who defined the host country's official idiom as their first language were classified as native-speakers. When the respondents from former colonies mentioned other languages as their primary socialization idiom (e.g. Quechua for the Bolivians), they were not included in the native-speakers group[xii].

In respect to second-language proficiency, a set of questions was posed in order to gauge broad-spectrum language skills. Given the main purpose of measuring the quantity of social interactions between immigrants and natives, only oral skills were considered in the calculation of the average language aptitude. The questions included in the composition of this indicator sought, therefore, to evaluate communication efficiency in three contexts: i) when visiting a doctor or a hospital; ii) when dealing with institutions; and iii) when following the news on the television. Due to their complementarity, the same weight was assigned to each query.

Based on immigrants' destination-language command, resulting either from being native of a former colony or from later acquisition of second-language competences, we aim to explore its implications for their social networks. This analysis will rely on the section of the GEITONIES questionnaire addressing close social networks. The respondents were asked to name a maximum of eight contacts with whom they would interact in four different contexts – spending free time, sharing confidence and advice, asking for help and other relationships.

Attempting to further explore our research questions, a bipartite analysis will be undertaken: firstly, a broader analysis for the three cities will be carried out aiming to uncover the importance of dominant language proficiency among immi-

grants in the establishment of interethnic relations, including either the social networks established with people from different ethnic backgrounds or those exclusively developed with natives; subsequently, a detailed analysis of the immigrants presenting a larger number of close contacts with natives will be presented. Considering this, a sample of the 10% of immigrants showing more contacts with natives was selected for each city, representing a total of 90 individuals. This selection was primarily defined by establishing a lower cut off limit corresponding to the average plus one standard deviation and, secondly, by randomly selecting the remaining cases.

Table I draws a primary insight into the profile of the language groups aforementioned. A straightforward analysis of all groups allows us to identify a differential pattern with respect to gender, age cohorts and educational levels. As theoretically expected, and in contrast to the highly fluent immigrants, the poorly proficient group is characterized by a higher concentration of persons in the upper age cohorts and lower educational levels. Indeed, half of those presenting poor second-language proficiency completed at most the first stage of basic education, being on average older than those immigrants showing higher levels of destination-language command (46 and 40 years old, respectively). The socio-economic occupational index (ISEI)[xiii] and the length of residence in the destination country deserve a more thorough analysis. The more positive results encountered for those with low second-language fluency – average ISEI of 36 and a period of residence in the country reaching 14 years – can be mainly related to two aspects: i) entrepreneur immigrants (e.g. Chinese or Bangladeshi); and ii) immigrants from large and long-established groups (e.g. the Turks). In both instances, the size and social networks based in the ethnic community may act as a hindering factor for learning the destination-language, also potentially contributing to limit their likelihood to establish interethnic contacts (in average set in only 0.2).

Having briefly discussed the individual profile of each of the four groups included in the analysis, the discussion will now focus on how immigrants' language skillfulness translates into their interethnic networks and socialization dynamics.

Table I – General characterization of the groups in analysis.
Quadro I – Caracterização geral dos grupos em análise.

Variables	Native-speaker immigrants	Language proficiency		
		Non-native speaker immigrants		
		Highly proficient	Fairly proficient	Poorly proficient
Sex (%)				
Masculine	39.2	52.2	63.0	43.2
Feminine	60.8	47.8	37.0	56.8
Total	100	100	100	100
Age Cohorts (%)				
< 35	45.3	39.0	36.4	25.0
35-49	36.2	44.2	48.5	45.5
50-64	11.7	12.7	11.1	15.9
>= 65	6.8	4.0	4.0	13.6
Total	100	100	100	100
Average age (years)	40	40	40	46
Educational level (%)				
No school, primary and first stage of basic	21.5	21.5	46.0	50.0
Lower and second stage of secondary	25.9	21.9	14.0	15.9
Upper Secondary	32.3	29.1	14.0	11.4
Post-secondary and Tertiary	18.3	25.1	21.0	18.2
Missing values	2.0	2.4	5.0	4.5
Total	100	100	100	100
Socio-economic profile				
Average ISEI	34	37	34	36
Average interethnic contacts with natives (no.)	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.2
Average length of residence in country of residence (years)	14	17	12	14

Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010.
Valid cases: n native-speaker immigrants = 498; *n* highly proficient immigrants = 251; *n* fairly proficient immigrants = 100; *n* poorly proficient immigrants = 44

IV. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND IMMIGRANTS' CLOSE INTERETHNIC CONTACTS: UNCOVERING PATTERNS AND IMPLICATIONS

Aiming to further examine the premises underlying this research, a general discussion on immigrants' interethnic contacts at the city level will be primarily undertaken. Subsequently, a more detailed analysis will be conducted on the profile of the immigrants presenting a larger number of contacts with the native population.

From the outset, it is important to have a general picture of the distribution of immigrants according to their language proficiency per city as it constitutes the foundation for the results discussed later on. It is interesting to note, in figure 1, the remarkable relevance of native-speaker immigrants in Lisbon, followed by Bilbao.

This pattern cannot be detached from the fact that the immigration flows to Portugal and Spain are indeed more focused in the former colonies, a phenomenon that is less perceptible for Rotterdam[xiv]. Concurrently, the proportion of immigrants claiming to be highly fluent in the destination-language is far higher in the case of Rotterdam, where the longer and more consolidated immigrant past may contribute to a more prominent command of the Dutch language. Furthermore, it can be added that 20% of the immigrants from former colonies who mentioned a first language other than Dutch (e.g. Papiamento for natives of the Netherlands Antilles) and, therefore, were not considered native-speakers, are counted among the highly fluent immigrants.

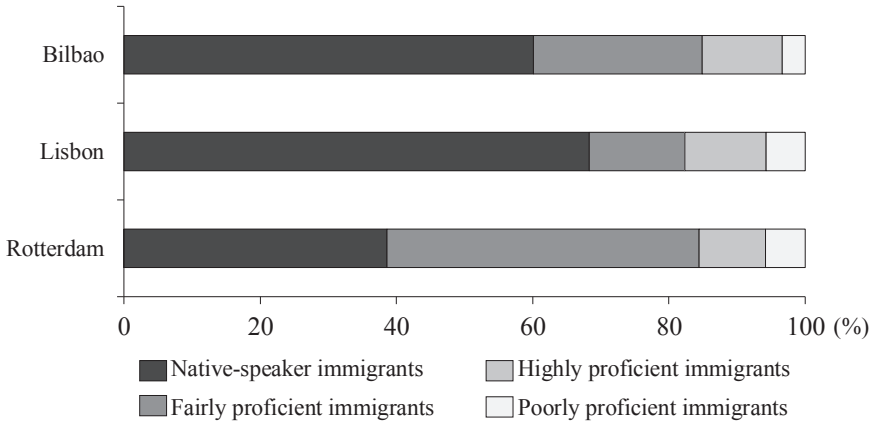

Fig. 1 – Destination-language proficiency among immigrants per city.
Fig.1 – Proficiência dos imigrantes na língua do país de acolhimento por cidade.
Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010.

Bearing in mind the patterns of dominant language proficiency among immigrants residing in Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam, it is now intended to examine how these are related to their levels of interethnic socialization. Table II summarizes the presence (or absence) of interethnic contacts according to language proficiency for the three cities under analysis.

Considering the overall patterns found, it stands out that while the native-speaker immigrants and those with high second-language proficiency have, in more than half of the cases (50.3% and 61.5% correspondingly), interethnic contacts, only a modest 29.1% and 21.2% of those fairly and poorly proficient have such interactions.

From a cross-city perspective, it can be underlined that both in Lisbon and Rotterdam, in contrast to Bilbao, native-speaker immigrants tend to have interethnic contacts more often (45.2% and 69.9%, respectively). These differentiated trends may be related to a more consolidated presence of immigrants from former colonies in the first two cities (mainly since the mid-1970´s), while in Bilbao the arrival of Latin-Americans is mainly visible since the mid-1980´s and 1990´s. Finally, it is interesting to emphasize that the proportion of poorly fluent immigrants reporting to

have interethnic contacts does not even reach 30% of the respondents for any of the three cities analysed.

Table II – Interethnic contacts according to language proficiency per city.
Quadro II – Contactos inter-étnicos de acordo com o nível de proficiência linguística por cidade.

Language proficiency	Bilbao			Lisbon			Rotterdam			Total		
	Yes	No	Total%	Yes	No	Total%	Yes	No	Total%	Yes	No	Total%
Native-speaker immigrants	42.8	57.2	100	45.2	54.8	100	69.9	30.1	100	50.3	49.7	100
Highly proficient immigrants	71.6	28.4	100	44.8	55.2	100	59.3	40.7	100	61.5	38.5	100
Fairly proficient immigrants	36.4	63.6	100	17.9	82.1	100	32.0	68.0	100	29.1	70.9	100
Poorly proficient immigrants	11.1	88.9	100	27.3	72.7	100	23.1	76.9	100	21.2	78.8	100
Total abs.	140	149	289	101	144	245	163	111	274	404	404	808

Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010.
Bilbao: Chi square = 25.094, df = 3, p = .000
Lisbon: Chi square = 8.502, df = 3, p = .037
Rotterdam: Chi square = 20.085, df = 3, p = .000

Figures 2 and 3 show, in the first case, the overall number of interethnic contacts (including both natives and immigrants from other ethnic backgrounds) and, in the second case, the number of contacts with natives according to immigrants' dominant language fluency.

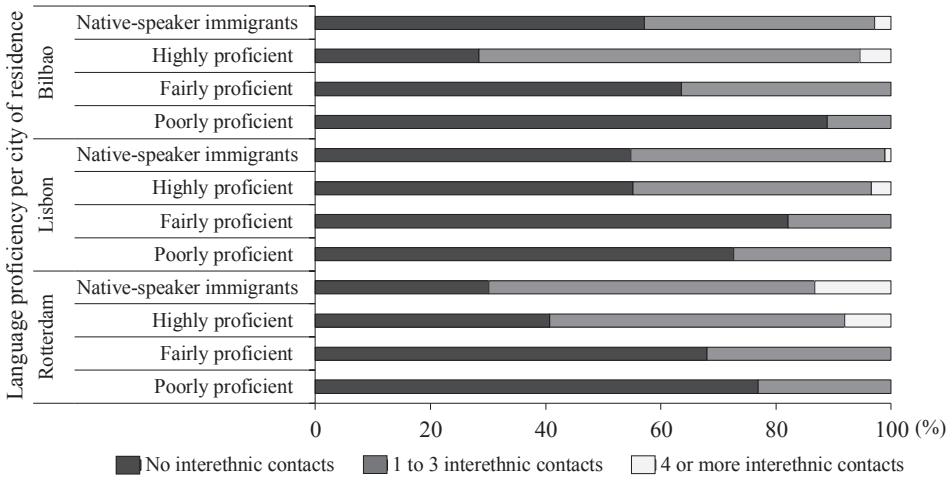

Fig. 2 – Interethnic contacts according to immigrants' destination-language proficiency per city of residence.
Fig. 2 – Contactos inter-étnicos de acordo com o nível de proficiência dos imigrantes na língua do país de acolhimento por cidade de residência.
Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010.

In a first assessment, a converging pattern between the two figures can be identified, which supports the idea that a significant part of the interethnic contacts mentioned actually refer to contacts with natives. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that there are generally low levels of interethnic relations with natives across all groups of immigrants regardless of their command of the destination-language[xv].

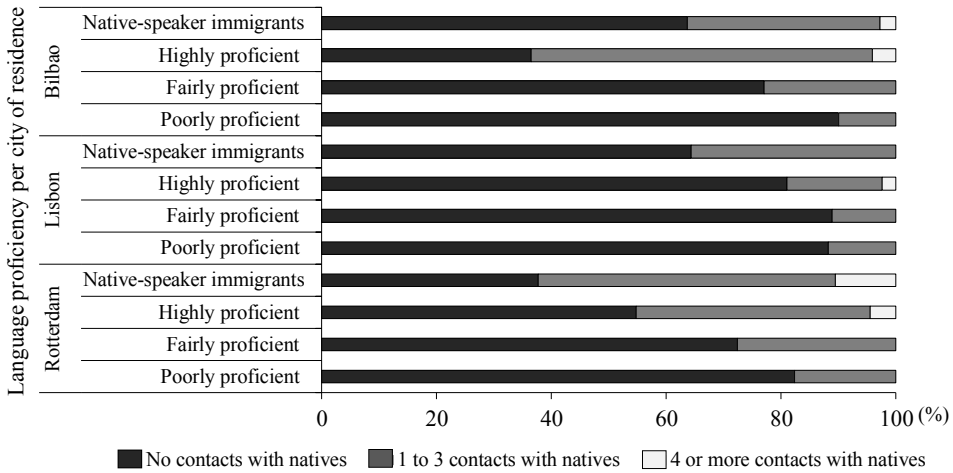

Fig. 3 – Interethnic contacts with natives according to immigrants' destination-language proficiency per city of residence.

Fig. 3 – Contactos inter-étnicos com nativos de acordo com o nível de proficiência dos imigrantes na língua do país de acolhimento por cidade de residência.

Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010.

Drawing a further insight into the patterns found in figures 2 and 3 two major notes can be made:

i) Being a native-speaker immigrant does not seem to be determinant to develop a high number of interethnic relations with natives, but it can be pointed out as an enhancer of those relationships. This trend seems to be particularly true for Rotterdam where 51.8% of the immigrants identified as native-speakers reported having 1 to 3 contacts with natives compared to 40.7% of those highly proficient and only 17.6% of those with poor second-language command[xvi]. Lisbon appears in an intermediate position showing a higher percentage of immigrants whose first language is Portuguese having 1 to 3 contacts with natives (35.6%) but, on the other hand, the highly fluent migrants stand out as showing the upper percentage of 4 or more contacts (2.4%). Bilbao, for its part, is the only city where the tendency is markedly different and only 33.5% of the native-speaker immigrants (compared to 59.4% for those with high command of the destination-language) reported having 1 to 3 contacts with natives.

ii) On the whole, a positive association between the number of interethnic networks / contacts with natives and the destination-language fluency can be found.

Indeed, second-language poorly proficient immigrants consistently show low levels of interaction with natives. In the three cities under analysis more than three quarters reported having no contact with natives (82.4% for Rotterdam, 88.2% for Lisbon and a remarkable 90% in the case of Bilbao). Conversely, highly proficient immigrants are those who more frequently have a larger social network with natives (4 or more contacts). Overall, these patterns translate into positive correlations between the level of second-language proficiency and the number of interethnic contacts, a trend which is particularly evident for the cases of Bilbao and Rotterdam[xvii]. These results seem to support the evidence in the literature that second-language proficiency constitutes an essential resource to increase the number of interethnic acquaintances (Wagner and Machleit, 1986; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2009).

Who are the immigrants showing more social interaction with natives? Fitting language proficiency in the global profile

After having discussed broad patterns of interethnic social networks in three European cities – Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam – the analysis will be deepened by examining the immigrants who present a larger number of contacts with natives. A general profile of the 90 immigrants showing more acquaintances with natives, structured in three dimensions of analysis – dominant language proficiency, contacts and social interaction, and descriptive profiles – is presented in table III and dissected afterwards.

Firstly, considering the main dimension under analysis, language proficiency, a preponderance of native-speaker immigrants among the sample presented in table III is noticeable. This reflects the importance of speaking the native idiom (as well as sharing other related cultural communalities) as a quintessential element for enhancing interaction with the native population[xviii]. This trend seems to be particularly true for Rotterdam and Lisbon and, to a lesser extent, for Bilbao. In the former cases, the post-colonial immigrants and their second-generation offspring[xix] show a superior number of contacts with the native population when compared to other long-established groups such as the Turks or the Moroccans in the Netherlands. This empirical evidence seems to be consistent with the results achieved in previous studies (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Conversely, in the latter instance, the ethnic concentration of the Latin-American community in Bilbao, despite the fact that they are also Spanish native-speakers, may act as a hindering factor for establishing contacts with natives since it may inhibit opportunities (through daily routine or leisure-time contacts or even marriage) and incentives to develop acquaintances with fellow indigenous (e.g. from the 41 Bolivians surveyed for Bilbao, 75.6% reported having no close contacts with natives)[xx]. Furthermore, the fact that, besides Spanish, the Basque language is used as the idiom of everyday contact may also hamper acquaintances between Latin-Americans and the native population.

Table III – General profile of immigrants presenting a larger number of interethnic contacts with natives.
Quadro III – Perfil geral dos imigrantes com maior número de contactos inter-étnicos com nativos.

			Bilbao	Lisbon	Rotterdam
Dominant-language proficiency	Language proficiency	Native- speaker immigrants	17	28	23
		Highly proficient immigrants	12	1	7
		Fairly proficient immigrants	1	1	0
Contacts and social interaction	Interethnic contacts	Average interethnic contacts (no.)	3.3	2.4	4.1
		Average interethnic contacts with natives (no.)	3.2	2.4	3.8
Descriptive profiles	Individual profile	Sex			
		Masculine	22	17	9
		Feminine	8	13	21
		Average age (years)	36	38	42
		Educational level			
		No school, primary and first stage of basic	3	6	8
		Lower and second stage of secondary	5	8	5
		Upper Secondary	2	9	4
		Post secondary and Tertiary	20	7	8
		Missing values	0	0	5
		Average length of residence in Country of residence (years)	16	30	35
		Average length of residence in the area of residence (years)	11	12	15
	Socio-economic profile	ISEI average	40	45	42
		EGP average	5	5	5
	Family Background	Country of birth (CoB)			
		Country of Residence	2	14	15
		Spanish/ Portuguese/Dutch speaking countries	15	14	7
		Other countries	13	2	8
		Portugal/Spain/Netherlands as CoB of at least one of the parents	5	10	6
		Second-generation offspring	2	14	15
		Native partner	15 (total of 23)	14 (total of 19)	3 (total of 8)

Source: GEITONIES survey 2009/2010; $n = 90$.

Indeed, as the case of Bilbao demonstrates, although destination-language proficiency represents an essential step towards the development of interethnic contacts with natives, other factors may also influence this process, helping to understand

why, in some circumstances, native-speaker immigrants show more moderate levels of interaction with the native population. Keeping this in mind, and referring to Wagner and Machleit (1986), it may be that natives develop a negative attitude towards immigrants when their concentration becomes perceived as a threat. Finally, having poor second-language command appears to constitute an effective barrier hindering interaction with the endogenous population as none of the immigrants in the selected sample presents such a low level of proficiency.

As formerly emphasized, despite the importance of dominant language mastery in the development of interethnic relations, other individual and contextual factors – e.g. age, length of residence in the host country or level of ethnic concentration in the area of residence – may also influence, and potentially contribute to explain, diverse degrees of interaction with the native population. For this reason, table III aims to combine dominant language proficiency, a dimension regarding contacts and social interaction and descriptive profiles focused on individual and family background variables.

Looking at the individual profile of the immigrants presenting a larger network of contacts with natives, the patterns found appear to be consistent with the literature supporting that those arriving at a younger age in the country of residence, living there for a longer period of time and presenting a higher educational level are more likely to develop competences regarding the dominant language and, by these means, increase their chances of interacting with the native population (Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2009). Transposing these assumptions on to the selected group of immigrants, it is worth noting, as showed in table III, that their average age is relatively low, particularly if we add to the analysis the average length of residence in the host country[xxi]. Indeed, immigrants with a larger number of contacts with natives have lived in the country (and also in the area of residence) for a longer period of time (never below the 10-year mark). This is more observable for Lisbon and Rotterdam[xxii], where many of these migrants arrived after the decolonization process during the 1970´s[xxiii], having inclusively originated a matured second-generation offspring. Additionally, this group also tends to present above average levels of education (especially true in the case of Bilbao).

Proceeding with the analysis of the descriptive profiles displayed in table III, and regarding the socio-economic dimension, measured by the average International Socioeconomic Index (ISEI) and Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP), it becomes obvious that the economic occupational status of this group of immigrants tends to be relatively high[xxiv]. In light of these results, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the higher socio-economic condition of these immigrants may have allowed them to increase more easily their destination-language competences and, in relation with this, more straightforwardly develop interaction with natives.

Family background is also intimately related to the dominant language command, frequently potentiating (or hindering) the acquisition of destination-language skills and the establishment of contacts outside the immigrant's ethnic group. As presented in table III, being a second-generation offspring or from a former colony,

that is being a native-speaker of the host country idiom, seems to play an important role in the interaction dynamics with the indigenous population (Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, second-generation youth may be more capable of developing stronger bonds with the country of residence since they were born and went through all their socialization process there. This dimension assumes foremost relevance for Rotterdam since it has a long-established history of migration which includes Dutch native and non-native speakers – Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks and Moroccans; also, but to a lesser degree, this is significant in Lisbon where an African second-generation, whose parents arrived in Portugal after the decolonization process, can be found (Fonseca *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, the second-generation is still not significantly visible in Bilbao, where the Latin-American migrants arrived to in the late 1980´s and during the 1990´s. This tendency largely justifies the more pronounced social networks with natives in Rotterdam and Lisbon regarding native-speaker immigrants. Indeed, as stressed in the theoretical section, contrary to the foreign-born labour migrants, the immigrant descendants, by having undergone all their socialization process and schooling in the country of residence, have developed native-speaker competences in the dominant idiom, which also helps to explain their higher promptness to establish social networks with natives and other second-generation companions (Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk, 2006; Fonseca *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, as evidenced in table III, having a native partner turns out to be a strong determinant for the long-term acquisition of competences in the host country language and, in relation with this, for the development of acquaintances with natives, either through the spouse's network of contacts or through improving language skills and, therefore, potentiating further contacts (Chiswick and Miller, 1996; Martinovic *et al*., 2009; Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2009).

V. FINAL REMARKS

Previous literature has supported the importance of destination-language command as an elementary aspect for assuring immigrants' economic and social integration in the host country. In line with this, the present research reinforces the important role that dominant language proficiency among immigrants plays in the establishment of interethnic relations with natives. Recalling our initial research questions, it is now possible to outline some major findings:

Do native-speaker immigrants have more interethnic contacts with the native population?

Considering the abridged level of attention that this topic has achieved in the literature, this research allows us to contend that, although being a native-speaker immigrant does not constitute a determinant factor for developing interethnic contacts, it can actually act as an enhancer of those relationships. Drawing particular

attention to the case studies presented, it is remarkable that for Rotterdam and, to a lesser extent, for Lisbon, this is a valid tendency. The same does not seem to be equally evident in the case of Bilbao. It appears, therefore, reasonable to assume that for those places where the arrival of immigrants from former colonies has been taking place for a longer period of time and has inclusively originated second generations, the importance of being a native-speaker in the establishment of interethnic contacts is more obvious. Regarding this latter aspect, this research made salient the role of the second-generation as individuals that are more prone to create ties with the indigenous population, including other second-generation fellows. Indeed, having undergone all their socialization process in the country of residence, the descendants of immigrants develop a more comprehensive domain of its spoken language and cultural habits, which may be translated into a convergent educational and socio-economic profile with the native population. Moreover, this lengthened cultural exposure may increase their opportunities to socially interact with natives, either through voluntary or involuntary networks. This can lead, as highlighted by this research, to an increasing number of mixed marriages and, as a result, to an enlargement and strengthening of social networks between immigrants and natives.

Does second-language proficiency among immigrants influence their level of contact with natives?

Regarding second-language proficiency among non-native speaker immigrants, our empirical findings are consistent with previous literature supporting that a stronger command of the destination-language constitutes a quintessential element for enhancing the contact between immigrants and natives. Nonetheless, this research also highlights the importance of other – individual and contextual – factors that may influence a more prompt and successful acquisition of dominant language competences. Indeed, immigrants showing higher skills regarding second-language fluency tend to combine a set of characteristics that increase their likelihood to establish contacts with natives. This can be placed at the individual level, contextualized within their close (e.g. family) networks or related to the more ample context of their place of residence.

At the individual level, these immigrants tend to show a relatively analogous educational level and occupational status to those of the native population. Furthermore, those foreign-born presenting a higher command of the destination-language are generally established in the host country for a longer period of time, meaning that they have undergone an extended cultural exposure and, potentially, adaptation to its culture. This tendency also increases their likelihood to include natives in their voluntary social networks which is visible, for instance, in a higher incidence of interethnic marriage.

Finally, looking at more contextual dimensions, the ethnic composition of the area of residence seems to play an important role in potentiating or hindering the acquisition of destination-language competences and, in relation with this, contacts

with natives. As previously pointed out, and in line with prior studies, more than a generally high concentration of immigrants, the strong presence of a singular ethnic group (e.g. for Lisbon, the Brazilians in Costa da Caparica) may indeed more notably hamper contacts with the native population.

Are there significant differences in the interaction between these two groups – native and non-native speaker immigrants – and the natives living in Bilbao, Lisbon and Rotterdam?

Building upon the case studies presented, the answer would be, in a first instance, yes, because native-speaker immigrants share cultural similarities with the indigenous population whereas, even being highly proficient in the destination-language, non-native speaker migrants do not. This is particularly observable for those countries where immigrants from former colonies are established for a long period of time and have been longer exposed to the host country culture – e.g. the Surinamese in Rotterdam since the late 1960´s or the Africans in Lisbon since the mid-1970´s. Moreover, their descendants went through all their socialization process in the country of residence which may obviously strength their bonds with the native population.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this pattern is less clear if the case of Bilbao is considered. Even having in common the strong presence of immigrants from former colonies, the fact that the Latin-Americans have less recent colonial ties with their former metropolis (Spanish former colonies in Latin America gained their independence mostly during the 19th century), arrived more recently (late 1980´s and during the 1990´s) and still have not originated a matured second generation, appears to reduce their advantage in the establishment of contacts with native fellows. Furthermore, constraints arising from the existence of another official language, the Basque, to the establishment of interethnic acquaintances between Latin-Americans and the native population seem to require further attention.

Considering this, the time frame of the migration streams, this meaning the length of residence in the destination country, also seems to represent a significant factor in promoting (or hampering) the acquisition of competences regarding the hosting country idiom and, associated with this, a determinant aspect for increasing (or decreasing) the likelihood of immigrants to develop interethnic networks with natives.

In summary, dominant language proficiency constitutes a major factor in the process of social interaction with, and integration into, the host society. Still, the process of formation and development of interethnic networks does not occur in a vacuum, it is also important to relate language proficiency to complementary individual and contextual variables. This may represent a first step towards building a more grounded analytical model which may help to better understand and contextualize the decisive role of dominant language competences in the development of interethnic networks between immigrants and the native population.

FUNDING

This research has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2011) under grant agreement nº 216184 (GEITONIES PROJECT).

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[i] The national language is the language spoken by the majority of people, whereas the official language is the one declared by the government to be the language of a nation. This latter idiom is used not only for administrative purposes but, being taught in schools, also plays a fundamental role in the construction of national cohesion and identity.

[ii] We share the concept of integration stated in the Resolution 1437 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which sees integration as a two way process for the accommodation of diversity aiming at ensuring social cohesion (Krumm and Plutzar, 2008).

[iii] From the economic viewpoint, language skills are a form of human capital because they are productive in the labour market through enhancement of wages and employment opportunities, are acquired at a cost and are embodied in the person and thus not detachable from the individual (Chiswick and Miller, 2007a).

[iv] Resolution 68(18) on the teaching of languages to migrant workers.

[v] Português Para Todos (PPT). This programme has been preceded by the programme Portugal Hosts (2001-2007) consisting of classes of Portuguese language and civics.

[vi] Centros de Educación de Personas Adultas (EPAs).

[vii] PALOP is the acronym for Portuguese-Speaking African Countries.

[viii] Besides Spanish, it is important to note the existence of other official languages in the Latin-American countries. For instance, Quechua is also an official language in Peru; in Bolivia, Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní have the same status as Spanish; and in Paraguay, Guaraní is one of the two official languages.

[ix] Bridging capital is a form of social capital that connects people with dissimilar interests and backgrounds, for example, from different ethnic communities (Woolcock, 2001).

[x] For the purposes of the GEITONIES project, the respondents having at least one parent born abroad were considered as immigrants, whereas those whose parents were born in the country of residence as natives. Please find a more detailed description of the GEITONIES project in the first article of this special issue.

[xi] It is important to note, however, that although immigrants from Dutch-speaking countries play an important role in Rotterdam this is not as evident as in the case of native-speaker immigrants in Bilbao or Lisbon.

[xii] Regarding this, 3 cases including a Latin-American and two immigrants who mentioned Basque as their native language were reported for Bilbao, 17 cases of immigrants mainly from former (African) colonies for Lisbon and 27 cases of Surinamese and Antilleans for Rotterdam.

[xiii] The socio-economic index of occupational status (ISEI) and Goldthorpe's class scheme (EGP) represent valid indicators to compare socio-economic status and social classes. In ISEI, higher scores correspond to a more favourable socio-economic position (ranging from 16 to 88) and for EGP the opposite applies. For more details on this please refer to Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996).

[xiv] From the overall sample of immigrants interviewed in each city in the ambit of the GEITONIES project, 60% were from Spanish-speaking countries in the case of Bilbao, 68% were from Portuguese-speaking countries in Lisbon and 39% from Dutch-speaking countries in Rotterdam.

[xv] These results may be framed as a more general pattern observable for the GEITONIES project.

[xvi] The same pattern is observable for the immigrants having 4 or more contacts. The native-speakers also stand out (10.5% compared to 4.4% for the highly proficient migrants).

[xvii] For Bilbao rho = 0.45 (p= 0.000) and, in the case of Rotterdam, rho = 0.21 (p= 0.007).

[xviii] Other related advantages of being a native-speaker immigrant such as the easiness to acquire the destination country citizenship and develop an upward social mobility can also be pointed out (Martinovic *et al.*, 2009).

[xix] Second-generation offspring is defined as individuals born in the survey country with at least one foreign-born parent. For further insight into the discussion on the concept of second-generation offspring please refer to Portes and Rumbaut (2001).

[xx] Even for Lisbon, where this tendency is less obvious, a more detailed analysis reveals that the neighbourhood of Costa da Caparica where, at the time of the GEITONIES survey, 64% of the foreign-born residents were from Brazilian origin, concentrated 36.2% of the overall number of immigrants showing no contacts with natives for this city (Fonseca *et al.*, 2012).

[xxi] In terms of gender, a predominance of men was found for Bilbao and Lisbon, which may be explained by their longer period of residence in the destination country, generally higher levels of education and a more outdoor socializing lifestyle, especially in culturally more enclosed ethnic groups (e.g. the Moroccans). The trend is the opposite for Rotterdam, where a higher number of women can be

identified. This latter pattern should be understood in a context of a larger concentration of women in the overall Dutch sample (Miltenburg *et al*., 2010).

[xxii] In a closer look at these two cities, the neighbourhood of Monte Abraão can be highlighted as an example of this pattern for Lisbon, as well as Afrikaanderwijk in the case of Rotterdam.

[xxiii] In the case of Rotterdam, however, it is relevant to note that considering Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles only the first met its independence in 1975. Conversely, the Antilles chose to remain within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, splitting later (1986 and 2010) and originating independent countries (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) and special municipalities within the Netherlands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba).

[xxiv] What is more, these immigrants do not appear to show a substantial discrepancy in relation to the native population (e.g. in the case of Bilbao, which shows the largest difference between natives and the selected sample of immigrants, the differential does not exceed 4 points). This latter pattern seems to be consistent with the theory supporting that the narrower the socio-economic gap between immigrants and natives, the more ample the opportunities for contact (Wagner and Machleit, 1986).