

# Acculturation strategies of young immigrants of Moroccan and Portuguese origin in Belgium: The perception of young Belgian natives

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**Abstract.** In our contemporary society, migration has become a key topic, in which the concept of acculturation refers to cultural and psychological changes resulting from the direct contact between members of multiple cultures. According to Berry (1997), individuals might display different attitudes and behaviours in the process of acculturation. Earlier studies have shown that members of host societies and immigrants often prefer the integration strategy, which seems to have most positive outcomes for both host nationals and immigrant communities. A sample of  $N = 120$  Belgian students between the ages of 18 and 29 living in Brussels participated in the present study in order to analyse which acculturation strategy young Belgians, as part of the host society, consider the most suitable and appropriate, and which strategy they would rather prefer to be put into practice by the immigrants, namely Portuguese and Moroccan immigrants.

## Theoretical background

Migration is a very old concept, people having always travelled from one place to another to settle down. As far as Europe is concerned, migration has become a key issue in the last years with the total migrant population in Europe amounting to over twenty million in 2012.<sup>1</sup> In Belgium, which is the focus of the present study, immigrants represented about 11% (1.195.122) of the total population (about 11M) in 2012.<sup>2</sup> In this context of migration, acculturation strategies refer to attitudes and behaviours individuals use in order to acculturate during the cultural contact between two or more groups. Most research so far has focused on the processes of acculturation with regard to the non-dominant groups, i.e. the immigrants, whereas consequences of acculturation processes for the dominant groups, i.e. the members of the host society, have been studied more seldom (Berry, 2001).

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that acculturation is a dual process affecting both members of the non-dominant as well as of the dominant groups. Several studies revealed the host societies' preference for assimilation (Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). Other researches have pointed out the host populations' preference for the integration strategy, which is also supposed to result in a higher well-being for all groups in contact, immigrants as well as host society members (Rohmann, Florack & Piontkowski, 2006). Several studies also highlighted the important role of the perception of similarity (Billiet, Carton, & Huys, 1990) and the quality of the intergroup contact (Islam & Hewstone, 1993) in the context of the acculturation process. Both elements might in fact influence the young Belgians' preference for a specific acculturation strategy in their daily life interactions with the immigrants depending on their cultural background.

## Sample

- ✓  $N = 120$  Belgian students between the ages of 18 and 29 ( $M = 22.07$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) living in Brussels ( $n = 48$  males and  $n = 72$  females)
- ✓ Students from the ULB ( $n = 118$ ) or different graduate schools in Brussels ( $n = 2$ )
- ✓ Participants were required to have the Belgian nationality and have a good language proficiency for the French

## Objectives & Hypotheses

The main research aim was to analyse the perceptions and preferences of Belgians regarding the acculturation strategies displayed by two immigrant communities in Belgium, namely Portuguese and Moroccan. In line with previous studies, we supposed that:

- Young Belgians would show a higher preference for strategies of integration and assimilation compared to separation (Rohmann et al., 2006)
- Young Belgians would show a preference for the Portuguese immigrants compared to the Moroccan immigrants due to a higher perceived similarity with the Portuguese culture rather than with the Moroccan culture (Billiet et al., 1990)
- There might be differences in the young Belgians' preference for a specific acculturation strategy depending on the target immigrant group's culture of origin

## Methods

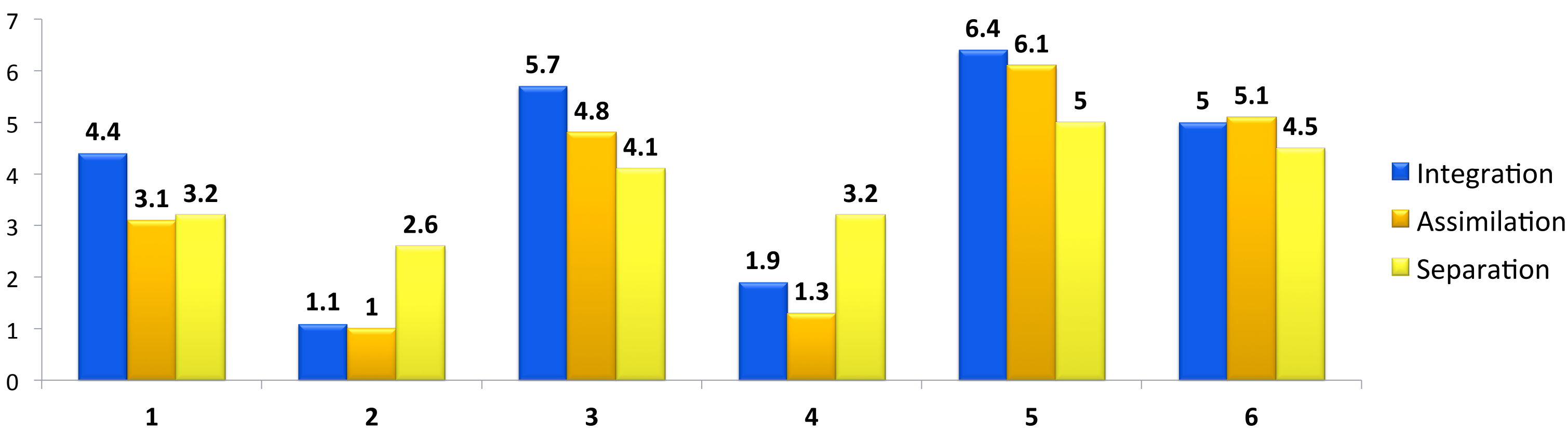
- ✓ Participants were assigned randomly to 6 different groups of  $n = 20$  persons → Each group was confronted with a different scenario (*one questionnaire per participant*)
- ✓ 3 different acculturation strategies were considered for the scenarios (Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra, & Buunk, 2005) – namely, *integration*, *assimilation* and *separation* (Berry, 2001) (*the marginalisation strategy was excluded*) → The main character of all scenarios was a male target person of the second generation of immigrants
- ✓ 2 culturally different origins were considered for each scenario → Portuguese and Moroccan (one being culturally closer to the Belgian culture and the other culturally more distant)
- ✓ Each group responded to a questionnaire regarding cultural knowledge and contact, affective and cognitive components of attitudes towards the main character's acculturation strategy, as well as behavioral tendencies towards the main character



## Results

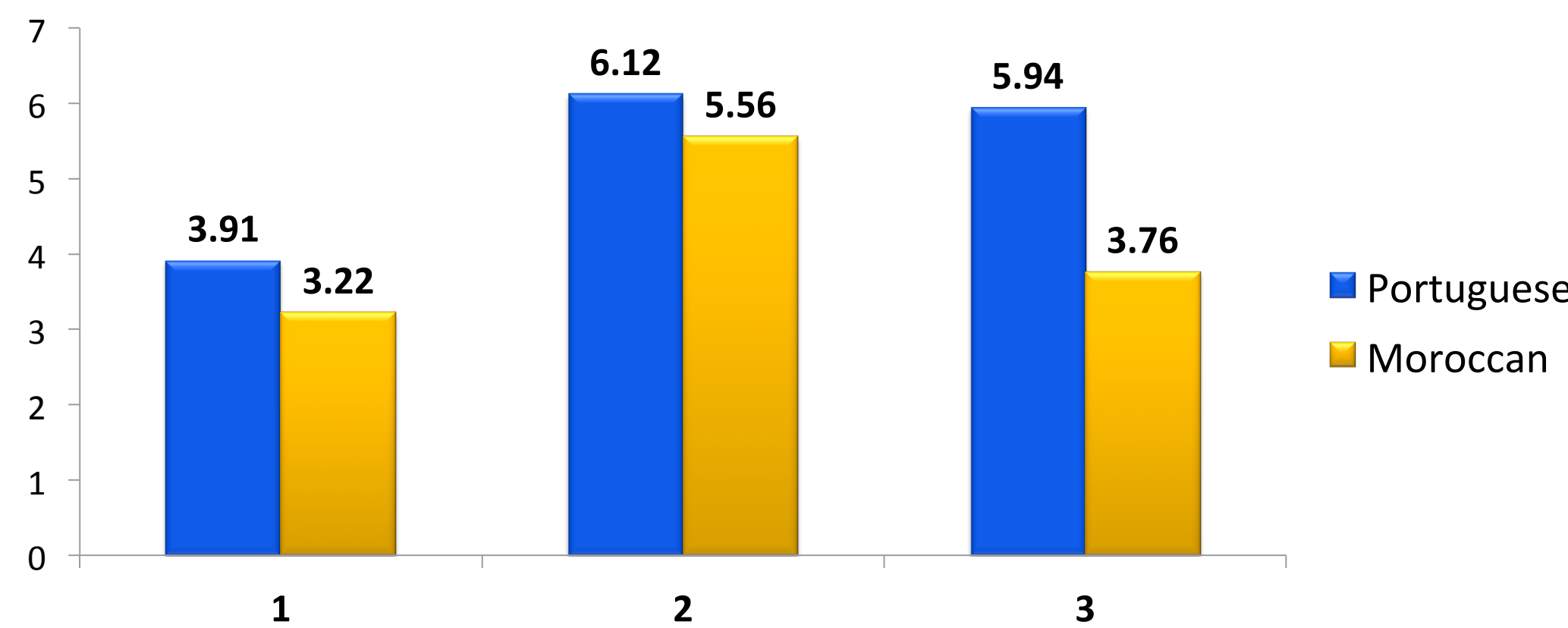
- All hypotheses were tested by 2 x 3 ANOVAs for independent measures (2 origins – Portuguese & Moroccan – and 3 strategies – integration, assimilation & separation)
- No differences in age, gender or national identity of the participants assigned to the different scenario groups were found
- Overall, participants showed the highest preference for integration, followed by the assimilation strategy, whereas the separation strategy was the least preferred one
- All in all, only few main effects of cultural origin were found, indicating slightly more positive ratings of the participants regarding Portuguese compared to Moroccan immigrants
- No interaction effects between acculturation strategy and origin were found

**The Acculturation strategies** (*integration, assimilation & separation*)



1. Positive emotions	$F(2,114) = 9.52$ $p < 0.001$	3. Positive personality traits	$F(2,114) = 18.54$ $p < 0.001$	5. Hosts' behaviours towards immigrants	$F(2,114) = 7.92$ $p = 0.001$
2. Negative emotions	$F(2,114) = 22.40$ $p < 0.001$	4. Negative personality traits	$F(2,114) = 33.74$ $p < 0.001$	6. Perceived intergroup relations	$F(2,114) = 3.19$ $p = 0.05$

**The Origins** (*Portuguese & Moroccan*)



1. Positive emotions	$F(2,114) = 9.52$ $p < 0.001$	3. Perceived intergroup relations	$F(2,114) = 18.54$ $p < 0.001$
2. Hosts' behaviours towards immigrants	$F(2,114) = 22.40$ $p < 0.001$		

## Conclusions

- When it comes to a global appreciation of an immigrant's acculturation strategy in terms of positive cognitive and affective aspects of attitudes, the young Belgian hosts showed a clear preference for integration. This strategy implies a maintenance of the culture of origin paired with cultural contact to the host society; this was preferred over a strategy entailing a desistance of the culture of origin – i.e. assimilation – and over the strategy that entails distancing from the host society – i.e., separation.
- Negative cognitive and affective aspects of attitudes were rated highest with regard to immigrants who display a separation strategy, whereas negative ratings were very low with regard to the other two strategies.
- Regarding behaviours related to actual outcomes in daily life (e.g., trust a person, friendship, etc.), natives did not differ in their preferences for immigrants to display either an integration or an assimilation strategy, but again, both were preferred over a separation strategy.
- Differences in ratings with regard to cultural origin of immigrants might be explained by differences in perceived cultural distance (see also Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998). Interestingly, most differences were found regarding behavioral indicators, whereas ratings of cognitive and affective aspects of attitudes towards both immigrant groups did not differ.
- As no significant interactions between displayed acculturation strategy and cultural origin of the main character were found, we might conclude that general preferences for specific acculturation strategies are independent of the cultural origin of the immigrants.
- It would be interesting to include also other age groups in future studies, both regarding the host nationals as well as the target immigrant groups, and to examine both the majorities' and minorities' preferences in terms of acculturation strategies.

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