Assessing the content validity of acculturation attitudes measures.  
A call for integrating cultural sociology into acculturation research

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Paper presented at:

Working Group on Migration of the European University Institute  
Florence, April 24th 2009

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Abstract

Acculturation generally refers to the processes by which individuals, families, communities or societies react to intercultural contact. In today’s sociological research, the study of acculturation is conceived as the study of the cultural dimensions of the integration of immigrants in western society. One of the instruments used in this field, is the measurement of acculturation attitudes, in line with the models of Berry and Bourhis. Immigrants are asked about their attitude towards maintenance of their heritage culture and towards adoption of the culture of the host society. In this paper, the validity of these measures is assessed – both with reference to general methodological principles and with reference to their application in research on the second generation of migration.

Based on qualitative empirical data, gathered within the context of a research on the ethnic identity of the second generation of Moroccan immigrants in Brussels, it is demonstrated that the acculturation measures lack content validity. First, this is due to the complexity of the statements generally used in survey questionnaires; second, this is caused by a lack of operationalization of ‘the cultural’ and by a failed understanding of how respondents operate with the notion of culture; third the validity problem is due to a lack of understanding the complex ethnic identity of the second generation and the resulting fissure between the subject positions of the theoretical respondents implied in the acculturation questions on the one hand, and the actual identity positions of the respondents mobilised during the interviews on the other hand. This paper wishes to demonstrate these content validity problems and to point to the urgent need for the integration of insights of cultural sociology into integration research.

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Content

Content .............................................................................................................................................. 2

1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................................... 3

2. Situating ‘acculturation attitudes’ in social scientific research ......................................................... 3
   2.1. Contexts and definitions of acculturation ...................................................................................... 3
   2.2. Ways of assessing acculturation .................................................................................................... 4

3. Measuring acculturation attitudes ..................................................................................................... 5
   3.1. Towards a bidimensional, contextual, interactive model of acculturation .................................... 5
   3.2. Measuring acculturation attitudes in the TIES-research ............................................................... 7

4. Assessing the validity of the acculturation attitudes model ............................................................... 11
   4.1. Content validity in scientific research ............................................................................................. 11
   4.2. Research questions of the content validity assessment ....................................................................... 11
   4.3. Data and methodology ................................................................................................................... 13

5. Empirical data analysis – detecting content validity problems ........................................................... 14
   5.1. Cultural maintenance at home – on the complexity of acculturation statements ......................... 14
   5.2. Cultural maintenance at school or at work – same answer, different meanings ......................... 16
   5.3. Cultural adoption at school or at work - on the indeterminacy of ‘culture and lifestyle’ ..................... 19
   5.4. Cultural adoption – on the difference between adoption and adaptation and the diversity of positions within the second generation .................................................................................... 22
   5.5. Implicit and explicit feedback on the acculturation question – on ethics ........................................ 24

6. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 25
   6.1. On the content validity of ‘acculturation attitudes’ measurement .................................................... 25
   6.2. Lessons for acculturation studies in general – a call for more cultural sociology ......................... 27

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................... 28
1. Introduction

Acculturation generally refers to the processes by which individuals, families, communities or societies react to intercultural contact. For several converging reasons, acculturation is considered to be an increasingly important topic in today’s world and in scientific research: new technologies for transportation and communication make it easy for cultures to be in contact worldwide and political, economic and environmental pressures produce millions of migrants annually, as do free-trade arrangements (Rickard 1994, cited in Rudmin 2003: 4).

In today’s sociological research, the study of acculturation is conceived as the study of the cultural dimensions of the integration of immigrants in western society. One of the instruments used in this field, is the measurement of so called acculturation attitudes, in line with the models of Berry and Bourhis. In this paper, the content validity of these measures - both with reference to general methodological principles and with reference to their application in research on the second generation of migration - is called into question.

In the first part of the paper, I situate the measurement of acculturation attitudes within the more general framework of acculturation and integration research. Afterwards, I present the model which is used in the TIES research, a research on the integration of the European second generation and which functions as the point of reference for this paper. In a next section, this model is put to the test – a content validity test, based on qualitative empirical data, gathered in a research on the ethnic identity of the second generation of Moroccan immigrants in Brussels. In a final paragraph, I draw conclusions, both with reference to the specific acculturation attitudes model and with reference to acculturation research in general.

2. Situating ‘acculturation attitudes’ in social scientific research

2.1. Contexts and definitions of acculturation

Generally speaking, acculturation refers to the processes by which individuals, families, communities or societies react to intercultural contact. “Acculturation is an ancient and probably universal human experience,” Rudmin (2003) states. When he traced the concept back to its early roots, he found evidence of ancient ‘cultural policy’ on the protection of traditional cultural practices from acculturative change through commerce with foreigners, and from Egyptian policy changes from separation to assimilation strategies, dating from before the second millennium B.C. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘acculturation’ itself was first used (in English text) in 1880 to describe changes in native American languages (Rudmin 2003).

The concept of acculturation has travelled through several scientific disciplines throughout history. It has been used in social and behavioural sciences to better understand the modernization processes that various cultures and communities were undergoing during the 19th and 20th century (Trimble 2002; cf. Mason 1955). G.S. Hall
described the acculturation attempts of European settlers, invading the country after their landing in Plymouth in 1620. Anthropologists first discovered the phenomenon in the context of colonialism. In the early 20th century, the concept appeared in psychological writing. Only some decades later, the contact between ethnic minorities living the United States and the host society’s majority also became covered by the concept (Spiro 1955). In 1936, anthropologists Redfield, Linton & Herskovits gave their authoritative definition to the phenomenon observed in the period of massive European migration to North America and Australia. Acculturation was seen as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Phalet 2001; “Preface” 2002). In 1954, The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Seminar on Acculturation revised the concept and promoted the following definition: “Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences and the operation of role determinants and personality factors” (cited in Trimble 2002; cf. Mason 1955). Psychological studies on acculturation mainly study both the (causes of) different levels of the ‘aculturatedness’ among ethnic minority individuals, and the effects of acculturation on individual’s well being (Zane & Mak 2002). On the blurry boundaries with social-psychology, also sociological research on assimilation and integration has adopted the same concept with similar definition (f.e. Gordon 1964; Alba & Nee 2003, in Flanders: Swyngedouw et al 1999; Lesthaeghe 1997).

Currently, acculturation research is considered to be a subfield of the more general research on the integration of ethnic minorities in their host societies. Integration is generally defined as a multidimensional, two-way process of adaptation between cultural minorities on the one hand and the dominant cultural group and institutions on the other hand (for an international overview: Bourhis & Dayan 2004; in Flanders: Lesthaeghe 1992; Swyngedouw, Phalet & Deschouwer 1999). The multidimensional aspect of the definition relates to the acknowledgment that integration is a process that occurs within the different functional domains of society. It also implies that the socio-economic, political and cultural integration (the standard triptych) do not necessarily evolve in the same pace and direction (Swyngedouw, Phalet & Deschouwer 1999: 31-35; cf. Sam 2006).

2.2. Ways of assessing acculturation

Acculturation measures vary in the types of domains that are assessed for cultural change. Zane and Mak (2002) made a review of the acculturation literature and tried to make an inventory of the measures used to assess acculturation. The most frequently assessed ‘cultural domain’, according to the authors, is the use of language. There are differences, however, in how language use is assessed. For some researchers it includes the ability to speak and/or understand certain languages, others focus on the actual language use in different social settings, still others measure the preference of use (cf. Zea et al 2003). Another often researched domain is that of ethnic identity. This is mainly considered to be the subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group or culture (Arends-
Tóth & Van De Vijver (2004) and can be operationalized by an individual’s self-identification, affiliation and pride as a member of the culture of origin or of the host culture. Also actual behaviour is measured, usually through questions such as friendship choices and media preferences (Zea et al. 2003). An additional important research domain is that of values. Central to the value research is the distinction between individualist and collectivist values (Phalet et al. 1999). Typical individualism measures are scales with questions on freedom, independency, creativity, success, ambition, etc. Collectivism scales enclose questions about respect for tradition, respect for parents and elderly people, obedience, self discipline, etc. Other value assessments that come across in acculturation research are measurement of gender roles, family values and the need for achievement (Marín & Gamba 2002). Finally, the assessment of acculturation attitudes – i.e. attitudes towards maintenance of the minority culture and adoption of the host society culture – is often central in acculturation studies. The next paragraph will focus extensively on this aspect.

The overview of Zane and Mak (2002) shows that different studies cover different sets or combinations of measures for different domains of the cultural realm, according to the agenda of the researchers.

3. Measuring acculturation attitudes

3.1. Towards a bidimensional, contextual, interactive model of acculturation

As this paper aims at assessing the validity of the measurements of acculturation attitudes for the second generation of immigrants, I devote a paragraph to presenting this aspect of the study of acculturation. In his extensive overview of the literature, Rudmin (2003) discerned different names for the same construct. Whether called ‘adaptations’, ‘attitudes’, ‘goals’, ‘modes’, ‘orientations’, ‘paths’, ‘preferences’, ‘strategies’, or ‘styles’, acculturation attitudes – how I will refer to them – concern general attitudes toward the own ‘heritage culture’ and towards the host society or ‘mainstream culture’.

According to Berry (a.o. Berry & Sam 1997), acculturation attitudes refer to two fundamental issues facing immigrants: one refers to the question how an immigrant deals with the culture of origin (cultural maintenance dimension), and the other refers to the extent to which he or she wishes to have contact with the culture of the host society (cultural contact dimension). Bourhis and his associates (1997) proposed a change in the nature of the second dimension of Berry’s model by making it cultural in stead of social in nature, and thus making the acculturation model symmetrically cultural. The two attitudes then refer to cultural maintenance and cultural adaptation, according to Arends-Tóth & Van De Vijver (2007: 1463). As the social, the cultural and the identity (see underneath) related items all measure modes of ‘adaptation’ (cf. Van De Vijver & Phalet 2004: 222), I propose to use the denominator cultural adoption for the second dimension of Bourhis’ model (cf. Snauwaert et al. 231: 232).

Depending on the presupposed relationship between de maintenance and the adoption dimension, two acculturation models have become prevalent: the unidimensional model and the bidimensional model. Unidimensional models assume that
acculturation takes place along a single continuum – aspects of the heritage culture are lost when aspects of the mainstream culture are adopted. The most well-known of this type is Gordon’s conceptualisation of assimilation from 1964 (Gordon 1964; cf. Alba & Nee, 1993; cf. Van De Vyver & Phalet 2004: 216). Berry was among the first to point out that immigrants have more options than moving along the continuum of assimilation. His bidimensional model sees cultural maintenance and cultural contact as two independent dimensions (Arendt-Tóth and Van De Vijver 2007: 1464). Based on the combination of the (dichotomised) orientations on both the maintenance and contact/adoption dimension, four acculturation attitudes or orientations can be discerned: integration (both maintenance and contact), separation (only maintenance), assimilation (only contact) and marginalisation (neither maintenance nor contact) (a.o. Berry & Sam, 1997; Arends-Tóth 2003: 12-13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance</th>
<th>Adaptation (social, cultural, identity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A close link between the theoretical models and measurement methods can be discerned. The unidimensional model is usually converted to a one-statement item with a bipolar response scale, reaching from full cultural maintenance to full cultural adaptation. Bidimensional models tend to be measured by either two- or fourfold measures. The twofold measurement presents two separate items to the respondent: one concerning the maintenance, one concerning the adaptation dimension (f.e.: “it is important for me to maintain the Moroccan culture” for the maintenance dimension). Fourfold measures construct one item per acculturation attitude (f.e. “it is important for me to maintain the Moroccan culture and to adopt the Belgian culture” for the integration attitude). Arendt-Tóth and Van De Vijver (2007) compared the adequacy of these different models and concluded that the four statement method shows significant method effects. Participants seem to have problems with the long and complex statements. The one and two statement tests both show similar results and less method effects.

Acculturation scholars have also stressed the importance of acknowledging that acculturation attitudes can not be considered as a personal trait of people, but should be treated as context or domain specific phenomena (Van De Vijver & Phalet 2004: 222). The contextual acculturation models proposed in the literature differ in their levels of abstraction or breath of the domain. At the first level, a distinction is made between value attributions in the private versus the public domain. A second level is formed by models that distinguish between specific life domains (f.e. education, child-rearing, and marriage), in which for each of these domains an attitude towards cultural maintenance and adaptation can be developed. A last layer of models refer to specific situations, assuming that an individual’s preference for adaptation and maintenance may vary across specific situations (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver 2004; 2007; cf. Phalet 2001).
Another important family of extensions of the basic bidimensional model, is the interactive acculturation model, in which the acculturation orientation of the host society is taken into account as well. Acculturation of immigrants can only partially be understood through their personal preferences or strategies. Also the nature of the relationship(s) with host society (members) should be taken into account (Bourhis et al. 1997; Phalet 2001).

A last contribution to the acculturation field worth mentioning is the one of Hutnik. She made a distinction between acculturation proper, in the sense of cultural change, and self-categorisation. Hutnik proposed a twodimensional identity model, resulting in four identity strategies, labelled acculturative (hyphenated identity), assimilative (predominant majority identity), dissociative (predominant minority identity) and marginal (non of both groups identified with) (Van De Vijver & Phalet 2004: 221). Snaauwaert et al. (2003: 232) state that it is important to make a clear distinction between ethnic identification patterns and acculturation attitudes, as Hutnik observed that these two kinds of patterns are only weakly correlated. Self-categorisation as an ethnic minority member is very resistant to change, even for individuals who have largely adopted cultural features of the host society.

3.2. Measuring acculturation attitudes in the TIES-research

In this section, I present the acculturation model, how it is used in the Belgian segment of the so-called TIES research. This international comparative survey research on The Integration of the European Second generation was launched in 2005 as a collaborative project of research groups of (in total) eight European countries. In every country, two bigger cities were selected as sites of research and two minority groups as subjects under study. The research group I am affiliated with, the Institute for Social and Political Opinion Research (ISPO) of the University of Leuven executes the Belgian survey. In Belgium, Antwerp and Brussels were chosen as sites of research and the face-to-face questionnaire was filled out by members of the Moroccan and the Turkish second generation (Swyngedouw & Phalet 2004). Notable about the design of this research is that not only immigrant groups, cities and countries can be compared to each other, but also that in every city a comparison group of the original Belgian population was selected. This group functions in the first place as a control group to control for overculturalizing the interpretation of the results of the survey and secondly, as the representatives of the treatment side in the process of integration.

In this paragraph, I first present the statements the respondents were asked to respond to in this survey research. Second, I offer an overview of the results of the survey, concerning the Moroccan second generation in Brussels.

As, unfortunately, there is no widely accepted measure of acculturation available (Arends-Tóth & Van De Vijver 2007: 1462), it is necessary to relate my assessment of the validity of acculturation measurements to one specific example, in stead of referring to the acculturation research in general. The TIES model will be the direct point of reference of my contribution, as my qualitative research is constructed in close dialogue with it. However, this does not mean that my conclusions will not have any relevance to
other acculturation research. My aim is to make a focused analysis of one instance of this broader research practice to result in conclusions with a broader scope that are relevant for acculturation researchers in general.

3.2.1. TIES survey question assessing acculturation attitudes
The following question was asked to the Moroccan respondents in the TIES survey in Belgium. I first present the original French version and translate to English underneath.

Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous d’accord avec les affirmations suivantes ?

- Chez moi, à la maison, je trouve qu’il est important de maintenir autant que possible la culture et le mode de vie marocains
- À l’école ou au travail aussi, je trouve qu’il est important de maintenir autant que possible la culture et le mode de vie marocains
- À l’école ou au travail, je trouve qu’il est important d’adopter autant que possible la culture et le mode de vie belges
- Chez moi aussi, je trouve qu’il est important d’adopter autant que possible la culture et le mode de vie belges

Réponses : tout à fait d’accord, d’accord, ni d’accord, ni pas d’accord, pas d’accord, pas du tout d’accord.

To what extend to you agree with the following statements?

- At home, I find it important to maintain as much as possible the Moroccan culture and lifestyle
- At school or at work as well, I find it important to maintain as much as possible the Moroccan culture and lifestyle
- At school or at work, I find it important to adopt as much as possible the Belgian culture and lifestyle
- At home as well, I find it important to adopt as much as possible the Belgian culture and lifestyle

Response scale: totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, totally disagree

One can recognize the bidimensional foundation of Berry’s acculturation model, converted into two statements: one on cultural maintenance and one on cultural adoption. The TIES researchers have chosen to follow the adjustment of Bourhis and his colleagues, by assessing the attitudes towards ‘adoption’ and not towards ‘contact’, thus using a symmetrical ‘cultural’ model. Both statements are asked twice: once referring to the private context, once for the public sphere. The private sphere is operationalized by asking about what people think about maintenance and adoption “at home”. The public sphere is represented by “at school or at work”. The questions copied here are presented to the Moroccan respondents. The Belgian comparison group members also get an acculturation question, in line with the interactive acculturation model, proposed by Bourhis et al. (1997).

3.2.2. Acculturation attitudes of the Moroccan second generation in Brussels
In the following frequency tables, I present the distribution of the answers formulated by the TIES respondents of Moroccan descent in Brussels. If the summed totals do not always amount to the same number, this is due to item non-response. Next to these
tables, the distribution of the respondents of my qualitative research and whose data I analysed is displayed. More information on my empirical research can be found below.

For the sake of clarity, the answers under the heading of *totally agree* and *agree* are summed into one *agree* category. A similar aggregation happens with *totally disagree* and *disagree* that together constitute my *disagree* category. The response option *neither agree, nor disagree* is copied unaltered from the survey. This aggregation does not change the essence of the measurement as in the interpretation of the acculturation attitudes, the direction of the answer is more important than the degree.

The tables underneath cross the results of the *cultural maintenance* and *cultural adoption* answers of the respondents, first for the private context, next for the public context. From this cross-tabulation, the distribution of the respondents over the four acculturation attitudes can be read.
For the private context, 62 or 24% of the TIES respondents show an integrative attitude, 79 or 31% show a separation attitude. Both the assimilation and marginalisation orientations receive a low response of respectively 7 and 10 in absolute numbers, 3% and 4% in relative weight. The remaining 96 respondents or 38% of the sample hold an in-between position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIES</th>
<th>At school - work / public</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>48 / 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>62 / 24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With reference to the public context, 48 or 19% of the respondents have an integrative attitude, 14 people or 5% have a separation attitude. 62 respondents or 24% of the sample show an assimilative attitude, as far as the public context is concerned, and 15 people or 6% demonstrates marginalisation as orientation. With reference to the statements on the public sphere, 114 or 44% of the respondents end up in between the four types of acculturation attitudes.

The following tables show the distribution of the respondents of my qualitative research over the ‘acculturation attitudes’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hesters</th>
<th>At home / private</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hesters</th>
<th>At school - work / public</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the ‘acculturation attitudes’ in the private sphere, I interviewed two respondents with an integrative attitude and two with marginalisation orientations. The other six respondents have an in-between position. With reference to the public sphere, half of my sample shows an assimilative stance, two people have marginalisation attitudes. Two respondents do not fit the scheme of four categories.
4. Assessing the validity of the acculturation attitudes model

4.1. Content validity in scientific research

The quality of scientific research can be judged based on its trustworthiness and its validity. Research validity refers to both the interpretability and the generalizability of the research results to a defined population, also called the internal and external validity respectively. I will focus on the internal validity of the acculturation measurement, more specifically on the content validity. The general question therefore is to what extend the results can be interpreted adequately; do we measure what we think we measure? The more specific question is whether the operationalization of the theoretical question and concepts has been successful. Content validity refers both to the relationship between the research instruments and the theoretical field of reference, and to the relationship between the research and the empirical field under investigation. First, the instruments should cover what the theoretical concept contains. Second, the use the subjects make of the instruments, should correspond to the use the researchers expect them to make of them (see figure 1) (Waege 2005: 147-148).

![Figure 1. Visualisation of the meaning of content validity](image)

4.2. Research questions of the content validity assessment

Even though additional elements of the acculturation attitudes models and measures can be critically evaluated, I focus my attention to a number of specific aspects of the content validity that can be addressed through my empirical data and that are related to the theoretical fields of ‘ethnic identity’ and sociological research on ‘culture’.

A first point of attention is whether the statements are understood or read in the same way by all the respondents and in the way the researchers meant them to be understood. On face value, the items presented to the respondents are quite complex. When validity is concerned, complexity is a risk factor.
A second point of examination is whether respondents construct their attitude towards the same object, when they respond to statements on ‘maintenance’ or ‘adoption’ of ‘the Moroccan culture and lifestyle’ and of ‘the Belgian culture and lifestyle’ and whether it indeed can be considered as an attitude towards ‘culture in general’. Even though acculturation attitudes want to assess the respondent’s attitude towards the heritage culture and host society culture ‘in general’, this does not necessarily mean that respondents understand the assignment in the same way as the researchers do. Internal validity is dependent on the behaviour of respondents, not on the intentions of the researchers.

A third element that I would like to assess is whether the presupposed answering position of the respondents corresponds with their actual answering position during the interview. Every question calls the respondent into a subject position, which determines the frame of interpretation from which the respondent will answer the question and which the researcher assumes when interpreting the answers. Acculturation measures have been developed for researching immigrants' attitudes. Today, the exact same measures are used in research on the second generation, the children of the immigrants that grew up in the host society of their parents.

In the TIES research – like in all other research on the integration of ethnic minorities - respondents are assigned to groups that are defined, based on their ethnic background. Participants to the research that belong to the Moroccan second generation, receive the above mentioned questions. Members of the host society comparison group receive other questions, concerning their attitude towards the acculturation of ethnic minorities. The Moroccans are not, as their Belgian counterparts, asked what ethnic minorities in Belgium should do, but they are asked about their personal positioning: the respondents of Moroccan descent are addressed as Moroccans that can maintain their Moroccan culture and/or adopt the Belgian culture. The second generation, however, grew up, went to school and lived their whole life in Belgium; they are Moroccan by descent, but Belgian by birth. Therefore, I expect that they would have difficulties in solving the task of answering to the statements about the ‘adoption of the Belgian culture and lifestyle’. This question calls them into the position of the Moroccan who is not Belgian. After all, this statement implies that there is something ‘to adopt’, thus which does not belong to the respondent yet. If they have difficulty answering these questions, this is not signalled in the survey results, as the survey research format forces respondents to pick an answer from a predefined set of possibilities.

To know whether we measure what we think we measure, we should know whether our interpretation of the answers of the respondents corresponds to their interpretation of their answers. With two types of outcomes, the validity of the measurement can be questioned. A first one would display answers of the respondents that systematically mean something else than we would have thought they mean. In this case, we could try to correct the survey results by accounting for this ‘bias’. A second type of outcome would be that the respondents show a strong variety in response behaviour which would mean that the same survey answers would stand for different meanings and/or that different survey answers capture the same meanings. In that case, it would be impossible to coherently interpret the survey results due to a lack of content validity.
4.3. Data and methodology

To answer the research questions of this paper, I conducted in-depth interviews and asked a sample of the people who participated in TIES the exact same acculturation question as they answered some months before during the face-to-face survey interview. While asking the question, I followed the procedure of the survey. Only after having received an (closed) answer for each of the four statements without further explanation, I asked to explain and elaborate on the responses. This way, I did not give the respondents the opportunity to think longer about the statements before answering them. At the end of this section of the interview, I also asked the respondents some explicit feedback on the questions. The acculturation question was offered towards the end of longer interviews (of the average length of 2 hours) I conducted within the context of my Ph.D. research on the ethnic identity of the second generation of Moroccan immigrants in Brussels. The section preceding the acculturation question in the interview sequence is one that explicitly refers to ethnic identity and the meaning of being Moroccan, Belgian, Muslim, Francophone, etc. These questions can be expected to ‘set the mind’ of the respondents towards the topics of ethnicity and culture and influence the answers on the acculturation questions. All questions preceding this one have a broader, more general scope and do not explicitly refer to the fact that the respondents have a Moroccan background. In the survey, the same sequence of questions was followed. I would therefore state that, content wise, the interview context of my research did not prepare the respondents in such a way that the answers to the acculturation question can be expected to systematically differ from those of the survey.

For my Ph.D. research, I conduct in-depth interviews with members of the Moroccan second generation and with members of the Belgian comparison group, selected from the (random) sample of TIES. As this paper concerns the answering patterns of the Moroccan second generation, only their interviews will be considered. As a strategic research site, I use the theme of the education of the children of the respondents in the interviews, to tap into their vision on raising and educating children, on what is important in life in general, on their relationship with their own parents and on their own life experiences, both as an individual and as a member of the second generation of Moroccan descent. Therefore, all participants of my research are parents of (generally young) children. I interviewed men and women, with different levels of education and job positions, living in different areas in the city of Brussels (i.e. the 19 communes).

Only a rather small number of interviews are used in this analysis, namely ten. For the purpose of this paper, using only a small amount of data should not be considered as a problem. After all, if I can demonstrate a crucial level of variety in the response behaviour of a small sample that is due to systematic (non random) ‘error’, the variety can only be larger in the general population, not smaller. A (non random) variety in response behaviour leads to the impossibility of coherent interpretation of the survey results and thus to content validity problems.

The interviews have been fully transcribed. As the amount of data is rather low I have not used the assistance of software for qualitative data analysis, but conducted it in the ‘old fashioned way’, with the aid of paper, coloured markers, a pair of scissors and glue.
For each of the respondents I defined the object of reference of their opinions and the position they took while answering, for each of the four statements. I also derived from their explanations their definitions of the different elements mentioned in the acculturation statements (‘culture’, ‘Moroccan culture and lifestyle’, ‘Belgian culture and lifestyle’, ‘maintain’, ‘adopt’). After having drawn such a profile for each respondent, I could compare the different elements and relate them to the answers they gave on the acculturation items.

5. Empirical data analysis – detecting content validity problems

In this paragraph, I present the analysis of the empirical results of my qualitative research. A numerical overview of the responses of the participants of my study can be found under 3.2.2. I provide a descriptive account of the answering patterns of the respondents, but in stead of first making an inventory of all the different answering patterns I could observe, I immediately present selected material that was filtered through my research questions. The answers to each separate acculturation item serve as material for separate arguments on the validity of the acculturation measurement.

To each of the respondents, I appointed a number. Whenever I quote or paraphrase an interview, it will be identified with a reference to the number of the respondent. The English quotes are translated from French. As translation is a delicate endeavour, the original French quotes will be linked to the translations in footnote.

5.1. Cultural maintenance at home – on the complexity of acculturation statements

The answers to the statement “At home, I find it important to maintain as much as possible the Moroccan culture and lifestyle” within my sample of 10 people reached from disagree over neither agree, nor disagree to agree. I will not explain how the answer was constructed for every single respondent. What I will do, is demonstrate different types of answering patterns and use some interview fragments to elucidate. In this paragraph, I wish to demonstrate that the complexity of the statements as a whole in the acculturation model indeed produces validity problems.

One respondent (respondent 10) answered that she does not agree at all with the statement that refers to cultural maintenance at home, as she “does not find it an obligation”. She added “everybody does what he or she wants, at home”. With this response, she positioned herself with reference to the sequence “il est important de”/“it is important to”. Rather than taking the position of ‘the Moroccan respondent’, answering a question that starts with “chez moi …”, she took a general position, talking for people in general. Her general position is illustrated or confirmed by the argument that “everybody” (people in general) is free to do what he or she wants at home. As she can not or does not want to decide for other people what is important, she does not agree with the statement.
Two respondents replied with *neither agree, nor disagree*, referring to the fact that on the one hand certain things are important to maintain, but that, on the other hand they also think it is important to adapt to the society one lives in; that there is also limits to the way one can or would want to ‘live’ the Moroccan culture and lifestyle. Different from the previously mentioned respondent, these respondents did answer from their personal, ‘Moroccan’ point of view about the importance of maintaining the Moroccan culture and lifestyle in their own daily life. They referred to the elements “At home / I find it important / to maintain the Moroccan culture and lifestyle”. What they did not take into account the way the researchers meant to, however, is the part “as much as possible”. In the rational of these respondents, the *neither, nor* category has functioned as an alternative to the “as much as possible”, element, which was integrated to the statement to avoid black-and-white claims.

It is important. But not that important, as with the education of the children, one is obliged to, at a certain moment... my culture is very important, but I am obliged to adapt to the world I live in². (respondent 5)

Another respondent used the *neither, nor* category in a similar way as respondent 10, namely by answering for people in general, in stead of referring to her personal daily life experience, as a result of the position she was called into by “it is important”. From this answering position, she does not agree with the statement, but she would also not disagree with the statement.

It says “is important to maintain”. I agree and disagree, huh. It is important, but I am not against as well³. (respondent 2)

Half of the respondents in my sample answered positively to the statement. These people all responded in a similar way, in the way it was meant by the researchers. This means, the question, starting with “At home, I find it...” indeed called them into the position of the Moroccan immigrant (descendant) who answers about his or her personal life experience. They expressed their will to maintain certain elements of the Moroccan culture and lifestyle they inherited from their parents. Even thought they balanced their answer, saying not every element they could think of as being ‘Moroccan’ would be important to maintain, the element “as much as possible” made it possible to agree with the statement on cultural maintenance at home. One example:

To be aware of who you are. *Bon*, my children prefer French fries over couscous or tajine, but at the same time it is important to show them that we, *voilà*, there is this and this and this. So they won’t detest being Moroccan either. We should show them the good things⁴. (respondent 7).

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² Original French quote : « C’est important. Mais pas tout à fait important, parce que avec l’éducation qu’on doit leur impliquer, on est obligé de à un moment donner... ma culture est très important, mais je suis oblige de m’adapter au monde dans lequel je vis. »
³ Original French quote : « Ils dissent “est important de maintainir”. On est d’accord et pas d’accord, hein. C’est important, mais je suis pas contre non plus. »
⁴ Original French quote : « Pour savoir qui on est et tout ça. Bon, mes enfants ils préfèrent les frites que le couscous ou la marmite, mais c’est important en même temps de leur montrer que chez nous, voilà, il y a ça et ça et ça. Pour qu’ils détestent pas d’être Marocain non plus. Il faut leur montrer les bonnes choses. »
All the people I interviewed reported that they try to maintain certain practices they consider to be part of their Moroccan heritage. These practices were passed on to them by their parents and they also wish to pass some of those on to their own children. Generally speaking, they all believed it is important that their children “know where they come from”, master at least moderately the parental language (Arabic or one of the Berber or Rif languages), “get to know the good things” of the Moroccan culture and/or live according to the Muslim education - elements they themselves explicitly answered under the heading of ‘the Moroccan culture and lifestyle’.

Based on the open answers the respondents have given explaining their relationship to the ‘Moroccan culture and lifestyle’ in their own terms, we could have expected all of them to end up agreeing with the statement on cultural maintenance at home. However, different respondents took up different elements of the question as point of reference and therefore ended up in different answering categories and in different acculturation types. It is important to mention that these different categories do not only differ in the strength of the attitude, but also in the direction. Therefore, I believe the statement is too complex to be a valid measure.

The cultural maintenance statement also revealed another type of difference in answering patterns that resulted in different answers, even though the general attitudes of the same people could be considered as similar, based on their narratives.

Respondent 4 did not agree with the statement that for him it is important to live as much as possible according to the Moroccan culture and lifestyle at home. This is how he continues:

“The Moroccan culture and lifestyle is living like a Moroccan in Morocco, but in Belgium, this is not possible. Because it is not advantageous. My parents have lived like that, but for us, it is not possible, as we are not the produce of a typical Moroccan milieu. Because we are mixed, it is not possible.” (respondent 4)5

Other respondents had a less restricted interpretation of what ‘the Moroccan culture and lifestyle’ entails. What they received as cultural heritage from their parents was also considered to belong under the heading of the question. A different interpretation of what ‘the Moroccan culture and lifestyle’ is, may thus also lead to different answers. In paragraph 5.3. I elaborate on this issue.

5.2. Cultural maintenance at school or at work – same answer, different meanings

The answers to the cultural maintenance statement in the public sphere – “At school or at work as well, I find it important to maintain as much as possible the Moroccan culture and lifestyle” – received once neither agree, nor disagree and nine times agree among the sample of respondents of my research. Even though the answer of most respondents is the same, their shared negative answer hides different visions on society. I discern at

5 Original French quote: « Mais le mode de vie Marocain – pour moi, c’est vivre comme un marocain au Maroc ? Mais en Belgique, c’est pas possible, ça. Parce que c’est pas avantageux. Et mes parents ils on vécus comme ça, mais c’est pas possible pour nous, parce qu’on est pas issues des mileux typiquement marocains, parce qu’on est mélangés, c’est pas possible. »
least three different views on the multicultural society. Some respondents show an attitude in favour of the principle of laïcité, while others prefer a plural society. Still other respondents see a dominant Belgian society minorities have to assimilate to. All three stances equally lead to disagreeing with the cultural maintenance statement with reference to the public sphere.

Respondent 1 illustrates the principle of laïcité, which represents a secular society that is based on a strict separation of Church and State. In her opinion all religious, political and cultural signs should be taken away from the official institutions, such as public school, and the individuals within. School and the workplace should be neutral terrain. As she also mentions explicitly, this also counts for citizens of Belgian descent. She does not agree with the statement on cultural maintenance at school or at work, because the school or workplace is a ‘culture free’ zone.

I think that at school or at work, there are no differences. We are here, we are in Belgium. Everybody has got his or her own culture, religion, lifestyle, and one should not impose. We are... enfin, even if one is a Belgian. (...) What is done at home, is done in private. As people say: "never mix the private with the professional". This is equally valuable with reference to culture, politics and religion. (...) It is good that people are different, but when one passes the threshold of school or the workplace, it is a completely different situation, all of this should be left behind. (...) What I want to say is: if one is at a public school, an athenaeum, one should take off; one should leave neither a cross, neither the little sign of anarchy, a little red or black badge... that's why dress codes are installed.⁶ (respondent 1)

This quote illustrates the importance of the institutional reference in the cultural maintenance statement: "at school or at work". Other versions of the acculturation measures imply “outside of home” to refer to the public sphere in the statements (f.e. the collective English root questionnaire of the TIES project). I believe this difference between ‘the public sphere in general’ and ‘the public as an institutional or political context’ can make a crucial difference for respondents who have a strong attitude towards laïcité.

Respondent 3 also believes people should not ‘impose’ their own culture onto other people in a context where individuals of different backgrounds should work and live together. However, this does not mean that individual differences should be wiped out as much as possible. He refers to the principle of respect towards each others individuality and personal sensitivities. The limit of what one can show of his or her background culture is negotiable and should be defined by respect for the other people. In the last part of his argument – "it's not for that he will not be able to study" – he expresses his impression of irrelevance of cultural elements such as the veil to the functionality of school and the workplace.

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⁶ Original French quote: « Je pense que à l’école ou au travail, on a pas de différences. On est ici, on est en Belgique, chacun a sa culture, chacun sa religion, chacun son mode de vie et on n’a pas à imposer. Nous, on est... enfin, même si on est belge. (...) Ce qu’on fait chez soi, on fait chez soi. C’est quelque chose de privé. C’est comme on dit : « ne jamais mêler le privé avec le professionnel » et c’est tout à fait valable pour la culture, la politique et la religion. (...) C’est bien faire la différence, mais quand on a passé le seuil de l’école ou du travail, c’est tout à fait autre chose, on laisse tout derrière. (...) Je veux dire : si on est dans une école communale, qu’on est dans un athénée, on enlève. On doit pas laisser ni la croix, on doit ni laisser le petit anarchie, le petit badge noir ou rouge... Alors à ce moment-là, on met un code vestimentaire. »
No, school, that’s another domain [than ‘at home’ – DH]. School is for everyone... But respect is also important. If now a girl wants to veil... I don’t see how this could shock another person, for example. Right or wrong, this is something I have never understood, why in England or in the United States, people can wear the veil and why here, we engage in a polemic around the veil. (...) If he wants to put an earring here [points to the lip - DH], or here [points to the eyebrow - DH]; it’s his body, it belongs to him. It is not for that he will not respect other people. It’s not for that he will not be able to study. (...) I really think it is stupid, to take away things one likes.7 (respondent 3)

For this reason, I would call his vision on living together in a mixed society a plural one. Differences can be present, but every individual should do his share in compromising in order to harmoniously live together on a one-to-one basis. As a result, he does not agree with the statement saying that he finds it important to – as a principle - maintain as much as possible of the Moroccan culture and life style at school or at work.

Respondent 9 mainly observes a Belgian society where individuals from a non-Belgian ethnic background adapt to ‘a Belgian way of living’.

Habits, one should keep at home. Outside home, we live in a country. We are in Belgium and Belgium is Christian. (...) I respect the European education, but that’s all. We are in a Belgian country and we dress like Belgians, we discuss like Belgians. And we don’t impose our stuff. (...) It’s we that have to adapt to the others, not the others to us.8 (respondent 9)

This respondent does not consider the public sphere as a culturally neutral sphere (cf. respondent 1) or as a sphere of mutual adaptations of individuals (cf. respondent 3), but as a zone of Belgian culture, non-Belgian ethnics should assimilate to. His reference to Christianity serves as an illustration of how the Belgian – and larger: the European - society is culturally defined. He believes Muslims should adapt and live according to the Christian rules that dominate the European society.

I consider that the attitudes towards 'culture' in an ethnically mixed society illustrated by these respondents, demonstrate three inherently different visions on society. Their similar answer to the cultural maintenance statement with reference to the public sphere, fails to differentiate between those.

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7 Original French quote : « Non, l’école, c’est dans un autre domaine. C’est pour tout le monde... Mais bon, il faut aussi respecter. Si maintenant une fille qui a envie de mettre le voile... je vois pas où ça va choquer l’autre personne, par exemple. Bêtement ou bien, c'est un truc moi j'ai jamais compris, pourquoi en Angleterre ils le mettent bien, en Amérique ils le mettent bien. Pourquoi ici on polémise sur par exemple : le voile. (...) Si il veut mettre même une boucle d’oreille là ou bien une boucle d’oreille là. C’est son corps, ça lui appartient, c’est pas pour ça qu’il ne respecte pas l’autre personne. C’est pas pour ça qu’il peut pas faire ces études. (...) Je trouve ça idiot. A retire des choses qu’on aime ou bien qu’on veut faire. »

8 Original French quote : « Les coutumes, on les garde à la maison. A l’extérieur, on est dans un pays. On est en Belgique, c’est chrétien. (...) Je respecte l’éducation européenne, mais c’est tout quoi. On est dans un pays belge et on s’habille comme les belges et on discute comme les belges. Et on n’impose pas notre truc. (...) C’est nous qui devons nous adapter aux autres, c’est pas aux autres de s’adapter à nous, quoi. »
5.3. Cultural adoption at school or at work - on the indeterminacy of ‘culture and lifestyle’

The cultural adoption statement with reference to the public sphere produced material that I employ to demonstrate on the one hand how a different interpretation of the concepts in the statement, rather than a different attitude can lead to a different answer. On the other hand, I wish to demonstrate that respondents need to use specific answering strategies to correct for the incongruence of the statement with their interpretation of ‘culture and lifestyle’. The cultural adoption statement at stake here is the following: “at school or at work, I find it important to adopt as much as possible the Belgian culture and lifestyle”.

Three of my respondents said neither to agree, nor to disagree with the statement. Two of them, along with one respondent who did not agree, explained that for them ‘culture’ and ‘lifestyle’ are two different things. These two different elements in one question make it double barrelled and impossible to answer in a straightforward way. I illustrate with quotes from the interviews of respondent 8 and 5.

Yes and no. I would say ‘culture’: yes, ‘lifestyle’: no. After all, at school, we are in Belgium where the Belgian culture is present. But lifestyle, I don’t see what ‘lifestyle’ has to do with school.9 (respondent 8)

When I asked how she would define ‘lifestyle’, she answered:

I don’t know… something banal. For example: there are things you eat that we don’t eat. So there is something that we can’t adopt and that we will never adopt. We wouldn’t want to go backward, would we. Because if questions like that would be asked, we would go backward. We have adopted at the level of the school, it has been adopted already, so it is fine the way it is.10 (respondent 8)

Culture, for me that’s something personal. Lifestyle, yes, one has to live in the same way to evolve. But ‘culture’... I keep my own culture.11 (respondent 5)

Respondent 5 and 8 reveal a fundamental problem of the statements of the acculturation model, namely the indeterminacy and complexity of the notion culture and lifestyle. Not only does it consist of two different elements – ‘culture’ and ‘lifestyle’-, the definitions attached to the two elements may be so fundamentally different that they both lead the answer to the overall statement in a different direction. Researchers using the acculturation measures want to know the attitude of the respondents towards ‘culture and lifestyle’, as an amalgam, in general, but respondents construct their own interpretations. In other words: if the researchers do not provide a specific content for these ‘container concepts’, respondents activate their own specific interpretations. As a

9 Original French quote: « Oui et non. Je dirais ‘la culture’ oui, le ‘mode de vie’, non. On est dans des écoles où quand même on est en Belgique et que la culture Belge est présente. Mais le mode de vie, je ne vois pas ce que le mode de vie vient faire à l’école. »
10 Original French quote: « Je sais pas... un truc banal. Par exemple y a des choses que vous mangez et qu’on mange pas. Donc ça, c’est quelque chose qu’on peut pas adopter et qu’on a jamais fait donc on va pas revenir en arrière. Parce que si on pose des questions comme ça, on revient en arrière. On a adopté là maintenant au niveau des écoles, c’est adopté, donc c’est très bien comme ça. »
11 Original French quote: « La culture, je trouve c’est quelque chose de personnelle. Le mode de vie, oui, on doit avoir le même mode de vie pour évoluer. Mais la culture, je garde ma culture.”
consequence *the object* towards which people in the survey construct their attitude can differ, a difference that cannot be controlled for and the measure becomes invalid.

When taking a closer look to the different definitions the previous two respondents attached to the elements ‘culture’ and lifestyle’, two fundamentally different approaches of ‘the cultural’ can be discerned, a distinction which is not accounted for by the acculturation measures. One element refers to the ‘ethnic culture’, in daily life defined by people as an amalgam of traditions, religious practices and identity. Ideal-typically, ethnicity refers to roots and heritage and therefore to the past. In dominant daily discourse, ethnicity is essential to a person in the sense that one is born with it – ethnic culture is taken in with mother’s milk. It is rather ascribed than achieved, more exclusive than inclusive. The other ideal-typical interpretation of ‘the cultural’ stands for collective practices, beliefs, values, norms and institutions that are situated in the present. These are not necessarily inherited through genealogical lines and can therefore be achieved. The ‘ethnic’ interpretation of culture can be interpreted to follow a unidimensional model of acculturation. The ‘collective practices, beliefs, values and norms’ approach a bidimensional model. The acculturation models used today tend to opt for a bidimensional model of acculturation, which results in asking different statements along the lines of maintenance and adoption. For some respondents, who interpret ‘culture and lifestyle’ within the ethnic approach of culture, the acculturation question is rather confusing, as the statements are mirroring each other – agreeing on the one, implies disagreeing on the other. The unidimensional aspect shows when different respondents answer a question on adoption with an answer on the maintenance of their own culture, which is illustrated above by respondent 5 who answered with “I keep my own culture”.

By taking the previous observation into account, we can understand how come that the notion of ‘culture and lifestyle’ as a whole did not produce apparent problems for answering when the questions concerned maintenance, but did in the questions on cultural adoption. As the acculturation statements start with the reference to the Moroccan ‘culture and lifestyle’, the ‘ethnic’ understanding of culture is activated. Questions on maintenance can be answered while considering the ethnic culture, as it is a heritage culture. When the same understanding of ‘culture and lifestyle’ remains activated when being confronted with statements on ‘adoption of the Belgian culture’, respondents do not easily understand the question, for how could one ‘adopt’ something which can only be ascribed by heritage? - unless it would be ‘imposed’ on them, which the same people rejected in their reaction to the cultural maintenance statement with reference to the public culture. The question of adoption of the Belgian culture and lifestyle then becomes a very oppressive one.

Other evidence for the activation of the ethnic understanding of ‘culture’ and the problems this entails for the adoption questions, is the fact that none of the respondents could really define what the ‘Belgian culture and lifestyle’ is, apart from how it differs from the ‘Moroccan culture and lifestyle’ (e.g. drinking alcohol, eating pork, a stronger mix of men and women) or apart from pointing to French fries, chocolate or good beer. Respondent 1 is very explicit: “It is true, it is different. A Moroccan does not live like a Belgian, that's true. But on the Belgian side, I don't know how to define.” The dominant, white, ‘western’ culture is not defined in terms used to describe an ‘ethnic culture’ – ‘white identity’ is not considered as an ethnic identity, in daily life understanding.
As a result, for several of my respondents who did not understand how ‘Belgian culture’ could be linked to adoption or what was meant by the ‘Belgian culture’ in the first place, the adoption questions lead to frustration. They were lead to an answer they did not feel comfortable with, because something was asked from them which was not righteous. As a result, they had to disagree on a statement which involved the Belgian culture in questions which are clearly meant to measure their integration as Moroccans.

Six of my respondents did answer agree to the statement on cultural adoption in the public sphere. In order to agree, they had to change the notion of ‘the cultural’ they referred to from the ethnic understanding of the maintenance questions to the understanding of practices, norms and values.

One should respect the rules of work, be courteous, be pleasant. And that’s how it goes in all cultures.\(^\text{12}\) (respondent 6)

It’s like I told you before: one should respect. It’s more or less the same thing [like the question on cultural maintenance in the public sphere – DH]: one has to respect.\(^\text{13}\) (respondent 9)

One has to respect, that’s all. To adapt. But you wouldn’t ask a Muslim to eat pork.\(^\text{14}\) (respondent 1)\(^\text{15}\)

Also these answers revealed some friction. Previously quoted interview fragments may illustrate this. In the previous paragraph respondent 9 explicitly says: "I respect the European education, but that’s all". Respondent 1 says something similar: “respect, that’s all”, as a reaction to the question for adoption.

Some respondents – like respondent 6 in his previous quote - tried to show that they agree with the statement on adaptation/adoption, but that the differences between the Belgian and Moroccan way of living, in the sense of culture as practices, values and norms, is not so different. The following quotes serves as another example:

I think after all it is equally strong, the fraternal solidarity in general. But in general, values of a country can be found elsewhere as well. It’s just that some develop it, others don’t.\(^\text{16}\) (respondent 4)

This strategy reveals another fundamental problem of the acculturation statements: by asking separate questions on ‘the Belgian culture and lifestyle’ and ‘the Moroccan culture and lifestyle’, it portrays these two as two different blocks of ‘cultural stuff’ that exclude one another. What is part of the Moroccan culture is not part of the Belgian culture and

\(^{12}\) Original French quote: « On doit respecter les règles du travail, on doit être courtois, on doit être aimable. Ca c’est dans toutes les cultures. »

\(^{13}\) Original French quote: « C’est comme je vous dis : on doit respecter. C’est à peu près la même chose [que dans la question précédente] : on doit respecter. »

\(^{14}\) Original French quote: "On doit respecter. C’est tout. Il faut s’adapter. Mais on demande pas à un musulman de manger du porc. »

\(^{15}\) Respondent 1 agreed to a certain extend and disagreed to a certain extend. That is the reason why she acts in both arguments.

\(^{16}\) Original French quote: « Je pense qu’elle est quand même assez forte, la solidarité fraternelle en général. Mais en général, les valeurs d’un pays, on les retrouve ailleurs aussi. C’est juste qu’il y en a qui les développent et d’autres qui les développent pas. »
vice versa. As mentioned before, for the ethnic understanding of culture, this portrayal might work. For the understanding of culture as practices, values and norms in the present, this separation leads to a friction between the questions and the vision of the respondents and therefore creates short-circuits or frustration for respondents who do not want to or can not follow this clear separation.

5.4. Cultural adoption - on the difference between adoption and adaptation and the diversity of positions within the second generation

In this paragraph, I do not exclusively deal with the last statement on cultural adoption in the private sphere, but focus on the difference between ‘adoption’ and ‘adaptation’ and the different subject positions people take up when answering in the one or the other way. Taking this as a starting point, I wish to demonstrate that members of the second generation are not necessarily alike in taking the positions the acculturation questions call them into.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, several respondents turned the cultural adoption question into a more general ‘adaptation’ question. As I have tried to demonstrate, part of this has to do with the impossibility to join together the ethnic interpretation of ‘the cultural’ and to question on adoption of it. In my interpretation of the data, it is also linked to a broader ‘generalisation’ of the cultural adoption statement. In the intention of the researchers, respondents answer to the four acculturation statements from their personal, Moroccan perspective. If this was not intended, all respondents – Belgian, Turkish and Moroccan – could have gotten the same general questions on the integration of ethnic minorities in society.

I observed that some of the respondents did not answer for themselves, but for ethnic minorities in general and therefore did not answer from the perspective of ‘the Moroccan’ they are supposed to be when answering the questions. The public sphere questions allows them to take up this position, answering for people in general from a not necessarily Moroccan point of view. The private sphere questions start with "At home, I think it is important...". The French phrase “Chez moi” is much stronger than the English version in calling respondents into their personal position, as “moi” is more explicit in pointing to the individual answering the question. (If this question would have been meant to point to ‘people in general’, it would have been phrased with “Chez soi, il est important de...”, the impersonal third person singular.) The English version is much less specific in making this distinction. On the contrary, the questions concerning the public sphere, open with "at school or at home, I think it is important..." (with a similar phrasing in the French question). It provides an opening for answering with reference to ‘people in general’.

Generalising the statement allows them to answer the question on cultural adaptation/adoption in a favourable way. Respondents are generally very much aware of the fact that the acculturation statements are statements on acculturation/integration.

The reason why the respondents that use this strategy adapt the question and do not answer for themselves is that they believe that for them, personally, there is nothing to adopt/adapt to. They are Belgian. When I more directly asked the respondents whether
they sometimes feel they personally have to adopt something or adapt to something, I received different answers that are similar to the following examples.

I am really absorbed by the masses. No. No. I don’t have to adapt myself. (respondent 10)

I don’t like that people tell me: ‘you have to integrate yourself.’ No! I am here and I let myself be absorbed by the masses. (respondent 2)

It (the question – DH) is a bit authoritative/guiding. There is nothing to adopt. (respondent 6)

I don’t think it is important to adopt. I adopt automatically. (respondent 4)

I don’t see what I could adopt more than what I already have done now. (respondent 3)

If people like these respondents would not adjust the cultural adoption statement from ‘personal adoption’ to ‘general adaptation’, they would respond to it with disagreeing and as a consequence be categorised either in the ‘marginalisation’ or in the ‘separation’ category of the acculturation attitudes framework (depending on their opinion on maintenance). However they are not the ‘Moroccans’ who refuse to integrate in society they are supposed to be by these categories; they are Belgians that are as much part of the Belgian society that the question does not relate to them.

Other respondents did answer affirmatively to my question whether they sometimes felt they had to adopt something or adapt to society. They had more the tendency to answer the four acculturation statements from a personal point of view. In other words, they did not show so much friction answering the questions on cultural adoption from the position of the descendent of Moroccan immigrant that was implied in the question. Respondent 5 and 7 may serve as an example. Respondent 5 feels obliged to adopt more of the Belgian culture and lifestyle, in order to be able to keep a close connection to her children. Respondent 7 adapts to the Belgian culture by not veiling when she goes to work.

Yes. To plunge into their world a little bit... a bit more actively to see what my children live. (…) I have the impression that I’m far from their world. (respondent 5)

At work, if find. Not veiling. If you want to veil, you should stay at home, I’m sorry! (respondent 7)

From these different ways of reacting, I conclude that different members of the second generation of Moroccan immigrants have different relationship to the subject position they are called into by the question. The subject position they are called into refers to

17 Original French quote : « Je me noie vraiment dans la masse. Non. Non. Je dois pas m’adapter. »
18 Original French quote : « Moi, je n’aime pas qu’on me dise : ‘il faut t’intégrer,’ non ! Je suis ici et je me fond dans la masse »
19 Original French quote : « Ca force un peu la main. Il n y rien a adopter. »
20 Original French quote : « Je trouve pas qu’il était important d’adopter, je l’adopte automatiquement. »
21 Original French quote : « Je vois pas qu’est-ce que je pourrais adopter de plus de qu’est-ce que j’ai fais pour l’instant. »
22 Original French quote : « Oui. De replonger un peu dans le monde... un peu plus actif pour voir ce qui vis mes enfants. (…) J’ai l’impression d’être loin de leur monde. »
23 Original French quote : « Dans le travail, je trouve. De ne pas mettre de foulard. Si tu veux mettre ton foulard, tu restes chez toi à la maison, je suis désolée. »
their (supposed) ethnic identity. In order to analyse more precisely what is at stake at the level of the different ethnic identity constructions of the respondents, I should make a more thorough analysis than the one I did now within the framework of validity assessment. What I wanted to obtain in this paragraph is to reveal that ‘the second generation’ as a whole contains a diversity of ethnic identity positions which thwarts the answering patterns of the existing measures of acculturation attitudes.

5.5. Implicit and explicit feedback on the acculturation question – on ethics

If conclude this report by dwelling on the explicit and implicit feedback I got from the participants to my research on the acculturation question. If they had not already uttered some feedback while explaining their answers, I explicitly asked my respondents to give some comments on the battery of statements. For some, the questions were clear and easy to answer. As already mentioned before, for others they were not. I believe this does not only point to a methodological, validity problem, but also to an ethical one.

In paragraph 5.1., I referred to respondent 4, who did not agree with the statement on cultural maintenance at home, due to the fact that he considered the Moroccan culture to be what is lived by Moroccans in Morocco; that the children of immigrants can not and do not want to live like Moroccans in Belgium, as they are always already mixed. I used this fragment as an illustration that different interpretations of the same concept can lead to different answers. I believe, however, that his answer also signalled something else. When I asked this person questions on what he wishes to harbour from his Moroccan heritage, he answered this question by making references to his identity in general, his religion, his name – he is called Mohamed – and the importance of strong family ties. In this question, he did accept the denominator of ‘Moroccan culture’... after he made his point. Respondent 4 answered disagree to all four of the acculturation statements. He also repeatedly referred to himself as a ‘fils d’immigrés’, a ‘son of immigrants’, more specifically in two contexts: first, where he explains that as ‘fils d’immigrés’ one is a mix of different influences – not the one, nor the other, but a bit of both; second to refer to the fact that with this status, he and his fellows do not get fully accepted in Belgium. By consequently answering disagree to the statements, he refused the acculturation question altogether, as he felt it tried to force him to the one or the other category. This position is very similar to the one respondent 3 took when I asked for feedback on the question. He replied:

“There is also a lot of ambiguity in their questions. It is more conceived to be able to say: ‘do you feel more Belgian than Moroccan?’; but we don’t know. We don’t know, we can’t say things like that as we are born here. For me, for example, I am born here, I do not feel more Moroccan than Belgian. I feel a human being and I will die as a human being. And that’s the end of it!”

In short, these respondents did not feel recognised for what they are. Respondent 6 explicitly treated the question as an example of how the ‘fils d’immigrés’ are not fully accepted in Belgian society. The battery of acculturation statements positions them into the category of the ethnic minority member that can maintain and/or adopt. Some
respondents felt treated by prejudice and explicitly said they were disappointed by the research. One person that was invited to participate to an in-depth interview following up the survey interview refused to participate in the research as she did not feel at ease after participating to the survey. She felt scrutinized as a Moroccan and as a Muslim. Not all respondents had the same lucid reflection and were left with a vague feeling of frustration, which is equally unacceptable from social scientific research.

Even though a lot of integration research is conceived to aid to detect injustice, measure discrimination and empower ethnic minorities, this does not imply that the instruments are free of judgement or improper categorisation. Researchers should carefully scrutinize their instruments on their assumptions and question whether these assumptions meet the population they are researching before actually applying them.

6. Conclusion

In the last part of this paper, I bring together the conclusions of my analyses concerning the content validity of the acculturation measure used in the TIES research. Most of the conclusions can be extended to acculturation attitude measures in general, as they point to the very foundations of this family of instruments. In this paper, I do not formulate very concrete proposals for adjustments of the acculturation measure. What I do wish to end with, is setting an agenda for integrating more of the insights of cultural sociology or cultural anthropology into research on the cultural integration of immigrants.

6.1. On the content validity of ‘acculturation attitudes’ measurement

Content validity refers to the extend by which the results of research can be interpreted adequately. Do we measure what we think we measure? Can we interpret the answers the respondent produced more or less in the same way as the respondents themselves? Through the analysis of the in-depth interviews I conducted with members of the second generation of Moroccan descent in Brussels, I conclude we can not.

First of all, the acculturation statements used to measure the attitudes were not understood in the same way by all the respondents. Different respondents took different elements of the question as a point of reference (f.e. “...it is important to...” or “...mäntenen autant que possible...”). It was the difference in the points of reference of the question and not different attitudes that lead them to answer in a certain way – different answers hid the same meanings. Due to the complexity of the statements, the validity of the instrument can be questioned.

Second, the answers to acculturation questions concerning the public sphere indicated that even though people may have different visions on living together in an ethnically mixed society, the acculturation measurement fails to differentiate between them. In my research, respondents favouring laïcité, pluralism and assimilation all ended up in the same answering category.
Third, the notion of ‘culture and lifestyle’ is too vague and too complex to lead to valid results of acculturation attitudes measurement. Even if respondents referred to this same element of the question, different meanings attached to it also lead people to different answers, even though they demonstrated to have the same opinions.

Not only does it consist of two different elements – ‘culture’ and lifestyle’ -, the definitions attached to the two elements by some people are so fundamentally different that they both lead the answer to the overall statement in a different direction and made the question unanswerable.

The different definitions people attach to the notion of ‘culture and lifestyle’ point to two fundamentally different approaches of ‘the cultural’, namely one that refers to ‘ethnic culture’ and one that refers to ‘collective practices, values and norms’. The first leads to an exclusive vision of culture and a unidimensional model of acculturation; the second to a more inclusive vision of culture and a bidimensional model. The acculturation model is conceived as a bidimensional model, which may create cognitive problems for some respondents. When the ethnic notion of culture is activated in the understanding of research participants, the questions on ‘cultural adoption’ cause problems for some of them. Seen from the perspective of the ethnic culture, which is a heritage culture, it is difficult to understand how and why the Belgian culture could or should be adopted, as suggested in the adoption statements.

Respondents tend to answer the ‘cultural adoption’ question as a more general ‘cultural adaptation’ question, both to solve the previously mentioned problem on the problematic reconcilability of the ethnic notion of culture and ‘adoption’, and to be able to generalise and agree with a question on the integration. By generalising, they can agree with a statement for people in general, without having to answer for themselves. This way, they solve the problem of the contradiction of the question asking them for adaptation, while they feel that there is not much to adapt to for them, as full participants of the Belgian society.

By asking separate questions on the Belgian and on the Moroccan culture and lifestyle, the acculturation instrument portrays these as two different blocks of ‘cultural stuff’ that exclude one another. For the understanding of culture as practices, values and norms, this separation leads to a friction between the questions and the visions of the respondents that live both the ‘Belgian’ and the ‘Moroccan’ way, without being able to clearly separate both.

Fourth, the acculturation questions address the respondents as Moroccans that can maintain the Moroccan culture and lifestyle and/or have to adopt the Belgian culture and lifestyle. However, different members of the second generation of Moroccan immigrants have different relationships to this subject position they are called into by the questions. The ‘second generation’ as a whole contains a diversity of ethnic identity positions which thwarts the answering patterns of acculturation measures.

Firth and last, as the acculturation questions cause cognitive problems and fail to catch the positions of some of the respondents, they often lead to frustration. Moreover, some respondents did not feel recognized for what they are and demonstrated that the acculturation question serves as an example of how the Belgian society fails to recognize both their Belgian and their mixed identity. Even though integration research is often conceived to detect injustice and discrimination, this does not mean that the instruments
are free of judgement and wrongful categorisation. The validity problems of the acculturation measures therefore entail ethical ones.

6.2. Lessons for acculturation studies in general – a call for more cultural sociology

In this paper, I do not come up with concrete proposals for adjustments of the acculturation measurement. However, I want illuminate the fact that most of the above mentioned validity problems point to a clear lack of understanding the ethnic identity of the second generation, and a lack of insight in ‘the cultural’ and its different conceptions. Acculturation research, as the study of the cultural integration of immigrants, is considered to be a part of the general research on the integration of immigrants. It however equally requires the fertile context of cultural sociology or cultural anthropology. Therefore I would like to plead for the integration of cultural sociological insights in integration research. I finish with some threads of arguments and thoughts for proceeding:

As written before: if we fail to understand the ethnic identity of the second generation of immigrants, we do not know whether the use of the ‘traditional’ instruments of integration research is valid and just. A poor understanding of ‘the cultural’ leads to poor operationalization and to unfortunate models of cultural adaptation. At date, unidimensional and bidimensional models have been used, but ‘different cultures’ neither relate to each other as poles of the same continuum, nor as independent sources. ‘Cultures’ also do not just ‘fuse’, as is also proposed elsewhere. In today’s world, ‘cultures’ cannot be understood as homogeneous, exclusive, static blocs that could come into contact with each other, as is portrayed in the definitions of ‘acculturation’.

Important in drawing models on ‘culture’ is the differentiation between the way ‘culture’ is conceived at the level of daily life and at the level of sociology. Even if people understand culture according to a unidimensional or a bidimensional system, this does not mean that sociological research should copy this understanding into a scientific model.

Last, but at the same time first: when one wants to measure ‘acculturation attitudes’, one should know exactly what one really wants to measure – the very first rule for attaining content validity. Is it general attitudes towards the integration of immigrants in society? Then why ‘culturalize’ the statements and why ask immigrants a different question than the members of the original population? If it is about the actual cultural practices of people, respondents should be asked different questions than the general ones on maintenance and adoption, or observational methods should be used. If it is about understanding processes of cultural change, then asking people questions – either through survey or qualitative interviewing - might not be the right methodological approach.
Bibliography


