Open Access | Original Research
Journal of Intercultural Communication, 26(2), 2026 | PP: 128– 142
https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v26i2.1489

Perceived Expressive Reduction in German: Identity, Affect, and Social Relations among Highly Educated Hungarian Migrant Women in Vienna

Eszter Balogh [1], Zsuzsanna Szvetelszky[2], Virág Hajnal[3], Jázmin Szonja Ábrahám[4], Judit T. Nagy[4]

Article History:

Received: 02-04-2026
Revision: 11-05-2026
Accepted: 15-05-2026
Publication: 09-06-2026

Cite this article as:

Balogh, E., Szvetelszky, Z., Hajnal, V., Ábrahám, J. S., & T. Nagy, J. (2026). Perceived Expressive Reduction in German: Identity, Affect, and Social Relations among Highly Educated Hungarian Migrant Women in Vienna. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *26*(2), 128-1142. doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v26i2.1489

Corresponding Author:

Eszter Balogh

Department of Sociology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Hungary. Email: balogh.eszter@kre.hu

Abstract: This article examines how highly educated Hungarian migrant women living in Vienna perceive the differences between the expressive possibilities available to them in Hungarian and the communicative possibilities they experience in German and how these differences relate to their identity, emotions, social relationships, and tendencies toward self-segregation. The study is based on a qualitative secondary discourse analysis of 25 anonymised in-depth interviews collected in 2023 as part of a broader research project on women's social and labour market integration involving participants with self-reported German proficiency of at least B2 level. The results identify three recurring patterns. Women often associate the German language with feelings of shame, insecurity, and an inability to express themselves. In the participants' narratives, this experience is linked to identity-related tensions, a diminished sense of competence, and a subjective loss of status. Ultimately, these experiences are associated with more selective social networking, more cautious participation in German-language contexts, and a preference for Hungarian-language networks as emotionally safer spaces. The article introduces the concept of code reduction to describe this identity-related experience of expressive narrowing, interpreted not as an objective linguistic decline but as a subjective experience in which one is unable to reproduce one's usual native-language repertoire in the second language. The study argues that the linguistic experience of migration should be understood not only as a matter of language proficiency, but also as an emotional and identity-related dimension of social integration.

Keywords: Linguistic Code, Migration, Identity, Affective Relationship, Integration

1. Introduction

Language is central to migrants' social integration because it functions not only as a means of communication but also as a resource through which identity, status, recognition, and social participation are negotiated. Previous research has shown that second-language proficiency plays a crucial role in migrants' labour-market integration, access to institutional resources, social capital, educational trajectories, and psychological well-being (Norton, 2000; Guzi, Kahanec, & Mýtna Kureková, 2023; Rüdel & Steinmann, 2024; Bar-Haim & Birgier, 2024; Díaz-Millón & Olvera-Lobo, 2025; Mavisakalyan et al., 2025). Moreover, studies have examined second-language proficiency in relation to occupational segregation, income inequalities, gender-based labour-market disadvantages, accent-based discrimination, linguistic isolation, and the unequal valuation of migrants' linguistic repertoires (Baugh, 2003; Dovchin & Dryden, 2022; Ramjattan, 2022; Queirós et al., 2025; Tóth & Vitáloš, 2025).

However, migration research has primarily approached language proficiency as a functional resource connected to employment, institutional access, and social mobility. Less attention has been paid to highly educated migrants who possess a complex linguistic repertoire in their native language but feel unable to reproduce the same degree of nuance, spontaneity, emotional precision, professional authority, and identity-affirming self-expression in a second language. This gap is significant because migrants may formally possess a relatively high level of second-language proficiency while still experiencing reduced communicative agency, symbolic status, and social confidence.

The affective and identity-related dimensions of second-language use are particularly important in this context. Research on foreign-language anxiety, shame, multilingual identity, and emotional expression shows that language use is closely connected to self-confidence, emotional security, and the feeling of being recognised as a competent person (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Galmiche, 2017; Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018; Panicacci, 2018; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2023). Therefore, difficulties in second-language expression may produce not only communicative limitations but also shame, identity tension, perceived status loss, and avoidance of host-language social contexts.

This study examines this under-explored dimension through the case of highly educated Hungarian migrant women living in Vienna. Drawing on a textual analysis of interviews, the

[1,2,3,5] Department of Sociology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Hungary
[4] Department of Psychology, Columbia University, United States of America

study investigates how these women describe their relationship to the German language and how they perceive the difference between the expressive complexity they are accustomed to in Hungarian and the expressive possibilities available to them in German. The study introduces the concept of code reduction to describe this subjective experience of expressive narrowing. Code reduction does not refer to objective linguistic decline or the loss of native-language competence. Rather, it captures the perception that the speaker cannot fully reproduce in the second language the nuance, emotional precision, professional register, symbolic authority, and identity-bearing speech available in the native language.

Accordingly, this study presents a multidisciplinary interpretive framework for understanding the relationship between inequality and language. The analysis draws on linguistic, social-psychological, and sociological concepts to examine how highly educated Hungarian women who have settled in Vienna experience German-language use and integration into Viennese society. The research question is as follows: How do highly educated migrant women, characterised by an elaborate Hungarian linguistic repertoire, perceive the difference between the complexity of self-expression they are accustomed to in Hungarian and the expressive possibilities available to them in German, and how does this relate to their identity, emotional experiences, social relationships, and forms of self-segregation?

2. Language, Social Hierarchy, and Migration: Theoretical Frameworks and Research Perspectives

2.1. Language and social structure

Sociological and critical theories of language ground the framework of this study. Against Chomsky's (1965) purely formal concept of competence and the structuralist abstraction of language from social context (de Saussure, 2006), empirical critiques demonstrated the entanglement of language and social structure (Labov, 1966, 1972a; Hymes, 1972; Gumperz, 1964). This critical tradition has since evolved into contemporary examinations of social meaning, identity-construction, and linguistic superdiversity (Bell, 2016; Eckert, 2018; Arnaut et al., 2016). Bernstein's code theory (1971, 1996), rooted in Durkheim's concepts of solidarity (1893/1984) and connected to Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics, shows that restricted and elaborated codes reproduce class inequalities through schooling.

Bourdieu (1977, 1991) frames language as symbolic power: value lies not only in linguistic form but also in the speaker's social position, with institutional legitimation elevating certain registers and devaluing others (Albright et al., 2018). Norton (2000) extends Bourdieu's framework to language acquisition by recasting target-language learning as an investment in identity and future symbolic resources. Darvin and Norton (2015, 2017) further systematise this relationship along the axes of identity, capital, and ideology, in which participation is motivated by anticipated returns or blocked by the fear of exclusion. Foucault (1972) and Weedon (1997) add that discourses constitute their objects and continually reconstitute subjectivity within asymmetrical relations. Recent scholarship continues to apply this poststructuralist lens to examine how language learners navigate identity and power, highlighting that linguistic positioning is a site of constant negotiation and social investment (Baxter, 2016; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017; Norton & De Costa, 2018). Therefore, language operates as power at both macro- and micro-levels.

2.2. Language and migration

The theoretical framework developed in this section addresses five intersecting dimensions that bear directly on the empirical question: migration as a structural context, language as both resource and instrument of inequality, identity as it is reconstituted through second-language use, affect as a constitutive rather than peripheral dimension of migrant linguistic experience, and social networks as the medium through which linguistic trajectories take shape. Rather than reviewing the broader sociolinguistic and sociological traditions in which these concepts are embedded, the framework focuses on scholarship that specifically engages these dimensions in migration contexts.

The section proceeds from critical sociolinguistic accounts of communicative inequality in migration (Gumperz, 1982; Blommaert, 2010; Rampton, 2017), through theories of social and cultural capital and their uneven convertibility under conditions of mobility (Bourdieu, 1991; Erel, 2010; Albright et al., 2018), to recent empirical work on the affective and identity-related dimensions of second-language use among migrants (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2023). It then situates the present study within recent empirical literature on migration and language.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (1989, 1995), Wodak (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), and van Dijk (1992, 2008), links theory to methodology. Fairclough (1995) shows how texts create and support ideological structures and inequalities. Van Dijk (1992) demonstrates how racist and exclusionary ideas appear in everyday and institutional discourse. Recent scholarship has advanced these frameworks into contemporary domains, such as the discourse-historical approach to immigration control (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016), the normalisation of racism in immigration imaginaries (Krzyżanowski, 2020), and the evolving landscape of critical discourse studies (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2016; KhosraviNik, 2017). This perspective is especially important in migration research. Gumperz (1982), for example, showed how differing communication norms can cause misunderstanding and discrimination between immigrants and institutional gatekeepers in job interviews and administrative encounters (Rampton, 2017). His concept of "contextualisation cues" helps explain why people may be judged negatively when their communication differs from dominant cultural expectations. This line of research bridges the critique of formal linguistics and the study of power relations in migration contexts.

Social capital theory also provides an important interpretive framework for examining migration-related inequalities, although the theoretical unity of this research tradition is largely superficial[2]. The three types of social capital, bonding capital,

[2] Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), Bourdieu (1986), and Granovetter (1973) approach the subject from fundamentally different epistemological frameworks. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a resource embedded in the structure that enables individual action, within a framework grounded in rational decision theory. Putnam (2000) treats it as a community attribute and links democratic capacity to civic participation. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is an individually accumulated resource embedded in class structures, whose primary function is the reproduction of inequality. By contrast, Granovetter's (1973) The Strength of Weak Ties is a work of network theory that empirically demonstrates the informational and mobility advantages of loosely connected, heterogeneous networks; however, the term 'social capital' does not appear in his analysis. The conceptual linkage was made only retrospectively by Putnam (2000).

bridging capital, and linking capital, provide access to networks of different statuses (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Bonding capital refers to close ties with similar group members, bridging capital to weak ties between different groups, and linking capital to vertical ties with institutions and power. An immigrant's network position, therefore, reveals important aspects of integration, particularly the extent to which they are connected to their own cultural and linguistic group as well as to the host community.

In this context, Portes's (1998) critical review highlights that social capital is not necessarily a positive force. Dense bonding capital can limit individual mobility, exclude non-group members, and produce downward-levelling norms, which are particularly relevant to migrant integration. Contemporary research has refined this by exploring how migrants navigate 'weak ties' (Ryan, 2016) and 'differentiated embedding' (Ryan, 2018), suggesting a multi-level framework for understanding how migrant capitals are negotiated across different social and temporal contexts (Erel & Ryan, 2019). At the same time, immigrants' access to bridging capital is closely linked to their knowledge of the host society's language (Ryan et al., 2008; Rüdel & Steinmann, 2024), since language, as symbolic capital, can be converted into economic and social advantages (Bourdieu, 1991; Albright et al., 2018). Cummins's (1979, 2000) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency provides a useful clarification in this context. Basic interpersonal communication skills may be acquired relatively quickly, whereas cognitive academic language proficiency, which is necessary for career advancement, institutional interaction, and the activation of social capital, may take much longer. This difference may explain the gap between formal language proficiency and actual integration outcomes.

Baugh's (2003) research further highlights that immigrants face discrimination in the labour market and housing sector not only on the basis of actual language proficiency but also because of accent and dialect. Thus, language can serve not only as a resource but also as a tool of exclusion. Language barriers most severely limit access to linking capital, since building vertical connections requires knowledge of institutional registers. Similarly, Vertovec's (2007, 2009) superdiversity paradigm highlights that migration contexts are organised around highly complex and simultaneously occurring variables, including legal status, ethnic background, age, gender, education, and network position. Such complexity cannot be captured by linear models of integration.

The relationship between language and migrants' cultural capital has been theorised by Erel (2010), who critiques "rucksack" approaches that treat cultural capital as a fixed bundle transported from origin to destination. Based on case studies of Turkish and Kurdish migrant women in Britain and Germany, Erel argues that cultural capital must be actively reproduced and validated in the new context, and that this process generates intra-migrant differentiations along the lines of gender, ethnicity, and class. More recent policy-oriented research synthesised by Ruiz and Donato (2025), drawing on Eurostat data and the COST Action WEMov network, documents that migrant women workers in the European Union experience deskilling at higher rates than men. In 2019, approximately 40.7% of highly educated migrant women in the European Union were employed below their qualifications, compared with 21.1% of national women. Ruiz et al. (2025) identify the non-recognition of qualifications, limited network support, and linguistic barriers as contributing factors. These findings provide context for the present study by indicating that the structural devaluation of migrant women's resources in host societies extends beyond labour-market metrics to include symbolic and linguistic dimensions of recognition. However, the specific case of highly educated Hungarian women in Vienna has not yet been examined in this literature.

Alongside migration research examining the role of language, it is important to note that the literature has primarily focused on language proficiency in the context of the labour market. Research highlights that second-language proficiency is linked to labour-market segregation and income inequalities (Michalíková, 2018; Norton, 2000), and that these difficulties can persist for decades (Guzi et al., 2023). Several studies also document the gendered dimensions of these disadvantages, showing that the labour-market penalty associated with motherhood (Correll et al., 2007; Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2015, 2017) is compounded by the negative labour-market effects of caregiving burdens (Folbre, 2017; Udayanga, 2024), particularly among immigrant women, for whom limited language proficiency may further intensify structural disadvantages (T.Nagy et al., 2025). Magnússon et al. (2025) demonstrate the language difficulties of immigrant children in an Icelandic high school context, showing that code order in the Bernsteinian sense, namely restricted and elaborated codes, is correlated with educational inequalities among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This reinforces Bernstein's (1971, 1996) thesis regarding the role of codes in reproducing inequality across the school system.

In a migration context, language proficiency is not only relevant from labour-market and demographic perspectives. Montemitro et al. (2021) highlight the psychological implications of language proficiency by pointing to links between poor language skills and higher levels of psychological distress and alienation. Their research demonstrates that lower language proficiency can hinder authentic emotional expression and self-reflection, thereby increasing isolation. The affective dimension of second-language use among migrants has therefore received increasing empirical attention. Galmiche (2017), based on 30 in-depth interviews with foreign-language learners in France, introduces the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Shame and reports that participants associated experiences of shame with diminished linguistic confidence and avoidance behaviours. Sevinç and Dewaele (2018), studying three generations of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, propose the related concepts of heritage language anxiety and majority language anxiety, suggesting that migrants may experience anxiety not only in the host language but, in later generations, also in the heritage language. In a large-scale survey of 1,746 foreign-language learners worldwide, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) report that foreign-language enjoyment and foreign-language classroom anxiety are statistically distinguishable rather than mirror opposites. This indicates that affective experiences in second-language use are multidimensional rather than reducible to a single anxiety–comfort axis. Although these studies were conducted in different contexts, including classroom, family, and community settings, and cannot be directly generalised to highly educated adult migrants, they collectively support the interpretation that affective discomfort in second-language use is a documented phenomenon worth investigating in the present sample.

The present research also relates to the paradigmatic shift associated with Blommaert's (2010) concept of orders of indexicality. Blommaert demonstrates how different linguistic resources are systematically valued up or down by hierarchies of institutional and social expectations. In the case of immigrants, truncated repertoires, namely linguistic competences that are not fully valued by the host society, become a structural source of social disadvantage. Blommaert (2010) argues that one of the most important tasks of contemporary research is to understand the connections between mobility and inequality. This is

closely linked to the superdiversity approach described by Vertovec (2007) and fits within the broader critical sociolinguistic tradition established by Labov (1972b), Gumperz (1982), and Fairclough (1989) that has been further developed through contemporary syntheses of interactional sociolinguistics (Rampton, 2017) and the expansion of critical discourse studies (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018). Busch (2017), using the concept of Spracherleben, or the lived experience of language, emphasises that the linguistic repertoire is not merely a storehouse of communicative resources but also a carrier of bodily, emotional, and intersubjective experiences embedded in the individual's life history. This approach links Blommaert's concept of a truncated repertoire to the affective dimension by showing that language loss associated with migration may also disrupt continuity in lifestyle.

A related body of work focuses on how migrants perceive themselves differently across their languages. Panicacci's (2018) doctoral study, based on 468 Italian migrants residing in English-speaking countries, examines how length of stay, self-perceived second-language proficiency, and acculturation patterns relate to participants' reports of feeling "different" when switching between their first language and the host language, particularly in emotionally laden situations. In a follow-up study, Panicacci and Dewaele (2023) report that Italian migrants more often describe feeling "sincere about their feelings" when expressing emotions in their first language than in the host language, with this perception shaped by social and contextual variables rather than determined solely by formal proficiency. These findings, while limited to Italian-English bilinguals and self-report data, suggest that the perceived narrowing of expressive complexity in the host language, which is central to the present study's research question, is not idiosyncratic. Instead, it appears across comparable migrant populations, indicating that the gap between formal proficiency and felt expressive adequacy warrants systematic qualitative investigation.

Taken together, this literature shows that language is not merely a communicative tool but also a resource that shapes migrants' opportunities, recognition, participation, and psychological well-being (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022; Queirós et al., 2025; Rüdel & Steinmann, 2024). However, existing research has paid less attention to the subjective experience of highly educated migrants who formally possess advanced language proficiency yet still feel unable to reproduce, in a second language, the expressive complexity available in their native language. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining how highly educated Hungarian migrant women in Vienna describe the perceived narrowing of expressive complexity in German and how this experience relates to identity, emotions, social relationships, and self-segregation.

3. Data and Methods

The research was conducted throughout 2023 as part of a larger research project[3] whose original aim was to examine women's social and labour-market integration. It is important to clarify that the original questionnaire was not designed for a sociolinguistic study. However, during the coding process of the original research, we repeatedly observed a connection between the interviewees' manner of expression in Hungarian and their affective relationship to the German language. We also noted that negative emotions frequently emerged when participants discussed their knowledge and use of German. The coding was carried out by two researchers, who subsequently decided that the interviews also required secondary analysis from the perspective of participants' relationship to the German language. This analytical observation led to the secondary textual analysis presented in this article.

Data were collected from 25 women through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The 25 interviews comprised 863 pages of text and 309,428 words, providing a rich body of qualitative material for analysis. The interviews took place either in the interviewees' homes or in cafés. The interviewees were not known to the researchers beforehand. Sampling was conducted using the snowball method, with three starting points: a mailing list of the Hungarian school in Vienna, a Facebook page for Hungarians living in Vienna, and a mailing list for Hungarian mothers in Vienna. The average interview length was approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed, anonymised, and analysed using Atlas.ti software. The interview transcripts were examined through qualitative discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Two researchers participated in the coding process. They independently reviewed the relevant passages before comparing and discussing their coding decisions in order to resolve differing interpretations. Although numerical intercoder agreement indices are standard in quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019; Lombard et al., 2002), this study follows a qualitative approach that prioritises semantic validity (Krippendorff, 2019; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Accordingly, reliability was ensured through procedural transparency, researcher reflection, documentation of coding decisions, and regular consultation between the two researchers. Quotations from the Hungarian-language interviews were translated into English by members of the research team using a narrative-based translation protocol. During the translation process, semantic equivalence, evaluative stance, and emotional register were prioritised over literal syntactic correspondence. Each translated excerpt was also reviewed by a third bilingual researcher to verify that the content and discursive function of the original statement had been preserved.

Table 1: Demographic and linguistic characteristics of the interviewees included in the analysis

Characteristic	Category	n
Age	30–35 years	14
	36–40 years	11
Education	Bachelor's degree	8
	Master's degree	17
Labour-market status in Austria	Inactive, with no regular income	14
	Inactive, doing occasional marginal work	6
	Employed below qualification level	5
German language proficiency level and Hungarian linguistic code	Self-reported B2 or higher German proficiency and elaborated Hungarian linguistic code	21
	Self-reported B2 or higher German proficiency with limited evidence of metalinguistic elaboration	4

[3] Ethics license registration number Reg. No.: RH-TUD/1786-1/2024..

Characteristic	Category	n
Years since migration	2–4 years	2
	5–7 years	9
	8–10 years	3
	More than 10 years	11

Source: the author

The study used interview transcripts from participants who self-reported at least B2-level proficiency in German. The broader interview material consisted of 25 interviews conducted with highly educated Hungarian migrant women living in Vienna. First, all 25 interviews were analysed for passages related to language use, self-expression in Hungarian and German, emotional reactions to the German language, identity positioning, social relations, and labour-market participation. However, the central research question required the specific analytical condition that an elaborated Hungarian linguistic code be explicitly present in the interviewee's use of Hungarian. In four interviews, this condition could not be identified with sufficient strength or consistency. These four interviews were therefore not used to answer the central research question, as they did not provide a sufficiently reliable textual basis for examining code reduction under the same analytical conditions. Based on this criterion, 21 interviews were included in the final analytical sample, which contained sufficiently rich material to address the research question.

Atlas. ti software was used to organise the interview material, assign codes to relevant passages, write memos, retrieve coded segments, and compare patterns across interviews. Interpretation remained the researchers' responsibility; the software was not used for automated coding or interpretation. All analytical decisions, including the creation of categories and the interpretation of passages, were made by the researchers. Qualitative discourse analysis was used to examine how participants constructed relationships among emotional attitudes toward Hungarians and Germans, identity, social status, social participation, and integration. The analysis was not intended to measure objective German proficiency or quantify the frequency of linguistic features. Rather, it focused on how participants narrated, evaluated, and positioned themselves in relation to Hungarian and German; what meanings they attached to these languages; whether they interpreted themselves as competent or limited speakers of a foreign language; and how they believed language affected their integration.

During coding, interpretive codes were assigned to relevant discursive passages, and memos were used to support the interpretation of these codes. In the first stage of analysis, all transcripts were reread in their entirety to identify passages in which the emotional relationship to German, identity, status, social relations, and integration were evident. In the second phase, these text segments were assigned codes that captured both the topic being discussed and the participants' self-interpretations. Thus, the codes did not merely label themes but also reflected how participants positioned themselves and others through language. Examples of codes included "German as an obstacle", "shame in German", "loss of nuances", "Hungarian as emotional security", "administrative uncertainty", "avoidance of Austrian networks", "subjective loss of status", "Hungarian as authentic self-expression", "employment below qualification", and "dependence in institutional situations". In the third phase, the codes were grouped into broader analytical categories. These categories included negative and positive emotional relationships to German, perceived expressive narrowing, identity tension, labour-market positioning, institutional vulnerability, and social network orientation. These analytical categories show how participants constructed Hungarian and German as different symbolic, emotional, and social spaces. In the final stage, coded passages were compared across interviews to interpret recurring patterns and variations in the data. These comparisons were not interpreted statistically. Instead, the analysis examined variations, borderline cases, and contexts in which perceived code reduction was narrated with varying degrees of strength. It is important to emphasise that code reduction is used in this study as a sensitising concept rather than as a validated measurement tool. The article, therefore, introduces code reduction not as a ready-made instrument, but as an exploratory concept for interpreting participants' subjective linguistic experiences.

In this study, the classification of an elaborated Hungarian linguistic code was based on four qualitative indicators derived from Bernstein's theory: metaphorical language, complex syntax, abstract conceptualisation, and metalinguistic reflection. Metaphorical language was identified when participants used non-literal expressions to describe language, migration, identity, status, belonging, or loss; for example, when language was described as a barrier or when home was described as a form of loss. Complex syntactic structures were identified through subordinate clauses and causal, temporal, conditional, or contrastive formulations that linked linguistic experience to social, emotional, or institutional consequences. Abstract conceptualisation was identified through references to identity, status, equality, autonomy, shame, belonging, competence, dependence, self-expression, and integration. Metalinguistic reflection was identified through explicit comments on vocabulary, fluency, register, accent, expressive nuance, Hungarian–German differences, or the limitations of the communicative self in German.

These indicators were used as a qualitative coding framework and were applied consistently across the interview material. To qualify as an elaborated interview, the indicators had to appear repeatedly, and the researchers had to reach agreement after discussing borderline cases. Both emotional and reflective dimensions were classified as appearing simultaneously in participants' speech, reflecting an emotional attachment to identity and a symbolic interpretation of language. The language used by participants was generally structured and reflective, typically involving abstract concepts and nuanced, introspective lines of thought. In relation to the socio-cultural context, the interviewees often interpreted the decision to migrate from multiple perspectives and at a systemic level, reflecting linguistic patterns associated with middle-class forms of reasoning. In terms of cognitive organisation, spatial and temporal structuring, internal reasoning, and causal chains were dominant, reflecting the logic characteristic of an elaborated code. Textual analysis was used to examine attitudes toward the German language and work, social network positions, relationships with Austrian and Hungarian communities, and the interviewees' emotions and identities. Since the interviewees had lived in Vienna for periods ranging from 2 years to more than 10 years, the data reflect varied stages of migration, including early, middle, and longer-term settlement. This is a particularly sensitive context for examining the relationship between communicative competence and social integration.

The interviews were conducted in Hungarian and therefore do not provide direct evidence of participants' proficiency in German. However, they offer insight into participants' emotional attitudes toward German and their experiences of using it. Consequently, the study analyses perceptions of the German language rather than directly observed proficiency in German. Emotional attitudes toward German are treated as subjective perceptions rather than objective measures of language ability. It

is also important to note that the interview context itself may have influenced participants' language use, since the need for self-presentation and coherent narration may have encouraged a more elaborate register. The classification is therefore approximate and relies primarily on participants' self-reflective statements and metalinguistic remarks. The limitations of this approach are discussed in more detail in the Limitations section.

4. Research Findings

The in-depth analyses outlined a multidisciplinary interpretive framework suggesting that the patterns of the women's integration in Vienna may be related to their customary repertoire of linguistic self-expression in Hungarian, their affective relationship to the German language, and their narratives regarding identity and social connectedness. Our findings suggest that, in participants' experiences, the difference in opportunities for self- expression perceived as available in Hungarian and German does not appear merely as a linguistic issue but also as an experience associated with identity-related, emotional, and relational consequences. Based on the narratives examined, the relationship between linguistic repertoire and social positioning cannot be understood as a unidirectional determination, but rather as an interrelated, subjectively experienced process in which identity-constructing and psychological factors play important roles. The analysis identified three recurring empirical patterns. On the one hand, in participants' narratives, the German language is often associated with feelings of shame, insecurity, and inadequate expression. Second, this experience also manifests at the level of self-interpretation, as the limitations encountered in German are linked to identity tension, a feeling of "not being enough," and a subjective sense of status loss. Finally, all of this is also reflected in social relationships, as participants' accounts indicate that linguistic uncertainty is accompanied by more selective relationships, a more cautious approach to German-language situations, and a turn toward Hungarian-language environments perceived as safer.

Our empirical analyses showed that, based on Hungarian-language usage patterns that emerged in the interviews, correlations, rather than causal relationships, can be observed among attitudes toward the German language, social network characteristics, and women's identity constructions. Sociolinguistic research (Hoadley & Muller 2010; Savaş 2014) confirms that children, especially those from middle-class backgrounds, are capable of switching codes in context. For adults, code-switching is not an instinctive development, as it is for children, but a conscious, reflexive process (Rowsell 2008) in which the individual recognizes the expectations of the new environment (Curry, 2008) and, drawing on existing experiences and with external assistance (education, mentoring) (Pahl, 2008; Rowsell 2008) to reshape their own toolkit (Curry, 2008) Code-switching among adult migrants is also a conscious and reflexive process in which the individual adapts to the expectations of the new social field by mobilizing the cultural capital and "learning systems" acquired during their earlier socialization (Curry, 2008; Rowsell, 2008). While this body of research on code-switching provides an important framework for understanding multilingual adaptation, our analysis shifts attention to code reduction, as our findings relate not to the alternation between linguistic codes but the perceived narrowing of expressive capacity within a second language.

Code reduction is not a strictly empirical concept but an affect-based one describing the speaker's perception, according to which the focus is not on the level of language proficiency but on the reorganisation of the relationship to the German and Hungarian languages. The women are unable to reproduce their developed Hungarian linguistic code in German, resulting in code reduction. This is a situation in which the women do not feel they can fully reproduce the nuanced self-expression they are accustomed to in Hungarian when speaking German. Code reduction is a subjectively experienced narrowing of expressiveness in a second language, in which speakers are unable to reproduce the nuances, emotional precision, professional tone, and identity-bearing self-expression available in their native language. It is not interpreted as an objective linguistic decline, but as a perceived transformation of communicative agency, self-positioning, and symbolic status. It does not denote objective linguistic decline, the loss of native-language competence, or measurable second-language deficiency. Rather, it captures the experience that the speaker is unable to fully reproduce in the second language: the nuances, spontaneity, humour, emotional precision, professional register, symbolic authority, and identity-bearing speech available in the native language. In this sense, code reduction is not merely a linguistic limitation but a subjectively experienced transformation of communicative agency, self-positioning, and social status.

In the participants' narratives, code reduction is linked to a sense of psychological loss, shame, identity tension, and a subjective loss of status. They experience frustration, feel restricted, are less satisfied with their labour market situation, have weaker interethnic ties, tend to connect more with the Hungarian social network, and their integration is characterised by some degree of self-segregation. In this context, several studies (Bernhard & Bernhard, 2022; Birgier & Bar-Haim, 2023; Bloemen, 2023; Vervoort et.al., 2012) confirm that women tend to rate their language skills lower, and that language deficiencies have a much more drastic impact on their employment prospects than on those of men.

4.1. Shame, Linguistic Insecurity, and the Subjective Experience of Expressive Limitation in German

Women often describe learning German not as a success story, but as a personal struggle, a source of tension and a sense of loss. The statements reveal that speakers are unable to reproduce in a foreign language the refined, professional, and administrative code they used confidently in their native language. The speaker experiences a loss of access to institutional, formal communication.

> *"I can't handle the administrative tasks because my German isn't good enough… I can't explain exactly what I want. I can't express myself" (36–40 years old, not working, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"I have to correct myself, which is still a disadvantage. It makes speaking more cumbersome. I can't express myself as eloquently." (36–40 years old, employed, has lived in Vienna for 10 years).*

Code reduction is essentially a perceived narrowing of expression. Complex thinking remains, but its linguistic expression is simplified and can only be realised through a limited code. Thought structures remain complex, but linguistic performance is narrowed. This linguistic code reduction is thus not a lack of competence, but a forced reduction in performance. Using Chomsky's terminology (1965), speakers remain capable of thinking in complex conceptual structures, but these cannot be verbalised due to the perceived lack of a sufficiently high level of German. At the same time, we regard this linguistic code shift as a reduction because the narratives indicate that the use of the German language is linked to a

perceived recalibration of personality, a devaluation of symbolic capital in the Bourdieuian sense (Bourdieu 1991), and a reframing of social status.

The findings suggest that code reduction is associated with experiences of psychological loss, negative identity formation, and loss of status. Women experience this psychological loss particularly acutely. On the one hand, many emphasised that Hungarian remained the medium of intimacy, childhood memories, and authentic self-expression, while emotional attachment to German developed only in relational contexts (e.g., school matters, workplace integration) (Pavlenko 2005). They typically do not associate positive emotions with the German language. The second language is associated with effort and the experience of failure.

> *"At the store, at the daycare, and at the doctor's, of course, I speak German… well, I have to." (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 8–10 years).*

> *"I felt that they couldn't abandon the Hungarian language, because that would be bad for everyone. Our family language is Hungarian; it cannot be the case that they do not speak Hungarian perfectly, so that the emotional bond remains, so they can express what they feel in Hungarian." (36–40 years old, inactive, doing occasional marginal work, has lived in Vienna for 8–10 years).*

> *"If they say 'Vizipók-csodapók,' you totally know what that is. That's the reference a Hungarian understands, and it's what makes communication comfortable and loving" (36–40 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

> *"It's not that I'm Hungarian that matters. The language, that's what matters! Literature! That I can express myself best in Hungarian. That I understand a Hungarian book best." (36–40 years old, employed below qualification level, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

The German language is not merely a cognitive construct but is stabilised within identity through emotional ties. The most defining emotion regarding the German language is shame. This negative affective relationship manifests in identity through self-limitations, negative self-definition, and a loss of autonomy. Shame emerged as one of the most consistently narrated affective responses to German-language situations, a finding that aligns with a well-established body of literature on emotion and second-language use (Galmiche, 2017; Sevinç &Dewaele, 2018).

> *"In my life, the German language is a barrier, because to this day, when I have to deal with bureaucratic matters or go to the doctor, where everyone is Austrian, I get stressed. I'm terribly afraid. I rehearse the conversations in my head beforehand, I always imagine what might happen, and I look up the words I might need. I'm not yet able to just drop into such a situation with ease and without a care" (30–35 years old, employed below qualification, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"I don't think I'm that open with Austrians either. I have my own inhibitions, so it's also up to me that communication gets stuck pretty quickly" (36–40 years old, inactive, doing occasional marginal work, has lived in Vienna for 10 years).*

> *"I was so afraid of what they would think of me that I could barely speak" (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

4.2. "Not Being Enough": Self-Interpretation, Identity Tension, and Perceived Status Loss in German

Regarding the limitations of their identity, the speakers suggest that they cannot use language to show who they truly are in Vienna; they feel that, as human beings, they are reduced in the eyes of the German-speaking community. The abilities that formed the core of their identity "fall silent," leading to psychological tension and alienation among the women. Experiencing this "devaluation" through linguistic code reduction represents a loss of identity.

> *"Your vocabulary is limited, and that limits you as a person too" (36–40 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"At first, it was heartbreaking that my experiences were diminished by my language deficiencies. It was gut-wrenching," (36–40 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 8–10 years).*

> *"I don't feel like I'll ever reach the same level in German as I do in Hungarian. I'll never be the same person in German as I am in Hungarian" (36–40 years old, not working, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"I'm an open, talkative person, and because of my German, I seemed quite reserved." (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

The interviewees experience a narrowing of their social identity due to the linguistic limitations of self-expression. Many interviewees feel stuck between "two worlds". They can no longer live out their status in their native language, and they are not yet able to do so in the new language.

> *"I can no longer live out my status in my native language the way I did at home, but I can't fully be present here yet either. It's as if I'm living in an in-between space." (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7years).*

> *"If you try speaking German, they're happy, friendly, and helpful. Basically, they don't exclude you, but it was still hard for me until I was brave enough to participate in German conversations… There's also the fact that I'm slower, and by the time I'm ready to speak up, 'Okay, now I'll say something too, because I have an opinion and I can even express it', they're already talking about something else" (30–35 years old, employed below qualification, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

Speakers experience their previous discursive spaces as inaccessible in a foreign-language environment. The participants' experiences correspond to Watzlawick's constructivist conception of reality (Watzlawick, 1976, 1984), according to which the subjectively experienced, second-order reality, the totality of meanings, values, and self-interpretations attributed to things, is not a direct reflection of the objective world but is constituted and maintained through communicative acts. Target language limitations should therefore not be interpreted as a mere lexical deficit but as a partial loss of discursive self-representation: speakers are unable to recreate their own social reality with the same complexity they naturally navigated in their native-language environment. According to the interview excerpts, this experience manifests not as a cognitive deficit, but as a rupture in identity; language use is unable to convey the intellectual and emotional nuance that speakers mobilise effortlessly in their native language.

> *"I can't express myself because I don't have that connection that you can otherwise establish in your own language. You phrase things differently, and they're understood differently; I can't reflect myself through my speech" (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"I still feel the language barriers. Not from a professional standpoint, you learn that; it's just a limited vocabulary. More so in private conversations. Sometimes I can't say things the way I'd like to, or the way I can express myself in Hungarian. People say I speak well. They praise me, they're satisfied with me, but I'm not satisfied with myself" (36–40 years old, employed below qualification level, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

Self-reflection on linguistic deficits is prominent in the statements, and the speakers often experience a negative self-definition. The interviewees frequently reflect on the experience of being "not the same in German as they are in Hungarian." The linguistic deficit is thus not cognitive, but rather identity-based and cultural, since the loss of language is also the loss of the "voice of my thoughts." In their new environments and lives, the interviewees cannot fulfil the same social, professional, and intellectual roles as they did in their country of origin. Women emphasise the existential role of the mother tongue because, for them, language is not a tool for integration but a very significant factor organising their lifeworld. Language shift is not simply a communicative challenge. The speakers feel that, as Hungarian recedes into the background and German is adopted, their identity is partially lost.

> *"How can I put this? It's not my home. Well, I don't think of my life here as being like a UFO or an alien, but… I simply can't exist here as the person I was back home." (30–35 years old, not working, has lived in Vienna for 5– 7 years).*

> *"I was afraid. I didn't think I was capable of finding my place in a foreign-language environment, or of working in another language. Probably because of a lack of self-confidence." (36–40 years old, employed below qualification level, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

In the texts, we encountered numerous situations in which linguistic competence and communicative confidence are intertwined. Participants associated a fear of misunderstanding with communicative anxiety and a diminished sense of autonomy, as the interviewee feels they need the help of others. The phrase "I'm saying something wrong" in the quote below indicates self-reflection on the code developed. The situation can be described more precisely using Chomsky's competence–performance gap (1965). According to this, the speaker possesses the conceptual structures but cannot mobilise them in the target language. Participants' narratives suggest a persistent tension arising from the gap between linguistic ability and realisation, mirroring Chomsky's duality problem (1965). The quote explores the psychological aspect of linguistic self-restraint.

> *"If something is more complicated, I'd rather ask for help because I'm afraid of being misunderstood or saying something wrong." (30–35 years old, inactive, doing occasional marginal work, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

The space for communication shrinks, and part of their social agency becomes inaccessible to them. For women, this can lead to a loss of status. We interpret status loss as a situation in which, as a result of migration, the interviewee's social position deteriorates, the discursive space available to them narrows, and they experience downward mobility and constriction in their labour-market and social position relative to the status they had previously inhabited and taken for granted. Here, loss of status is not a quantitative category, but rather the interviewees' subjective perception.

> *"Sometimes we're in a group, and they're talking about politics, so I just keep quiet. But I don't feel bad about it anymore; I just don't speak up. Even though I have an opinion" (30–35 years old, employed below qualification, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

> *"For a long time, I attributed my inability to express myself on certain topics to my lack of language skills. But even since I've gotten better at German, I still don't really do it." (30–35 years old, unemployed, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).*

4.3. Selective Relationships, Cautious Engagement, Labour Market Barriers, and the Retreat Toward Hungarian-Language Safety

The loss of status manifests itself in both labour market participation and social networking. The narrative of integration through language is one of exclusion in the labour market and a life bound by boundaries in the social sphere.

Women experience the use of an elaborate German code as inaccessible; the linguistic competence acquired at home cannot be transferred to the destination country. Language appears as a medium of power; speakers linguistically encode structural subordination and superiority. The subjects often equate German language competence with social and professional equality, and a lack of competence with subordination. At the same time, German language competence is not merely a communicative skill, but a symbolic status marker (Bourdieu, 1991) and a prerequisite for 'ingroup' membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979); therefore, linguistic insecurity easily translates into lower social and professional self-esteem and a diminished sense of subjective equality.

"*We are not on equal footing with an Austrian" (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).*

"Our knowledge of the local area and our language skills aren't enough; we aren't on equal footing with an Austrian" (36–40 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 8–10 years).

The integration narrative related to language is one of exclusion, rooted in a hierarchical structure. Narratives suggest that perceived limitations in language competence are linked to experiences of exclusion from certain labour market segments. Based on participants' accounts, code reduction appears, in certain cases, to act as a glass-ceiling-like barrier in the labour market. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the situation of the women studied is shaped by several additional factors, such as family and childcare responsibilities, the diverse fields of their qualifications, the recognition of those qualifications in Austria, the lack of local professional networks, and the structural constraints of the Austrian labour market. Therefore, the labour market significance of code reduction should not be interpreted in isolation but in conjunction with these family, institutional, and structural factors. At this point, the study draws attention to the fact that, in the participants' narratives, the narrowing of expressive possibilities experienced in the German language appears as an obstacle to professional self-assertion, status maintenance, and securing employment commensurate with one's qualifications. The German language is a status and communication threshold that, together with other structural factors, can contribute to labour market difficulties. A significant portion of the interviews indicates that women found employment in lower-status positions relative to their qualifications or became inactive because they were unable to carry out their previous professional discourse in their new linguistic environment. Our analyses here suggest that the phenomenon of brain waste (Wald, S., & Fang, T., 2008; Dalmonte Frattini, & Giorgini, 2024; Dumont & Monso, 2007) may be the consequence of not only structural but also affective code-reduction mechanisms.

Given that this article analyses the results of qualitative data collection, a detailed interpretation of the numerical data is not the primary focus of the study; however, it is important to mention at this point the labour market distribution of the broader sample of 25 women. In the sample, 5 participants held positions below their level of education, 14 were inactive and had no regular income, and 6 were inactive but performed occasional or marginal work. This means that 20 participants did not have a stable labour market position commensurate with their level of education. However, these labour market situations cannot be attributed solely to linguistic factors. The reports suggest that the experience of code-reduction emerged as an obstacle to professional self-positioning, maintaining one's status, and securing employment compatible with one's qualifications, but these experiences may also have been intertwined with other factors, such as childcare responsibilities, the recognition or transferability of qualifications in Austria, limited access to local professional networks, and broader structural constraints of the Austrian labour market. Our analysis, therefore, suggests that the underutilization of qualifications observed among highly educated migrant women can be linked not only to institutional and structural barriers but also to affective code-reduction mechanisms that manifest as a weakening of professional voice, symbolic authority, and communicative self-confidence in German-speaking labour market contexts.

"As long as you don't know German, they'll see you as an outsider and treat you differently. You won't get the job you deserve" (30–35 years old, employed below qualification level, has lived in Vienna for 10 years).

"Back home, thanks to my language skills, I can secure a position that I believe matches my qualifications and ambitions. Here, I can't" (30–35 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).

"When I worked in a call centre, I couldn't understand the callers' German, and that's where I got stuck. I left that job voluntarily" (36–40 years old, inactive, doing occasional marginal work, has lived in Vienna for 10 years).

The analyses showed that the subjects tend to have more extensive social networks within Hungarian-speaking communities. Their daily lives and the flow of information are predominantly tied to this group, while their network connections with the Austrian, German-speaking group are more sporadic and loose. Their interethnic relationships are far more contingent due to their negative affective relations to the language and their fractured identities.

"I don't really have any Austrian friends. I never have. I always feel the language barriers when I talk to Austrians" (36–40 years old, employed, has lived in Vienna for 10 years).

"It's easier to laugh in Hungarian than in German. It's much easier to do everything in your native language, and if you can, you'll do it" (30–35 years old, unemployed, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).

"We found a paediatrician who seemed good and also spoke Hungarian; strangely enough, Hungarians are drawn to other Hungarians because of the language" (36–40 years old, unemployed, has lived in Vienna for more than 10 years).

"You want to meet people you can talk to in Hungarian; the problems are similar, the language is similar, and the living environment is similar. That way, you have common topics to discuss. Do I need Austrian acquaintances!? I don't miss that, and the connections I do have are with Hungarians" (36–40 years old, inactive, has lived in Vienna for 5–7 years).

We examined whether there were any counterexamples in which participants had formed stable friendships with Austrians or developed a positively experienced German-language identity. No such strong counterexamples emerged from the data. At the same time, there were borderline cases: some participants reported functional or situationally positive relationships with Austrians, for example, in institutional, school, or workplace contexts. However, these did not develop into emotionally secure, primary social networks, nor did they represent a fully positive German-language identity. Therefore, these cases do not refute but rather nuance the main pattern: German-language interactions are not always hostile or exclusionary, yet positive situational relationships do not necessarily eliminate the experience of restricted expression, loss of status, or a turn toward Hungarian-language networks.

The findings indicate that frustration, identity change, and shame are associated with a tendency to form Hungarian-language networks, as the subjects, having lost their linguistic register, do not leave the network that provides linguistic and

emotional security to enter the uncertain and identity-threatening German-language networks. Pavlenko (2012), in examining affective processing in a bilingual context, notes that different languages offer distinct modes of emotional access. Emotional content encoded in the native language is not equally accessible in the second language. This theory may explain the code-reducing observed in the interviews, as the developed emotional and cognitive content in the native language cannot be fully conveyed with the target language's limited repertoire. According to Pavlenko (2012), this is particularly pronounced among speakers with a rich native emotional lexicon. In our view, this line of reasoning can be applied to interpreting the research data we observed.

5. Discussion

Based on our data, we emphasise that code reduction is not an individual failure but is linked to the reproduction of sociolinguistic hierarchies. We hypothesise that the higher the initial linguistic capital, the more painful the linguistic narrowing that occurs during migration. The perception of linguistic deficiency is not a knowledge deficit; rather, code-reduction becomes an emotional experience of life as a migrant. Talking about linguistic deficiency, recognising it, and verbalising it constitutes a sophisticated level of reflection. Speakers simultaneously experience communicative limitations and linguistic–cognitive reflection. The refined code, previously used without difficulty, served as the bearer of an identity characterised by high levels of competence, autonomy, and professional status. In the new socio-spatial context, however, communication relying on more limited linguistic resources may result in a lower-positioned identity, associated with experiences of dependency, vulnerability, and feelings of "not being enough".

The women's subjective experiences, emotional attitudes, and aspirations for integration into the German language are organically embedded in their identity constructions, which can be theoretically paralleled to the phenomenon of contingent self-esteem described by Crocker and Wolfe (2001). Within this framework, the use of the German language becomes part of the self-domain to which the individual attaches a sense of fundamental worth. The successes and failures experienced in interactions are closely linked in participants' narratives to the development of self-esteem and emotional state; thus, linguistic integration can also be interpreted as a site for validating self- image, where the relationship to language becomes a means of maintaining social recognition and individual dignity. The participants often associated German with feelings of shame, insecurity, and a sense of inadequate expression. Shame as a negative affective factor is not a unique phenomenon in target-language communication: Galmiche (2017) analyses in detail how shame affects the self-regulation of target-language production and communicative risk-taking. Sevinç and Dewaele (2018) conduct a joint examination of heritage language anxiety and anxiety related to the language of the host society in an immigrant context. According to their findings, the two types of anxiety do not necessarily go hand in hand, and the emotional dynamics of maintaining one's native language act as an independent factor in the integration process; this line of reasoning is consistent with our research findings.

Additionally, examination by Sevinç and Backus (2017), on the relationships between anxiety, language use, and perceived language competence in an immigrant context, identified a vicious circle in which high target-language anxiety reduces actual language use, which results in a lower level of competence and increases anxiety. Based on the accounts of the women we studied, this self-reinforcing dynamic is clearly evident. The perception of code reduction in the participants' narratives is linked to the avoidance of target-language interactions and to a more persistent experience of expressive uncertainty. The process of linguistic integration creates a sense of belonging in women, which is the cornerstone of successful settlement (Queirós et al. 2025). Nawyn et al. (2012) also note that linguistic isolation leads to the selective accumulation of social capital in immigrant communities. Drawing on Granovetter's (1973) theory of weak ties and Portes's (1998) concept of social capital, they demonstrate that limited proficiency in the target language restricts access to heterogeneous, broader networks while reinforcing a dense network of same- language contacts. According to their findings, the cohesion of the linguistic community and isolation from the host society form a mutually reinforcing dynamic, as social integration largely takes place within Hungarian networks, while the establishment of bridging ties with the Austrian community remains limited, a finding consistent with Portes (1998), who notes that dense social capital can limit individual mobility.

In our view, the code reduction presented in this study accurately reflects the women's migration status in the sample. It is important to emphasise that code reduction is based on Bernstein's (1971) code theory, but rather than social stratification, it should be interpreted at the level of individual, subjective experience and reinterprets the significance of linguistic codes within the context of migration experience. At first glance, code reduction may resemble certain sociolinguistic phenomena and concepts already documented in the literature. In our view, code reduction denotes an orientation toward expressive elaboration, and it is important to distinguish it from the literature on code-switching and translingualism, where the term "code" generally refers to a specific language variety. While translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013) treat the entire semiotic repertoire as an integrated resource, code reduction focuses on the subjective loss of register sophistication. Code reduction is thus an individual, subjective experience. Consequently, code-reduction differs from the linguistic uncertainty described by Labov (1966, 1972a). Linguistic uncertainty, in fact, defines the speaker in relation to an external, socially dominant prestige norm. In contrast, the reference point for code reduction is intraindividual; that is, the speaker measures meaning against their own prior linguistic complexity. The speaker does not feel a lack of conformity to an external standard, but rather feels unable to reproduce their own nuance. We believe that code-reduction differs from linguistic attrition (Schmid, 2002, 2011), which refers to an objective decline in native language competence. Code-reduction is, in fact, a subjectively experienced narrowing of register in the second language, which can occur even without a measurable loss of competence. Similarly, code-reduction differs from Blommaert's (2010) concept of a *truncated repertoire*, as a *truncated repertoire* is an externally defined structural condition based on social devaluation. Code reduction, however, is the speaker's internal experience of being unable to access their own existing resources. Although the findings indicate that code reduction is associated with feelings of anxiety among the participants, in the sample, this anxiety does not correspond to the phenomenon of linguistic anxiety documented by Horwitz et al. (1986). Anxiety is an affective state characterised by fear and a sense of threat, whereas code reduction is structural in that it denotes a perceived transformation of communicative ability in relation to developed and restricted codes (Bernstein, 1971). Finally, it is important to emphasise that, in our view, code reduction is a more complex phenomenon than the concept of reduced expressive range known in psycholinguistics (Pavlenko, 2005), since while the former describes a neutral, quantitative asymmetry between languages, code reduction entails deeper consequences for identity. Code reduction is explicitly linked to the loss of nuanced, reflective, and institutionally

sophisticated communication. At the same time, code reduction is not merely a matter of general communicative inadequacy, as articulated in Clément's (1980) concept of linguistic self-confidence, since the Bernsteinian framework (Bernstein, 1971) precisely defines the type of lost resource and the specific functions of the elaborated code in a migration context. In our view, code reduction integrates sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociological dimensions, including loss of status. Ultimately, the distinctive feature of code reduction lies in the qualitative nature of the perceived loss and the emphasis on subjective experience.

Our study straddles the boundaries of sociolinguistics, sociology, and psycholinguistics. It situates language within the affective and identity contexts of migration. The psychological dimension is not systematically elaborated upon in this study, we consider this a task for future research, yet the conceptual frameworks of shame (Galmiche, 2017), language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018), and perceived loss of competence are essential for interpreting the results. At the same time, we believe that our study contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue among linguistics, sociology, and psychology by applying Bernstein's (1971, 1996) and Watzlawick's (1976) theories in the context of migration, alongside concepts from social psychology and network theory. In our view, the term "code reduction" offers a new interpretive framework for capturing the linguistic experience of migration, demonstrating that linguistic competence, identity narratives, and network experiences are closely intertwined and mutually shape one another in the transnational space. The results suggest that occupational mobility and labour market status do not appear in the participants' narratives merely as institutional or gender-based issues, but are also linked to psychological and social processes that are intertwined with linguistic experiences. Code-reduction appears in the participants' narratives as an experience linked to a narrowing of social relationships and a sense of identity uncertainty; in other words, it is connected to changes in social embeddedness and self-interpretation. Our analyses suggest that the code-reduction experienced by participants does not manifest merely as linguistic limitation but is also linked to a narrowing of social agency and a reinterpretation of identity narratives.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The study highlighted that, for highly educated Hungarian immigrant women in Vienna, German is often not merely a second language, but a communicative space in which the nuances, emotional precision, and identity-affirming self-expressions they are accustomed to in Hungarian are difficult to reproduce. The results suggest that this perceived narrowing of expressive capacity is linked to shame, insecurity, identity-related tension, a subjective loss of status, cautious participation in German-language contexts, and a stronger orientation toward Hungarian-language networks, which are perceived as emotionally safer spaces. By introducing the concept of code reduction, this article contributes to current academic research on migration and language; this concept frames this experience not as an objective linguistic decline or a simple lack of language proficiency, but as a subjective transformation of communicative agency, symbolic status, and social embeddedness. Future research should test the concept of code reduction in longitudinal and comparative studies involving migrants with different gender positions, ethnic backgrounds, social classes, educational profiles, and first-language repertoires in order to examine which mechanisms are context-specific and which may be more general. Further studies should also elaborate on the psychological dimension of code reduction more systematically, especially its relationship to shame, language anxiety, perceived loss of competence, social embeddedness, and long-term labour-market trajectories. With regard to language integration policies, our findings suggest that general language courses are insufficient for highly educated immigrants who encounter code-switching in professional and institutional contexts. Integration programs must therefore provide advanced-level language support focused on professional, bureaucratic, argumentative, institutional, and emotionally complex communication. This support should help immigrants practice professional language use related to their qualifications, workplace negotiations, asserting themselves in administrative settings, formal argumentation, and emotionally nuanced self-expression in the host country's language. This would enable language integration policies to focus not only on basic communication skills but also on the forms of linguistic action through which migrants preserve their professional identity, symbolic authority, and social participation.

7. Limitations

Our research relied on a culturally and linguistically homogeneous sample, and its cross-sectional nature does not allow for tracking the long-term dynamics of code-reduction. Men, migrants from different ethnic backgrounds, and individuals from various social strata may follow different linguistic strategies and patterns of adaptation. Further longitudinal and comparative studies involving migrant groups with different social backgrounds, genders, and linguistic profiles are needed to understand which mechanisms of code-reduction are universal and which are group-specific. A further limitation of the study is that participants' German proficiency was self-reported, the sample was recruited through snowball sampling, and the analysis did not include direct observations or recordings of participants' German-language interactions. Our research highlights important correlations; however, its results can be interpreted with only limited certainty regarding the specific population and research context examined. The causal relationships underlying the development of linguistic identity, as well as the long-term consequences of code-reduction, require further investigation through studies employing larger samples and longitudinal designs. It is important to note that at the time of the interviews, a significant proportion of the women studied were at the beginning of their migration journey, which is a very important limitation from a linguistic perspective. The conclusions thus primarily apply to the early stages of migration. By its very nature, the interview setting may skew the subjects' statements toward an elaborate code: the need for self-presentation and coherent narrative construction, an implicit expectation in the interview genre, generates a higher level of reflexivity than in everyday communication. In addition, the quoted interview excerpts were translated from Hungarian into English, and the study does not include the perspectives of Austrian employers, institutional actors, or German-speaking interaction partners, which limits what can be concluded about how participants' perceived code reduction is externally evaluated in labour-market or institutional contexts. Applying the concept of code reduction introduced in this study to a migration context constitutes a theoretical novelty. Its strength lies in its potential to provide a new explanatory framework for interpreting linguistic experiences of migration; however, it requires further empirical testing in various social and linguistic contexts.

Acknowledgement Statement: The authors would like to thank all listed authors and Fruzsina Tóth, who assisted with the collection of interview data.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: The article was written by Eszter Balogh, Zsuzsanna Szvetelszky, and Virág Hajnal. Eszter Balogh served as the principal investigator. Eszter Balogh and Zsuzsanna Szvetelszky developed the concept. Virág Hajnal contributed to the preparation of the literature review. Jázmin Ábrahám performed the editorial work and helped revise the editor's comments. Judit T Nagy assisted with the visualisations and participated in the discussions.

Funding statements: As no external funding was received for this research, the study was conducted without financial support from any funding agency or organisation.

Data availability statement: Data is available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly AI for editing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

References

Albright, J., Hartman, D., & Widin, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Bourdieu's field theory and the social sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Arnaut, K., Blommaert, J., Rampton, B., & Spotti, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Language and superdiversity*. Routledge.

Arribas-Ayllon, M., & Walkerdine, V. (2017). Foucauldian discourse analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 110–123). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555.n7

Bar-Haim, E., & Birgier, D. P. (2024). Language distance and labour market integration of migrants: A gendered perspective. *PLoS ONE, 19*(4), e0299936. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0299936

Baugh, J. (2003). Linguistic profiling. In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. F. Ball, & A. K. Spears (Eds.), *Black linguistics: Language, society, and politics in Africa and the Americas* (pp. 155-168). Routledge.

Baxter, J. (2016). Positioning language and identity: Poststructuralist perspectives. In S. Preece (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and identity* (pp. 34–49). Routledge.

Bell, A. (2016). Succeeding waves: Seeking sociolinguistic theory for the twenty-first century. In N. Coupland (Ed.), Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates (pp. 391–416). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bernhard, S., & Bernhard, S. (2022). Gender differences in second language proficiency: Evidence from recent humanitarian migrants in Germany. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 35*(1), 282-309. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab038

Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, codes and control: Vol. 1. Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: Theory, research, critique*. Taylor & Francis.

Birgier, D. P., & Bar-Haim, E. (2023). Language used at home and educational-occupational mismatch of migrants by gender. *Social Indicators Research, 170*(1), 265-290. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-03054-w

Bloemen, H. G. (2023). Language proficiency of migrants: The relation with job satisfaction and skill matching. *Empirical Economics, 65*(6), 2899-2952. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-023-02445-3

Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalisation*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511845307

Bourdieu, P. (1977a). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812507

Bourdieu, P. (1977b). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information, 16*(6), 645-668. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847701600601

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.; J. B. Thompson, Ed.). Polity Press.

Busch, B. (2017). Expanding the notion of the linguistic repertoire. *Applied Linguistics, 38*(3), 340-358. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv030

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203073889

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.21236/AD0616323

Clément, R. (1980). Ethnicity, contact and communicative competence in a second language. In H. Giles, W. P. Robinson, & P. M. Smith (Eds.), *Language: Social psychological perspectives* (pp. 147-154). Pergamon. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-024696-3.50027-2

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*(Supplement), S95-S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology, 112*(5), 1297-1339. https://doi.org/10.1086/511799

Crocker, J., & Wolfe, C. T. (2001). Contingencies of self-worth. *Psychological Review, 108*(3), 593-623. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.3.593

Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism, 19*, 197-205.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596773

Curry, M. J. (2008). A "head start and a credit": Analysing cultural capital in the basic writing/ESOL classroom. In J. Albright & A. Luke (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and literacy education* (pp. 279-298). Routledge.
Dalmonte, A., Frattini, T., & Giorgini, S. (2024). The overeducation of immigrants in Europe (Centro Studi Luca d'Agliano Development Studies Working Paper No. 496). *SSRN*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4991626
Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 36-56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191
Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2017). Language, identity, and investment in the twenty-first century. In T. McCarty & S. May (Eds.), *Language policy and political issues in education* (Encyclopedia of Language and Education). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02320-5_18-2
de Saussure, F. (2006). *Writings in general linguistics* (C. Sanders & M. Pires, Trans.). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199261444.001.0001
Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237-274. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5
Díaz-Millón, M., & Olvera-Lobo, M. D. (2025). Systematic meta-review on migrant healthcare access: Language barriers and the role of translation. *Journal of Migration and Health, 12*, 100358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2025.100358
Dovchin, S., & Dryden, S. (2022). Translingual discrimination: Skilled transnational migrants in the labour market of Australia. *Applied Linguistics, 43*(2), 365-388. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amab041
Dumont, J.-C., & Monso, O. (2007). Matching educational background and employment: A challenge for immigrants in host countries. In *International Migration Outlook 2007*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2007-4-en
Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labor in society* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1893)
Eckert, P. (2018). *Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
Erel, U. (2010). Migrating cultural capital: Bourdieu in migration studies. *Sociology, 44*(4), 642-660. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510369363
Erel, U., & Ryan, L. (2019). Migrant capitals: Proposing a multi-level spatio-temporal analytical framework. *Sociology, 53*(2), 246–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518785298
Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
Flowerdew, J., & Richardson, J. E. (Eds.). (2018). *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies*. Routledge.
Folbre, N. (2017). The care penalty and gender inequality. In C. Goldin & L. F. Katz (Eds.), *Women working longer: Increased employment at older ages* (pp. 101-125). University of Chicago Press.
Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
Galmiche, D. (2017). Shame and SLA. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies, 11*(2), 25-53. https://doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.201708233538
Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(6), 1360-1380. https://doi.org/10.1086/225469
Gumperz, J. J. (1964). Linguistic and social interaction in two communities. *American Anthropologist, 66*(6, Part 2), 137-153. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1964.66.suppl_3.02a00100
Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611834
Guzi, M., Kahanec, M., & Mýtna Kureková, L. (2023). The impact of immigration and integration policies on immigrant-native labour market hierarchies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 49*(17), 4169-4187. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2207339
Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Edward Arnold.
Hoadley, U., & Muller, J. (2010). Codes, pedagogy and knowledge: Advances in Bernsteinian sociology of education. In M. W. Apple, S. J. Ball, & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 69-78). Routledge.
Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x
Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*(pp. 269-293). Penguin.
Jørgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208871
KhosraviNik, M. (2017). Social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS). In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 582–596). Routledge.
Khoudja, Y., & Fleischmann, F. (2015). Ethnic differences in female labour force participation in the Netherlands: Adding gender role attitudes and religiosity to the explanation. *European Sociological Review, 31*(1), 91-102. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcu084
Khoudja, Y., & Fleischmann, F. (2017). Labour force participation of immigrant women in the Netherlands: Do traditional partners hold them back? *International Migration Review, 51*(2), 428-458. https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12228
Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content analysis*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781
Krzyżanowski, M. (2020). Discursive shifts and the normalisation of racism: Imaginaries of immigration, moral panics and the discourse of contemporary right-wing populism. *Social Semiotics, 30*(4), 503–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.176619
Labov, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Center for Applied Linguistics.
Labov, W. (1972a). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Labov, W. (1972b). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research, 28*(4), 587-604. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00826.x
Magnússon, Ó. Ö., Ragnarsdóttir, G., Reiss, M. J., & Björnsdóttir, A. (2025). A place for Basil Bernstein in the field: How applicable is Basil Bernstein's theory of codes and social groups as a way of understanding educational inequity in

upper secondary education in Iceland during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic? *European Educational Research Journal, 24*(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041241235974

Mavisakalyan, A., Sotirakopoulos, P., & Tarverdi, Y. (2025). Linguistic integration improves refugee physical and mental health. *Scientific Reports, 15*, Article 16129. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-96793-y

Michalíková, N. (2018). Segmented socioeconomic adaptation of new Eastern European professionals in the United States. *Comparative Migration Studies, 6*, Article 8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0077-3

Montemitro, C., D'Andrea, G., Cesa, F., Martinotti, G., Pettorruso, M., Di Giannantonio, M., Muratori, R., & Tarricone, I. (2021). Language proficiency and mental disorders among migrants: A systematic review. *European Psychiatry, 64*(1), e49. https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2021.2224

Nawyn, S. J., Gjokaj, L., Agbényiga, D. L., & Grace, B. (2012). Linguistic isolation, social capital, and immigrant belonging. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 41*(3), 255-282. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241611433623

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.

Norton, B., & De Costa, P. I. (2018). Research tasks on identity in language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching, 51*(1), 90–112. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000325

O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220

Pahl, K. (2008). Tracing habitus in texts: Narratives of loss, displacement, and migration in homes. In J. Albright & A. Luke (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and literacy education* (pp. 187-208). Routledge.

Panicacci, A. (2018). *Psychological, emotional, linguistic, and cultural changes following migration: The case of Italian migrants living in English-speaking countries* (Doctoral dissertation). Birkbeck, University of London. Retrieved from https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40318/

Panicacci, A., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2023). 'Am I sincere about my feelings?': Changes in multilinguals' self-perceptions when discussing emotional topics in different languages. *Discourses on Culture, 20*(1), 21-48. https://doi.org/10.2478/doc-2023-0010

Pavlenko, A. (2005). *Emotions and multilingualism*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584305

Pavlenko, A. (2012). Affective processing in bilingual speakers: Disembodied cognition? *International Journal of Psychology, 47*(6), 405-428. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207594.2012.743665

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster. https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990

Queirós, M. L., Duarte, I. M., & Ferreira, P. (2025). Host language learning and sense of belonging: The perspective of migrant students. *Frontiers in Education, 10*, Article 1656989. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1656989

Ramjattan, V. A. (2022). Accenting racism in labour migration. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 42*, 87-92. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000143

Rampton, B. (2017). *Interactional sociolinguistics* (Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies, Paper No. 205). King's College London.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2016). The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed., pp. 23–61). SAGE.

Rowsell, J. (2008). Improvising on artistic habitus: Sedimenting identity into art. In J. Albright & A. Luke (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and literacy education* (pp. 233-251). Routledge.

Rüdel, J., & Steinmann, J.-P. (2024). "With a little help from my educated friends": Revisiting the role of social capital for immigrants' labour market integration in Germany. *Comparative Migration Studies, 12*, Article 7. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00366-3

Ruiz, M., & Donato, S. (2025). Deskilling of women migrant workers (WMWs) (Version 2). *Open Research Europe, 4*, Article 186. https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.18205.2

Ryan, L. (2016). Looking for weak ties: Using a mixed methods approach to capture elusive connections. *The Sociological Review, 64*(4), 951–969. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12395

Ryan, L. (2018). Differentiated embedding: Polish migrants in London negotiating belonging over time. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(2), 233–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341710

Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M., & Siara, B. (2008). Social networks, social support and social capital: The experiences of recent Polish migrants in London. *Sociology, 42*(4), 672-690. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508091622

Savaş, B. (2014). A linguistic evaluation of approaches to the education of immigrant students: The contribution of translated children's literature to linguistic and cultural integration. *The Journal of International Social Research, 7*(31), 262-278.

Schmid, M. S. (2002). *First language attrition, use and maintenance: The case of German Jews in anglophone countries*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.24

Schmid, M. S. (2011). *Language attrition*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511852046

Sevinç, Y., & Backus, A. (2017). Anxiety, language use, and linguistic competence in an immigrant context: A vicious circle? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 22*(6), 706-724. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1306021

Sevinç, Y., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2018). Heritage language anxiety and majority language anxiety among Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 22*(2), 159-179. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006916661635

Szreter, S., & Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. *International Journal of Epidemiology, 33*(4), 650-667. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyh013

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

Tóth, P., & Vitáloš, M. (2025). Complementarities of occupations and language skills of immigrants in Europe. *Empirica, 52*, 211-241. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10663-024-09636-w

Udayanga, S. (2024). Motherhood penalty and labour market integration of immigrant women: A review of evidence from four OECD countries. *Societies, 14*(9), Article 162. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14090162
van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society, 3*(1), 87-118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003001005
van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and power*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-07299-3
van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimising immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies, 1*(1), 83-118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001005
Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 30*(6), 1024-1054. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465
Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927083
Vervoort, M., Flap, H., & Dagevos, J. (2012). The ethnic composition of the neighbourhood and ethnic minorities' social contacts: Three unresolved issues. *European Sociological Review, 28*(5), 586-605. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcr059
Wald, S., & Fang, T. (2008). Overeducated immigrants in the Canadian labour market: Evidence from the workplace and employee survey. *Canadian Public Policy, 34*(4), 457-479. https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.34.4.457
Watzlawick, P. (1976). *How real is real? Communication, disinformation, confusion*. Vintage.
Watzlawick, P. (Ed.). (1984). *The invented reality: How do we know what we believe we know? Contributions to constructivism*. Norton.
Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

About the author

Dr. Eszter Balogh is a sociologist, associate professor at Károli Gáspár Reformed University, and a migration researcher. Her research focuses on the integration, labor market situation, career paths, and identity processes of Hungarians living in Austria and Germany. As research director of the KRE Migration Research Group, she has led several empirical projects, particularly on the labor market and social integration of highly educated Hungarian women in Vienna.

Zsuzsanna Szvetelszky, PhD, is a Hungarian social psychologist whose work focuses on informal communication, social networks, gossip, organizational communication, and the dynamics of information flow in communities and institutions. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary and a research associate at the RECENS Research Center for Educational and Network Studies within the HUN-REN Center for Social Sciences. She is also affiliated with the LINK-Group. Dr. Szvetelszky received her MA in Librarianship and Information Management from Eötvös Loránd University and earned her PhD in Social Psychology from the University of Pécs. Her interdisciplinary research explores how formal and informal communication structures shape social behavior, organizational effectiveness, trust, and community resilience. Her research has appeared in numerous national and international journals, spanning social psychology, network science, and organizational studies. She has also participated in international collaborative research projects on intergenerational value transmission, social influence, and network dynamics.

Dr. Virág Hajnal is a cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on the identity-related dimensions of ethnic minority communities. She is a lecturer at Kodolányi János University, where she teaches intercultural communication. Her research interests center on identity as a core concept, and over the past 25 years, she has conducted research in two related fields: language choice as a strategy of linguistic anthropological expression and, in her doctoral research, place branding and place attachment, approached through the lenses of migration and place retention.

Jázmin Szonja Ábrahám is a graduate of the Dual BA Program between Columbia University and Tel Aviv University, where she earned degrees in Psychology and English Literature with honors, with a specialization in Social Psychology. Her undergraduate thesis examined the psychology of Holocaust survivors, with particular attention to the intersection of trauma, aging, and collective memory. She currently works as a non-fiction book editor and collaborates with researchers at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Her research interests include migration, labor market integration, career trajectories, and the social experiences of Hungarian migrants in German-speaking countries. She contributes to literature reviews, data interpretation, academic dissemination, and scholarly publishing activities.

Judit T. Nagy is an associate professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary and a member of the university's ICT Research Center, as well as a member of the Migration Research Group of the university. She has participated in several research projects as an applied statistician.