

LANGUAGE SHIFT AMONGST ITALIANS IN FLANDERS AND TURKS IN THE NETHERLANDS

*Jetske Klatter-Folmer*¹
University of Tilburg
*Piet Van Avermaet*²
University of Leuven

1. Introduction

In the present article the first results of a research project on social determinants of language shift by Italians in Flanders and Turks in the Netherlands are presented. In section two the theoretical outline is described, and in section three the research design is given. Section 4 contains the preliminary results of the first analyses, and in section 5 some tentative conclusions are presented. In section 4.4 a comparison of our data with a data set from a similar research project which was conducted in 1986 by Jaspaert & Kroon is included. We would like to stress that only the results of first analyses are discussed here, and that possible causal relationships will be examined in next papers.

2. Theoretical framework

In this research project the concepts language choice and language shift have been defined as a socially, interactionally and contextually determined change in preference by members of an ethnic minority group to consider an existing language norm at interethnic level as legitimate in intraethnic group contacts (cf. Bartsch, 1987). An interesting theory in explaining language norm adaptation is Bourdieu's theory of "l'économie des échanges symboliques" (Bourdieu, 1979), which has been applied to language (cf. Bourdieu, 1982, 1991; Jaspaert, 1986). By analogy with an economic market where products have a price that is being determined by economic patterns, linguistic products have a symbolic price as well. The price of the linguistic products will be determined by the same economic mechanisms. Jaspaert & Kroon (1991) have distinguished two linguistic markets: linguistic market 1 (LM1) where members of the majority group interact with members of the minority group, and LM2 which refers to contacts within the ethnic group. Bourdieu (1982) argues that the different linguistic markets that exist in one political and economical entity show a tendency towards

¹ University of Tilburg KUB, werkverband Taal en Minderheden, PB 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg; tel: 00 3113 46625 88, fax: 00 31 13 46631 10; e-mail: J.Klatter-Folmer@kub.nl

² University of Leuven, KU Leuven, Centre for Language and Migration, Blijde Inkomststraat 7, 3000 Leuven; tel: 00 32 16 32 53 65, fax: 00 32 16 32 53 60; e-mail: piet.vanavermaet@arts.kuleuven.ac.be

unification. This implies that when ethnic groups become more and more politically and economically integrated in the community in which they live, a tendency towards unifying LM1 and LM2 can be expected where the norms that hold for LM1 will be adapted at LM2. Of course a member of an ethnic minority group will not do this just like that. In line with Bourdieu's theory on linguistic markets he will weigh whether the product that he has at his disposal –the language of the dominant group– is good enough to achieve what he wants to achieve. He cannot influence the criteria –the norms– which determine whether the value of his product is sufficient. For that he has not enough capital (power, prestige). But he certainly can assess whether his product has enough value to gain any advantage at LM1, in other words, he tries to assess the acceptability of his second language proficiency at that market. From the perspective of social norm adaptation and unifying linguistic markets a member of an ethnic minority group will opt for the use of the language of the dominant majority at intragroup level, when he thinks he can realize social or economic profit at intergroup level. This language choice behaviour leads to language shift. Conversely, if an individual thinks his second language proficiency is too low to function at LM1 and will gain him no profit, he will not adapt himself to the norm that is valid at that market. Consequently, he will not opt for the use of this norm at LM2 and there will be hardly any or perhaps no language shift at all.

3. Research design

In the present research project we aim at expanding the model on social determination of language shift. In this respect we study the effects of the confidence ethnic minority group members have in their ability to comply with the linguistic demands of the dominant majority culture on language choice behaviour and processes of language shift. To this end we will also investigate the confidence ethnic minority group members have, the way this confidence is built up, and the hierarchy within and the interaction between these and other determining factors.

3.1. Research questions and design

The first research question is to what extent an informant's self-assessment of his language proficiency in Dutch determines his language choice behaviour with members of the own ethnic group. We hypothesize that the use of the first language (Italian/Turkish) or the second language (Dutch) by the Italian and Turkish informants within the own ethnic group is not in the first place determined by the identification they have with their own ethnic group and its language (visualised by the interrupted line on the right in Figure 1), but rather by the

assessment they have of their own proficiency in the dominant language (Dutch), visualised by the full line on the right. The higher the self-assessment of the ability to produce Dutch, the more this language will be used in intragroup communication.

The second question is: which factors play a role in the development of the informant's self-assessment of his proficiency in Dutch? The hypothesis is that in the process of assessing the own proficiency in the dominant language the following cluster of factors is relevant: personal factors, ethnic group factors³, actual language proficiency level in Dutch, and ethnic group contacts (visualised by the full line on the left in Figure 1). The same cluster might to a lesser degree determine someone's identification with his own ethnic group (the interrupted line on the left). The dotted line indicates the theoretical possibility that language choice behaviour is determined directly by the independent socio-cultural variables.

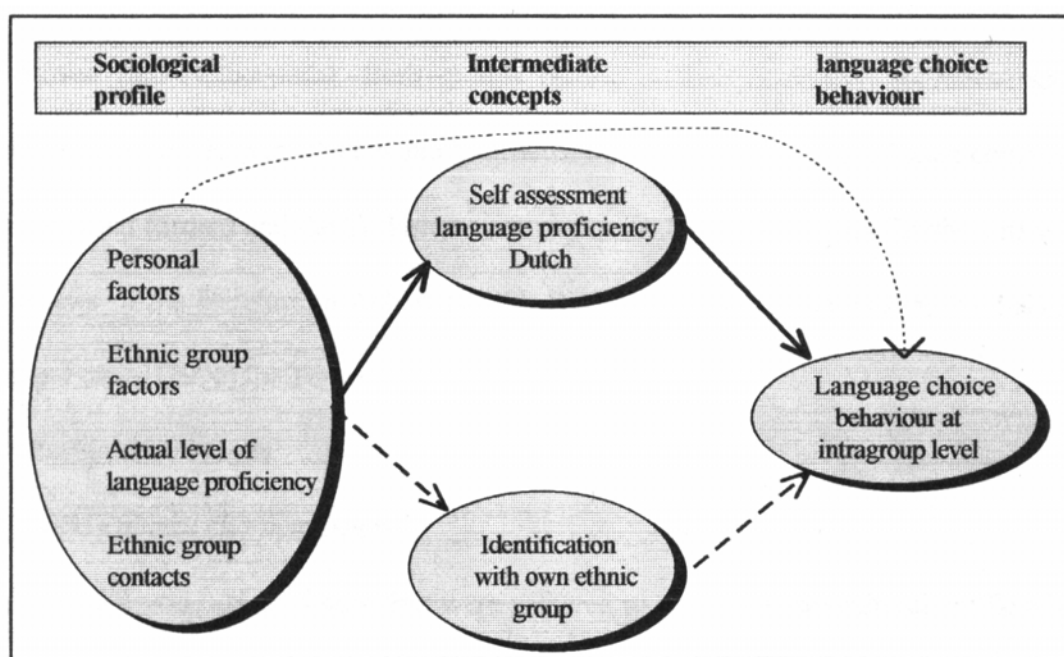


fig. 1: research design

3.2. Instruments

The instruments were a questionnaire which formed the basis for a comprehensive interview with the informants, and three Dutch language proficiency tests. The subclusters “personal factors” and “ethnic group contacts” from the socio-cultural variable cluster, the intermediary concepts “self-assessment of language proficiency in Dutch” and “identification with the own ethnic group”, and the dependent variable “language choice behaviour” were

³ The data on ethnic group factors are too extensive to be discussed in this article.

investigated by means of the questionnaire. The subcluster “actual language proficiency in Dutch” was measured by three language proficiency tests: a listening comprehension test, a grammar test (CITO-3), and an editing test.

3.3. Informants

The research project was carried out amongst Italians in Eisden (Flanders) and Turks in Eindhoven (the Netherlands). Both groups belong in their respective countries/regions of immigration to the largest ethnic minority groups. For a description of the Italian community in Flanders (and Eisden) and the Turkish community in the Netherlands (and Eindhoven) we refer to reviews of the literature in Aubert (1985), Bakker (1993) or Biasi (1996) for Italians and Klatter-Folmer (1996) for Turks.

4. Preliminary results

4.1. Socio-cultural characteristics

In section 3 it was explained how data were gathered to sketch a socio-cultural profile of the informants. First, by means of the questionnaire, a great variety of *personal data* was collected, a selection of which is briefly discussed here.

The Italian group consisted of 25 male and 27 female second generation adults, and 48 (24 male, 24 female) third generation members. The Turkish informants came from three generations: 20 persons from the first generation (10 male/10 female), 40 from the second (20/20) and 40 from the third (20/20).

With respect to ethnic origin the informants' answers to questions about four criteria were compared: the traditional criteria “country of birth” and “nationality”, and the complementary criteria “ethnic group” and “home language” (cf. Broeder & Extra, 1997). Most Italians (80%) were born in Belgium, but 64% still had the Italian nationality or both nationalities. No less than 97% considered themselves Italian in terms of ethnic group. In this respect, language appeared not to be a cultural core value (Smolicz, 1981) in this specific group, for only 25% reported to mainly or quite frequently use Italian in the home context. In the Turkish group, the percentages were divided rather differently. 45% of the Turkish informants were born in Turkey, 55% in the Netherlands. However, 97% either had the Turkish nationality or both the Turkish and the Dutch nationality. The factors ethnic group and home language corresponded quite nicely, as 75% felt they belonged to the Turkish community, and 68% mainly or quite frequently used Turkish in the home. So, in the Turkish group, in contrast to the Italian, language proved to be a cultural core value.

The majority of the informants were religious. Most Italian informants were Christian (Catholic) (78%), 6% adhered to another religion than Christianity or Islam, and 16% had no religion at all. 99% of the Turks was Islamic and 1% non-religious. Being religious not always coincided with attending church or mosque, as 18% of the Italians and 51% of the Turks were regular church/mosque visitors.

In the Italian group exogamy, according to country of birth of the partner, was more widespread than in the Turkish group. Of the Italians who had a partner (married, living together or widowed), only one fourth had an Italian partner. When taking into account nationality, around 50% of the partners had the Italian nationality. 39 Turks had a partner (married, widowed): according to country of birth, just one partner was Dutch; 9 partners had both the Turkish and the Dutch nationality.

With respect to educational level, it was found that for 20% of the Turks education had not reached further than primary school; these people mainly belonged to the first generation. One Turkish person had followed no education at all. On the other hand, Turks were well represented in lower (40%) and higher (33%) secondary education, whereas the Italians were mainly found in lower secondary education levels (69%). Higher education, however, counted more Italian (16%) than Turkish (6%) informants.

Second, the informants' actual *language proficiency level in Dutch* was measured by means of three tests: a listening comprehension test, a grammar test, and an editing test. Prior to the administration of the tests, 19 Turkish informants said they felt not proficient enough to take the first and second test, and 27 Turkish interviewees did not feel up to the third. These self-assessments obliged us to rank the Dutch language proficiency of these informants on these specific tests as "very low". The test results of the other informants were analysed. The reliability of the tests was satisfying: Cronbach's alpha was .63 for the listening comprehension test, .72 for the grammar test, and .95 for the editing test. In Table 1 the test results are presented; the informants who felt not able to take the tests are not included here.

| <i>Language test</i> | <i>Italians</i> | | | <i>Turks</i> | | |
|--|-----------------|------|-----|--------------|------|----|
| | M | sd | N | M | sd | N |
| Listening Comprehension Test (maximum score 10) | 9.3 | 1.33 | 100 | 9.3 | 1.08 | 81 |
| Grammar Test (maximum score 20) | 17.1 | 2.04 | 100 | 16.0 | 2.93 | 81 |
| Editing Test (maximum score 40) | 30.9 | 9.56 | 100 | 26.9 | 8.92 | 73 |

Table 1 Results Dutch language proficiency tests (M=mean, sd=standard deviation)

T-tests for groups pointed out that the differences between the Italian and Turkish group for the first test were not significant, whereas for the two other tests they were significant indeed: the Italian informants scored significantly higher.

Third, the *ethnic group contacts* in several situations and domains⁴ were studied, which provided us with a large data set. Summarizing, the total of contacts during a week regarding ethnic background, indicated that 10% of the Italians mainly met Italians, 27% more Italians than Belgians, 44% as many Italians as Belgians, 17% more Belgians than Italians, and 2% mainly Belgians. The totals of the Turkish interviewees were more explicit: 3% saw mainly Turks, 27% more Turks than Dutchmen, 58% as many Turks as Dutchmen, 11% more Dutch than Turkish people, and 1% mostly Dutchmen.

4.2. Self-assessment Dutch language proficiency

This variable was measured both indirectly and directly; the correlation between these two question categories was .76. Cronbach's alpha for the reliability of both the indirect and the direct questions was .95. The indirect questions were nine situations which differed in importance ("important", "fairly important", "unimportant") and nature (general, ethnic/social, financial). In each situation, the interviewees were asked whether they would –

linguistically– handle the situation themselves, together with an interpreter, or exclusively by means of an interpreter. In the Italian group, constantly 99 or 100% indicated that they would do it on their own, so there was no variation here. In the Turkish group, in all but one situation on average 84% handled it without help; the exception to this was a situation where the survival of an ethnic pressure group was at stake.

The direct questions were directed at self-assessments with regard to the four main skills. The Italians rated their proficiency in Dutch very positively: 90% assessed their writing skills as “(very) good”, and the same qualification was given by 98% for listening and reading, and by 99% for speaking. The Turks were more reserved: “(very) good” was reported for writing by 56%, reading 62%, speaking 67%, and listening 71%. For comparison, also the proficiency in the own ethnic language was investigated by direct questions. The results for the Turks were very much comparable to the Dutch proficiency, but the Italians ranked their proficiency in Italian considerably lower. The lowest ranking was for writing.

These self-assessments could be compared with the actual language proficiency in Dutch as measured by the three tests. The correlation between the direct questions and the listening comprehension test was negligible (.08). The correlation between the direct questions and the grammar test was .49, between the direct questions and the editing test .43.

4.3. Identification with the own ethnic group

Like self-assessment of Dutch language proficiency, identification with the own ethnic group was investigated in an indirect and a direct way ($r=.37$). Cronbach’s alpha for the reliability of the indirect questions was .73, of the direct questions .44.

The indirect questions were ten situations focusing pairwise at five factors (Leets & Giles, 1996): dependency upon ethnic identity, perceived ethnic boundaries, solidarity with ethnic group, perception legitimacy ethnic group status, and vitality beliefs. For both Italians and Turks, identification with the own ethnic group was low when it came to actually mentioning immigrant core leaders (vitality beliefs), and in the case of dependency upon ethnic identity. In this respect, the vitality questions were perhaps somewhat troublesome, as naming ethnic core leaders of course depends on their availability. In situations where the ethnic proportion of the circle of friends (perceived ethnic boundaries) and the solidarity with the ethnic group (this to a lesser extent for the Italians) were measured, the identification with the own ethnic community appeared to be high. Both groups differed with respect to the

⁴ The domains investigated were: family, friends, neighbours, church /mosque, sports clubs, community

perception of the legitimacy of the ethnic group status, where the Italians perceived their status as much more legitimate than the Turks.

In the direct questions the same five factors were focused at. Referring to the remark made above about the indirect vitality belief questions, the results indicated that the Turks, and to a lesser degree the Italians, considered their political, media and educational vitality as low. The cultural vitality was seen as being more advanced. For both Italians and Turks the dependency on ethnic identity was high, but also the dependency on the dominant group was medium/high for 91% of the Italians and 76% of the Turks. Comparable to the indirect questions, boundaries between the Italian and Turkish informants and fellow countrymen were perceived permeable by 91% of the Italians and 92% of the Turks; the boundaries between informants and the respective dominant groups were permeable according to 88% of the Italians and 64% of the Turks. Again parallel to the indirect questions, the solidarity with the own ethnic group was high (Italians 84% “high”, Turks 73% “high”), and lower with the dominant group (Italians 46% “low”/“medium”, Turks 54% “low”/ “medium”). The perceived legitimacy differed not so much between Italians and Turks, the position of both groups being considered illegitimate by 12% of the Italians and 38% of the Turks, comparable with the answers to the indirect questions.

4.4. Language choice behaviour

In the questionnaire domain related questions were used to establish language choice behaviour. As comparable data are available from a research project which was carried out ten years ago in 1986 by Jaspaert & Kroon, with Italians in Eisden (Flanders) and Turks in Enschede (the Netherlands), we present our language choice data in this larger framework. In our questionnaire informants were asked which language they usually use in communication at intragroup level in the various domains. Informants had to answer on a five point scale consisting of the following possibilities: 1=almost exclusively Italian/Turkish; 2= more Italian/Turkish than Dutch; 3=an equal amount of Italian / Turkish and Dutch; 4= more Dutch than Italian/Turkish; 5=almost exclusively Dutch. In the Jaspaert & Kroon questionnaire the informants had to choose from three or four alternatives: Dutch, Italian/Turkish, dialect (only for Italians), other. In order to draw a picture of the possible differences in language choice behaviour over a period of ten years we added up the number of informants in our project who scored 4 or 5 on the scale and compared it with the number of informants in Jaspaert &

Kroon's data who indicated to employ Dutch as their usual language. 64% of the Italian informants from the '97 data (It2) indicated they had Dutch as their usual language. Communication with children (85%) and in administration/services (83%) turned out to be most favourable to the use of Dutch. Within the domain "family" communication with partner (75%) and with siblings (77%) was also sensitive to the use of Dutch. The situation parents (27%), on the other hand, was most resistant to the use of Dutch. Another resistant domain was neighbours (47%). A comparison of these findings with the '86 data (It1) yielded some interesting results. On the whole, the shift in a period of ten years had been high, the amount of shift was higher in '97 than in '86 and some domains were shifted faster than others. The situation parents and the domain neighbours belonged to the most resistant in the It1 data and remained so in the It2 data; the amount of shift was much smaller than one might have expected. The domains church, friends, partner, and children were rather resistant in It1, but showed –especially communication with children– more shift than might have been predicted.

As for the '97 Turkish data (Tu2) the overall picture was that only 16% of the informants used Dutch as their usual language. Whereas the It2 data indicate a substantial "Dutchification", the Tu2 data showed hardly any shift to the use of Dutch at intragroup level. The domains that seemed to be most favourable to the use of Dutch were shops (31%), work (43%) and administration/services (43%). The more resistant domains were mosque (0%), partner (0%), parents (2%), and children (3%). A comparison of the '86 Turkish data (Tu1) with the Tu2 data provided an even more striking picture than the Italian data. Most surprising is that over a period of ten years there has hardly been any shift. On the contrary, for all domains –except neighbours and community centres / clubs– the extent of Dutch as usual means for intragroup communication was lower in the Tu2 data than in the Tu1 data. However, two observations have to be made here. First, we have done these analyses on only eight domains, because the figures of the Tu1 data set for the more formal domains are not available. Second, we have to be cautious with a comparison of the Enschede and Eindhoven data, since we do not have enough socio-structural information concerning the two locations in the past and now.

Finally, we have compared the It2 and the Tu2 language choice data. Irrespective of the group and of the fact whether a group was at the end or in the beginning of a shift process, the domains appeared to be organized from solidarity to prestige. This is in line with other research (see Geerts, Hellemaans & Jaspaert, 1985). The domains grandparents, parents, neighbours and community centres/clubs, that yield hardly any symbolic gain when Dutch is used, seemed to be more resistant to the use of that language. On the other hand, those

domains (sports clubs, shops, work and administration/services) that yield some or a lot of symbolic gain when Dutch is used, seemed to be most favourable to the use of the language of the dominant majority. The domains friends and siblings deviated a little bit from this pattern. For the domains church/mosque, partner, and children the deviation was larger. In the early phase of a language shift process these domains tended to be very resistant –which is the case for the Turkish Eindhoven ‘97) data– whereas when the shift process had nearly reached a “Dutchification” phase these domains seemed to become much more favourable to the use of Dutch –which was the case for the Italian (Eisden ‘97) data.

5. Conclusions⁵

To conclude we would like to sum up some interesting observations from the previous sections.

As for the *socio-cultural* characteristics one could observe that for the Italian informants exogamy was much more widespread than for the Turkish informants. The overall educational level was not really comparable for the Italians and the Turks. There were some parallels, but the former was better represented in lower secondary education and higher education and the latter in higher secondary education. As for the actual language proficiency in Dutch it could be observed that the mean scores for the Italian and Turkish group were fairly high, with a significant difference between both groups for the grammar and editing test. It is important to stress that one fifth to one fourth (depending on the test) of the Turkish informants felt not proficient enough to do the tests. They were not included in the above mentioned results. The overall picture for ethnic group contacts was comparable for both groups, with a higher percentage of Turks who indicated to meet as many Turks as Dutchmen. But the most striking observation was the relation between ethnic identity and home language. The majority of the Italian (97%) and Turkish (75%) informants saw themselves as belonging to their own ethnic community. Two thirds of the Turks indicated to use mainly or quite frequently Turkish at home, while only one fourth of the Italians said to use Italian in the home context. Preliminary (the results of just a small part of the questionnaire are used here) one might conclude that for the Italians ethnic identity and language choice are not in congruence with each other. This would confirm Gibbons & Ashcroft’s (1995) findings for Italians in Australia. On the basis of the currently available data language appeared not to be a “cultural core value” for Italians in Flanders. This would be in line with Smolicz’s (1981)

⁵ As mentioned before, these conclusions stem from our first analyses, and are therefore merely tentative.

finding for Italo-Australians (Gibbons & Ashcroft, 1995: 298). For the Turkish group, in contrast to the Italian, language proved to be a “cultural core value”.

With regard to the concept *self assessment of Dutch language proficiency* it could be observed that for the indirect questions most of the Italian and Turkish informants indicated to have a high confidence in their proficiency of Dutch, while for the direct questions the scores were not comparable. The Italians rated their proficiency in Dutch very positively, while the Turks were more reserved.

The results for the concept *identification with the own ethnic group* were highly comparable for the Italian and the Turkish informants. As for the “perceived ethnic boundaries” and “the solidarity with the own ethnic group” the identification with the own ethnic group was high on the indirect and the direct questions, while the scores for “vitality beliefs” were low. As for the “perception of the legitimacy of the ethnic group status” the Italian informants scored high on the indirect questions and low on the direct questions, while the Turkish informants scored twice low. In the case of “dependency upon ethnic identity” both groups scored low on the indirect questions and high on the direct questions.

As for the longitudinal data on language choice behaviour by Italians we have seen that the shift over a period often years was high and that some domains remained resistant while others were more susceptible to the use of Dutch. A possible explanation could be found in the theory we have put forward. From a diachronic perspective one might assume that people tended to shift more rapidly in those domains that were sensitive to prestige and the attraction of the dominant majority and thereby yielded relatively more symbolic gain than in domains where solidarity was important and where the symbolic gain would be negative when using the language of the dominant majority. At first sight the domain church did not fit in this line of reasoning. One must keep in mind, however, that most of the churchgoers belonged to the majority group. In the light of this, the domain church seemed to constitute more of a prestige domain than one might expect.

With respect to the longitudinal data on language choice behaviour by Turks the following could be concluded. As in Enschede in ‘86 some shift could be observed in Eindhoven in ‘97. The shift was also limited, and compared with the data in Enschede it was even smaller. One might argue that –when we assume for the time being that Enschede and Eindhoven are to a certain extent comparable– the Turkish informants had not changed their language choice behaviour over a period of ten years, because the Turkish language had a high “cultural core value”, and they still assess their proficiency in Dutch rather low. They perceived the symbolic gain –in using Dutch– that could be realised as too low, perhaps even

negative, and this would slow down the shift process longer than one might expect. While in a later stage with a higher self-assessment of one's proficiency in Dutch and a lower "core value" of the own ethnic language, a higher degree of symbolic gain in using Dutch could be realised and the shift process would evolve faster. Of course, this explanation is very preliminary and will have to be supported by more detailed analyses.

Finally, we have compared the Italian and Turkish language choice data of this research project. As might have been expected we could distinguish a "line" going from "solidarity" to "prestige". However, three domains (church/mosque, partner and children) seemed to deviate from this pattern. One possible explanation could be found in the social position and the social opportunities of the groups involved. These might be better for Italians than for Turks. The domain children was a case in point of this line of reasoning. The shift within this domain was rather low for the Turkish data, because parents might have perceived their social position as rather weak and assumed that the use of the Turkish language in communication with their children was better for their future, as they might have perceived the confidence in their Turkish proficiency higher than the more restricted confidence parents might have had in their proficiency of Dutch. An additional explanation could be found in the fact that they supposed that Dutch would be taught at school. Therefore they preferred to use Turkish in the home context, because they wanted their children to learn the mother tongue next to Dutch and because the option of remigration was still very vivid (Klatter-Fomer, 1996). For the Italian data, however, the shift in this domain was very high, because Italian parents might have perceived their position in society as better and assumed that the use of the majority language in communication with their children was better for their educational and professional future. Of course, these assumptions require further investigation.

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