

STUDIES ON
MIGRATION IN
EUROPE: PATHS
TO THINK ABOUT
LANGUAGES,
MEDIA, AND
JOURNALISM

[INTERVIEW WITH TOM MORING]

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[**ABSTRACT RESUMO RESUMEN**]

From the point of view of researcher and journalist Tom Moring, Emeritus Professor at the Swedish School of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, this interview addresses how language and the social sharing of information impact in the integration process of refugees and migrants. Considering the researcher's experience and his studies, the interview problematizes the media coverage and the work of journalists around these themes, highlights the connectivity of the variables migration, integration and information, and discusses how the results of European research in the area can be applied in diverse contexts, such as Latin America.

Keywords: Migration. Refuge. Integration. Minorities. Language.

A partir do olhar do pesquisador e jornalista Tom Moring, Professor Emérito da Escola Sueca de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Helsinki, esta entrevista aborda de que forma a linguagem e o compartilhamento social da informação interferem no processo de integração de refugiados e migrantes. Considerando a experiência do pesquisador e seus estudos, a entrevista problematiza a cobertura midiática e o trabalho de jornalistas em torno desses temas, destaca a conectividade das variáveis migração, integração e informação, e discute de que forma os resultados de pesquisas europeias na área podem ser aplicadas em contextos diversos, como o latinoamericano.

Palavras-chave: Migração. Refúgio. Integração. Minorias. Linguagem.

Desde la perspectiva del investigador y periodista Tom Moring, Profesor Emérito de la Escuela Sueca de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad de Helsinki, esta entrevista aborda cómo el lenguaje y el intercambio social de información impactan en el proceso de integración de los refugiados e inmigrantes. Teniendo en cuenta la experiencia del investigador y sus estudios, la entrevista problematiza la cobertura mediática y el trabajo de los periodistas en torno a estos temas, destaca la conectividad de las variables migración, integración e información, y discute cómo los resultados de la investigación europea en el área pueden aplicarse en diversos contextos, como el latinoamericano.

Palabras clave: Migración. Refugio. Integración. Minorías. Lenguaje.

“Society must provide news and high-quality programs in the languages of migrants and in a way that meets their civic needs”, assesses Tom Moring, an Emeritus Professor at the Swedish School of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. The premise is crucial when analyzing the relationship between migrants’ integration, languages, and media. Moreover, Moring highlights: migrants and minority language speakers need to be informed about affairs and matters in the country where they live.

At the University of Helsinki, Moring also works as a researcher on Media and Minorities, Political Organizations and Parties, Comparative Politics and Elections,

Public Opinion, and Voting Behaviour. He was recently engaged in research projects on Immersive Automation of Media Content at the University of Helsinki, and Presidential Politics, at the University of Södertörn.

Also, a journalist and an immigrant in Sweden – born in Finland – Moring has both personal experience and scientific knowledge of media connections and migration. He has dozens of published articles and book chapters with results from his research and is convinced that integration is a process that requires respect and support to integrate people’s cultures. Read more below.

[Figura1]



Photo: Courtesy Janne Rentola / SLS.

Enio Moraes Júnior: We would like to start the interview by knowing more about yourself. Why did you develop your career and studies around migration and multilingualism? How did this journey start?

Tom Moring: It all started with me being a Swedish-speaking journalist in Finland. Swedish is officially on par with Finnish; thus, Finland has two national languages. One more, *Sámi*, is official in its designated area in Northern Finland – *Sapmi*, according to the *Sámi*. However, as only circa 5% of the population has Swedish as their mother tongue, it is a de facto minority language. So, I got interested in questions relating to minority languages and Media as a journalist and later as director of the Swedish branch of the Finnish broadcasting company, YLE. This path then brought me to the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, EBLUL, and the Committee of Experts for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Moreover, of course, my research agenda followed this interest.

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: Considering this board *Vademecum* (see References) of the project *Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe* (MIME): is it possible to adapt the research method to migration studies in Latin America? What is your knowledge about migration in Latin America or/and the situation of Latin American migrants in Europe?

Tom Moring: The MIME project's *Vademecum* focuses on policies and measures aimed at language policies and valuable practices. However, many aspects have general bearings on minority issues related to broad aspects that concern the support of

better inclusion into society on equal ground. The MIME project has recently published a book, *Advances in Interdisciplinary Language Policy* (2022, see References). The general approach: how to support mobility and inclusion simultaneously, when often the opposite is the case – more mobility leads to minor inclusion.

This approach is generally applicable. Note that a copy-paste approach – “best practices”- has been abandoned as an approach as contextual factors are often so different that direct implementation from other experiences is, in many cases, not helpful. Nevertheless, to sum up, this general approach is helpful when applied to migrants from Latin America. Its focus is on languages with a broader approach without forgetting to address social and political issues. The within-Latin America migration has different perspectives that have also been addressed in research. Researchers also focus on racism, ghettoization, social conflicts, Etc. This research would be very relevant in the current situation of mobility and inclusion in a Western context of migration.

Enio Moraes Júnior: What does integration mean to you today, based on your theoretical foundation and research?

Tom Moring: As many scholars, including myself, see integration is a two-way process. Opposite to assimilation, it requires respect for and support for the culture of individual people being integrated. Also, under certain conditions, it may require active support to the language or the minority as a group – collective rights. Such principles are included in the European Charter and the Framework Convention for

Protection of National Minorities, another instrument of the Council of Europe. Also, the Covenant of the Rights of the Child includes reference to collective rights to language and culture. According to these principles, those concerned can be supported and must integrate into society while maintaining their language and culture. This idea is the first direction.

The second is that the society must integrate into its newcomers by fostering understanding and knowledge that provides an inclusive approach and supportive policies. Furthermore, as a friend and colleague, Professor Charles Husband has often pointed out, “to treat me equally, you have to treat me differently” is a principle to be considered. He means that supportive promotion of migrants and other minorities should not be seen as inequality but rather as leveling the scores to improve inclusion with respect for the person who seeks to be integrated.

Enio Moraes Júnior: How can European governments, in countries like Germany, which has been receiving many refugees, work more efficiently on the mobility-inclusion articulation, freedom, and linguistic territoriality? The balance of maintaining minority languages and accepting English and new other languages might be pretty challenging. Do you agree with that?

Tom Moring: This Vademecum is mainly a tool for people who are not involved in academic research. Nevertheless, whose professional or political activities lead them to consider matters of multilingualism, take a stand on those issues, and, directly or indirectly, shape language policy decisions at the local, national, or supra-national level.

As part of these duties, they repeatedly face the need to weigh the respective advantages and drawbacks of the policy measures those different social and political actors propose for dealing with multilingualism.

The MIME Vademecum intends to help them deal with this type of situation. The main message is that successful integration must maintain a balance between inclusion and mobility that includes respect for the traditional population and the migrant, refugee or person belonging to a national minority with a traditional presence. To allow that it happens, it is required respect and proactive measures to support a multilingual society.

The question can be divided into two sub-questions, one related to practical solutions and the other one to principles of multilingualism. The first one is about the importance of arranging services in critical sectors – for example health and medical care – in a language understandable to the patient. The second concerns the costs and benefits of multilingual policies and ends with a recommendation to be proactive while attentive to local differences. However, you introduce a third factor, English, and your question then broadens to whether the migrant, the refugee must learn two languages simultaneously: the local official language and English.

How to address migration into bi- or multilingual regions – such as Catalonia, Basque, Wales, and South Tyrol, for example? The argument supports a multilingual approach that respects the diversity in the new host region. Also, it concludes with a strong recommendation for supportive measures rather than punitive measures, as a society must respect that people of different

ages, social conditions, and learning abilities may have different possibilities to learn new languages. This approach could have a bearing on your question about the policies in a context where you have a Ukrainian migrant, refugee coming into Germany and offered a job where the person could successfully work with English as the professional language used in the workplace.

I believe society should, where feasible, facilitate and support the learning of more than one new language. However, the requirement of a balance between mobility and inclusion would require that a priority should be given to the local conditions and deep integration into the society where both a traditionally present population and a newcomer can feel at ease regarding respect for their respective cultures and languages.

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: As we now reflect on the issue of the Ukrainian war, how do you think the European Media is working on the refugee issue? Many voices claim that European journalism has shown more empathy towards Ukrainians than Syrian or African refugees, for example. An English journalist shocked part of the international community by saying on TV that Ukrainians were white refugees with blue eyes, the right refugees...

Tom Moring: This argument is frequently presented, and interestingly, by activists on the left, who would like to support migration from Syria, Yemen, and African countries, and activists on the right, who oppose migration also from Ukraine and want to fend it off. From a humanist point of view, the leftist argument is fair: all human beings should be treated equally, and this

is not the case in media coverage. From a pragmatic point of view, as I see it, the discussion misses one central point, that the Ukrainian case is a military attack by a much bigger state on a small state with immediate borders to many European states.

The flow of migration cannot, thus, be subjected to such policies that have been applied to more distant countries, whose neighbors have also been accepting a disproportionate burden of refugees of war. This argument can refute at least the argument from the right. A more cynical view is often present in newsroom discourse: “the news value of a story correlates with the distance from the audience.” In many media, I would say, news value squared appears to correlate with the distance – both in a cultural and a geographic sense. This is a fact, not a valid excuse...

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: Going to the Swiss scenario, a country with 25% of migrants: according to the directives, the Swiss Government is exerting pressure to make the migrants speak German, specially in the German part of the country. The “pressure” includes terminating some projects in other languages, for example, in some cantons. The directives are following the obligation to learn the local language. In contrast, most multinational companies hardly consider the necessity of speaking German; English is more than sufficient. Do you think that categorizing the language as an obligation is a form of discrimination?

Tom Moring: It is written in the guiding principles of the Council of Europe – you can see European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – and generally

accepted that the value of interculturalism and multilingualism should be stressed. Nevertheless, “Stressing the value of interculturalism and multilingualism and considering that the protection and encouragement of regional or minority languages should not be to the detriment of the official languages and the need to learn them”. From my understanding, it is a signal to states that they can maintain policies that, in addition to the support of a – in this case, traditionally present – minority language, also encourages or requires learning an official language in the state. This principle, again, is not as simple as it may seem to have four official languages. Is it OK to learn only Romansch in addition to the migrant’s mother tongue? In Catalonia, many migrants learn Catalan, not Castilian. In Finland, some migrants learn Swedish, not Finnish. This premise should fill the requirement if the language is official within the state. Moreover, of course, there are reasonability principles to be considered. What is the reasonable level that can be required from an adult migrant working full time?

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: Recently, the Swiss newspaper 20Min. launched an engaging app that allows readers to read the articles published in German in numerous other languages, such as Portuguese, Spanish, Albanian, Etc. Could this kind of initiative from the companies sensitize the Swiss government?

Tom Moring: I do not know if this sensitizes the government. However, I think it is important to invite migrants to more profound citizenship in the country where they work, as it gives a fast track to understanding society and a complement

to media content imported from abroad. For example, from the “old homeland”. A broader view of the democratic entity formed by a state is often not even offered to the migrants or migrant communities. Therefore, the state should support such an initiative. However, consider that migrants should also have the right and should be encouraged and supported in acquiring national language – or languages -, to be more fully included and in some countries, even to be allowed citizenship rights.

Enio Moraes Júnior: Based on your answer, we tend to think that countries with a considerable number of migrants should also have published news in other languages to help migrants or those who speak minority languages better understand the societies they live in. Is that right? Could you please explain the relationship between minority languages and journalism?

Tom Moring: You have two questions: The need for migrants and minority language speakers to be informed about matters in the country where they live and the relationship between minority languages, journalism and media content in a broad sense. I will address them separately. First, yes. Current information and news are relevant to people who live in a country in a language they can understand. Many migrant groups develop pages on Facebook or Instagram to maintain contact and inform about various important matters and events. It is good, although it can also add to isolation. Such sites seldom carry news of a more general bearing that would add to the understanding of the political life in the country and locality concerned and give access to a broader Newsbeat. Such access is, however, essential and adds

to the civil competence of people and an entire exercise of citizenship. It is therefore crucial that society provides news and other high-quality programs in the languages of migrants and in a way that meets their civic needs.

Second, and this concerns migrants and other speakers of minority languages, media content must be available in written form and audio and audio-visual that offers daily contact with the language. Consider that people on average use six to more than eight hours daily with media and that this is an essential support for a living language and its maintenance and updating daily. Media can contribute to languages, their related culture, and the connectedness and integration of the society. In some cases, there are media contents in languages spoken more widely in other countries – this will help. Nevertheless, it is not tuned to the daily life and culture in the country where migrants and linguistic minorities live. Supply in a national language or a lingua franca – e.g., English – does not offer an equal contribution to language and culture. At this point, I would like to add a specific part of the Vademecum text. On page 84, it is written: “where states impose language proficiency requirements, they should generally be less demanding at the entry stage than at the stage at which the migrant seeks long-term or permanent residence status, or when the migrant applies for citizenship. The requirements should be relaxed for specific categories of migrants, particularly at the entry and possibly at the long-term residence application stage,

such as the elderly and those with lower levels of formal education”.

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: Retaking Switzerland as an example: a study from the University of Zurich shows that foreigners and non-German speaking Swiss citizens are particularly affected by feelings of social exclusion. The study found that as many as one in five Swiss residents feel socially excluded. Do you think that could be the result of these linguistic politics affecting non-German speakers?

Tom Moring: The problem you point to is actual and includes a paradox. If people do not learn the language and get to know the culture of the environment where they reside, they may become alienated. Furthermore, one cannot require that the most vulnerable – older adults, people without education – are those who would be exempted from the requirements of learning the official language because it is not feasible in practice. There is no ideal solution, but the aim of all involved – in this case, the German speakers and the various minorities, migrants and traditional minorities alike – should be one of respect for each other and an effort to solve the language issue reciprocally locally. I have started to talk about “cityzenship” instead of citizenship to indicate that many migrants do not relate to the nation but the more immediate locality. In a longer perspective, the best solution is to support the migrant and minority languages and the ability to master the German language, to integrate, and not to assimilate.

Liliana Tinoco Bäckert: We just faced the riots in Sweden, during Easter 2022, after a demonstration promoted by the leader of the Danish far-right political party Hard Line, Rasmus Paludan. Due to the migration situation in Sweden, do you think such anger from both sides is already expected? Could you please tell us your opinion on how Sweden has mishandled the migration situation in some cases, which may have contributed to the growth of right-wing extremists?

Tom Moring: Two questions here. The first question relates to Mr. Paludan and his active efforts to throw fuel on the fire by provoking conflict. He was Danish and still is, but as his father is Swedish, he also has Swedish citizenship. It needs to be said, his being Swedish is a political move. His provocative activities have been prevented by police and border control in Germany, Belgium, and France. In Sweden, campaigns such as burning the Koran have been allowed under the principle of freedom of expression. After some reconsiderations, due to recent events that you certainly have read about, some intended campaigns have been stopped by Swedish authorities. I have no respect for this type of provocation, and I have also been critical of publishing the Muhammed cartoons by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in Denmark in 2005. This type of action is, by persons or institutions in a privileged position, to disrespect many people in a less powerful and often dependent position. On these grounds, I think it should fall under the principles of hate speech and “incitement against ethnic groups and certain other groups”, as the Swedish law formulates it. Until now, the law has not been read this way, but this may change.

At least, based on the general rights of the authorities to maintain order, the provocative activities appear to be stopped.

Having said this, the more difficult part, your question number two, remains: How have the migrant policies in Sweden contributed to the situation? It is pertinent to say that already before the increased migration in 2015, the situation in Sweden was not ideal. Migrants were economically supported, but their isolation in the suburbs and a lack of inclusive policies had led to the emergence of townships and suburbs where a part of the migrant community led by people using criminal methods has developed. This unbalanced situation is unfavorable for those migrants who want to be included and the surrounding society. One of the results is a partial polarization of society and also brought a general movement within the much more numerous central political field that is moderately left or moderately conservative: the Social Democrats and the conservative Moderates. Also, these have moved their policy goals toward a more restrictive approach to migration and a stronger focus on measures of policing and punishment. Of course, this also increased support for a populist semi-fascist movement such as the Sweden Democrats.

We must, however, understand that there is a problem with conflicts between gangs, some of them traditionally native Swedes, which is most frustrating to both a newly migrated population and a traditionally Swedish population living in places that are primarily concerned. An observation is that those most severely involved in criminality are often not the newcomers but the young in the second generation, young

people who are often born in Sweden and should have been given the possibility to be integrated. However, if their parents have lived in isolation and under frustrating conditions, it is no wonder if it backfires. In the current conflicts around Paludan's provocations – as we know it from the media – suburban populations acted out against the police rather than against Paludan. There have been riots before in Sweden, so the phenomenon should not surprise the authorities. It indicates a more profound conflict than a religiously motivated one and discontent felt against the Swedish society rather than against the provocateur.

Enio Moraes Júnior: As a colonized country, we face a severe issue in Brazil. Our history shows we have nearly extinguished minority indigenous languages and have tried to delete the African influences in our culture. Although the high complexity of experiencing diversity, it is undoubted that there is a beautiful outcome from this. What would be the message to the readers that might not be used to living with people from a different background?

Tom Moring: In my view, the difference is the primary driver of creativity. In an earlier Europe Union project, *Exploring the Dynamics of Multilingualism* (also booklet, see both in the References), there are many examples of the positive force in not only accepting difference but in actually promoting difference in various environments – including positive effects on individuals who have the privilege of taking up several languages at a young age. The MIME project makes the main contribution to solving precisely the problem your question points to how to combine increased mobility – equals increased diversity –

with increased inclusion. It is possible and leads to good results for all when handled well. However, those involved in the process must accept that there is no quick fix that applies equally to all situations. Therefore, policies must be sensitive to the local, social, and cultural conditions of the sites where policies are implemented.■

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