

## The Acculturation and Ethnic Identity of the Albanian Immigrants in Italy

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### Abstract

Acculturation is defined as a process of psychological and behavioral change in people and groups due to their long-lasting contact with another culture (Berry, 1980; Berry & Sam, 1997). Culture is dynamic, constantly changing through social interactions (Handwerker, 2002). Moreover, people today live in different cultures and therefore, they are always altering. The host culture and that of immigrants are transformed through their interpersonal and intercultural experiences. In this context, the problem is how to describe and measure changes that occur during acculturation. On the other hand, it is true that ethnic identity has survived even within a culture other than that of origin. Instead of being assimilated, members of ethnic groups have implemented a more complex form of adaptation. These people have not only acquired the ability to integrate within a host culture (acculturation), but have also preserved some characteristics of their culture of origin (ethnic identity) (Mendoza, 1989). Albanian immigration to Italy has such peculiar characteristics as to make it one of the most relevant study case for the sociology of ethnic relations. For this reason this research work is about the study of possible differences between Albanians in Albania and Albanian immigrants to Italy. In this way we analyze: 1. The attitudes of the Albanians who immigrated to Italy towards some Italian and Albanian foods; 2. The acculturation and ethnic identity of the Albanian immigrants to Italy.

**Keywords:** acculturation, ethnic identity, Albanian immigrants, scale of acculturation, scale of ethnic identity, food

### 1. Introduction

So as to analyze the degree of acculturation and identity of Albanian immigrants to Italy, it is also important to consider the **scale of acculturation and ethnic identity**, which is widely used in research works conducted with immigrant participants (Laroche, Kim, Tomiuk, 1998; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, Buki, 2003; Lim, Heiby, Brislin, Griffin, 2002; Dacosta and Wilson, 1996; White and Kokotsaki, 2004, etc.).

There are two different perspectives to measure the process of adaptation of immigrants. The first is a bipolar linear model (Phinney, 1992). According to this model, a person, by acquiring aspects of the host culture, at the same time, loses aspects of its culture of origin. Therefore, we risk confusing ethnic identity with acculturation. The second model, which is more complex, emphasizes the fact that adaptation is a multicultural process (Mendoza, 1989). Thus, the acquisition of traits of the dominant culture is not necessarily positively correlated with the loss of ethnic identity. For this reason, some studies employ independent scales to measure ethnic identity and acculturation (Laroche, Kim, Tomiuk, 1998; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, Buki, 2003; Lim, Heiby, Brislin, Griffin, 2002).

In line with this second perspective, Berry (1990) classifies the possible results of ethnic identity and acculturation scale in four modes. *Integration* takes place when a person preserves elements of its culture of origin and at the same time acquires elements of the host culture. When a person acquires elements of the new culture and fails to preserve elements of its culture of origin, we have *assimilation*. *Separation* includes the rejection of the new culture and the preservation of the culture of origin. Finally, *limitation* includes the rejection of the culture of origin and of the host culture.

As for the scales of acculturation and ethnic identity, different dimensions are used in different studies, given that characteristics of different cultures change. A dimension that can be important in a culture is not necessarily important in others.

A research work on Italian immigrants to Canada (Laroche, Kim, Tomiuk, 1998), with regard to ethnic identity, employs the following dimensions: Italian language used with family members, participation and social interaction in Italian activities, and Catholicism. Whereas for acculturation, other dimensions were employed: exposure to the Canadian mass media, participation and social interaction in Canadian activities. Another research work on acculturation and the ethnic identity of the Latin population in the United States (Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, Buki, 2003), for both scales, employs the following dimensions: behavioral aspects, cultural identity, knowledge, language and values. A different research work related to the Cambodian immigrant population in the United States (Lim, Heiby, Brislin, Griffin, 2002) employs such dimensions as: cognitive, language, emotional. As one can see, the 'use of language' dimension is the most common, because it is the one that most shows the integration in a host culture or the preservation of the ethnic identity.

## 2. the Methodology

The research work is based on two main goals, each of which involves different experimental hypotheses. The first goal is to analyze the attitudes of the Albanian immigrants to Italy towards some Italian and Albanian foods.

The second goal of the research is to compare the acculturation and ethnic identity of the Albanian immigrants to Italy: if living in another country, have resulted in Albanians preserving elements of their culture of origin or acquiring elements of the host culture

The questionnaire for the 200 participants consists of three sheets. The first page, for both questionnaires, contains a letter of introduction which provides information on the purpose of the research; invites participants to read the questionnaire carefully and answer the questions; reassures participants that there are no right or wrong answers, but it is only important to express their opinion; underlines the importance of collaboration for research purposes; guarantees the anonymity and use of information only for scientific purposes within the university.

The second page offers a list of five Italian foods (among the best known in Italy) and five Albanian foods (among the best known in Albania). The aim is to gather information on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements of attitude towards the foods listed. For each of these foods participants must indicate if they know it, if they have tried it and if they liked it (yes / no answers). The five Italian foods are *pizza*, *mozzarella*, *spaghetti*, *Parmigiano Reggiano* and *tortellini*. The five Albanian foods are *dollme* (it is consumed especially on New Year's Eve. It is a mixture of flour, water, salt and eggs, cooked in the oven and then crumbled into small pieces, soaked into turkey broth and served hot with the turkey meat), *tave kosi* (it is prepared with lamb meat, rice, low-fat yogurt and eggs. The mixture is placed in the oven until golden brown), *bakllava* (it is a dessert of Turkish origin especially consumed especially on New Year's Eve), *arapash* (a *polenta* prepared with the broth and the internal parts of the lamb) and *stuffed peppers* (it is prepared with peppers stuffed with rice, tomato and chopped onion).

Again, the second page included question B) which serves to understand their eating behavior before coming to Italy. So it invites the participants to indicate if they had tried some Italian food before coming to Italy. Question C) measures the ability of the participants to recall some Italian foods that they had tried before coming to Italy (if they answered 'yes' to the previous question) and to vote on a scale from 4 to 10 (as at school) for each food they recalled. The vote can vary between 4 and 10, as in Albania the marks at school are within these limits. This information is important to understand if the participants were already acquainted with Italian foods before coming to Italy.

The third page concerns the scale of acculturation and ethnic identity. To build this scale for our research we referred to the study of Zea, Asner-Self, Birman and Buki (2003) on The Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale. That research work was carried out on the Latin population in the United States and it has been validated either among students or in the community.

There are 42 items in the original questionnaire (for both acculturation and ethnic identity), but for our questionnaire we thought it appropriate to select only 16 (see the appendix). From the original scale we have removed the part concerning the understanding of the language and the knowledge of history, heroes, magazines and newspapers for both cultures. In our questionnaire the items regarding acculturation (8 in total) and those regarding ethnic identity (8 in total) are substantially the same, only the fact that the former refer to the host culture and the latter to the culture of origin change. The information collected serves to understand whether the participants have integrated into the host culture (the Italian one), or have preserved the characteristics of their culture of origin (the Albanian one). For both scales respondents must

indicate their position on a 5-point Likert scale (with the same scale labels shown above). Recall that acculturation and ethnic identity are two independent processes that are not mutually exclusive.

## The Results

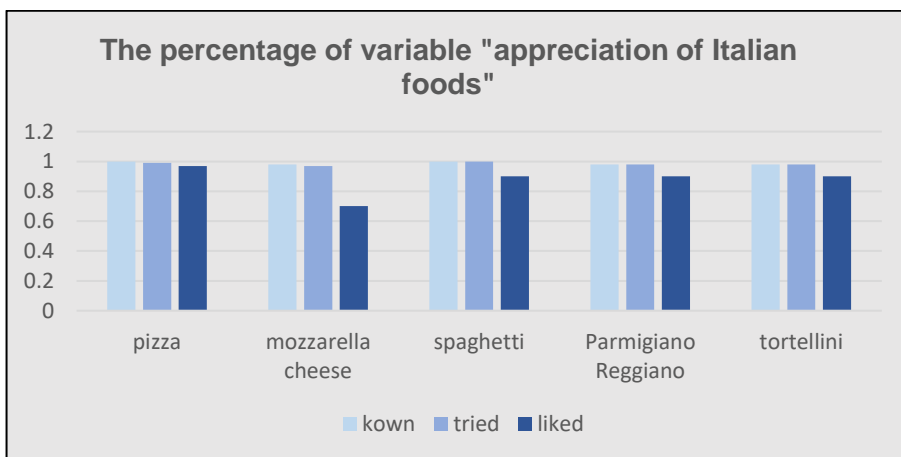
### Attitudes towards Italian and Albanian food

The questionnaire is developed in order to analyze some food attitudes of the participants. Attitudes are positive or negative orientations that we take throughout the experience and help us to build representations of the social world (Palmari, Cavazza, Rubini, 2002). The first section, concerning the knowledge, liking and tasting experience of 5 Italian foods and 5 Albanian foods, intends to measure the cognitive, emotional and behavioral component of the attitude towards such foods, through yes/no answers.

As for the five Italian foods, from the analysis of the data, it emerges (see graph 1) that the best known food is *spaghetti* with 100%, while the less known is *tortellini* with 96%. Spaghetti is also the most tried food with 100%, while the least tried food is *tortellini* and *mozzarella* with 95.90% (two participants did not answer). Although the best known and most tried food is *spaghetti*, the most appreciated is *pizza* with 95.80% (four participants did not answer) and the less liked is *mozzarella* with 72.30% (six participants did not answer).

It can be said that Italian foods, in general, are quite well known, tested and liked by the Albanian population residing in Italy. This can be an indicator of the high degree of acculturation of our participants.

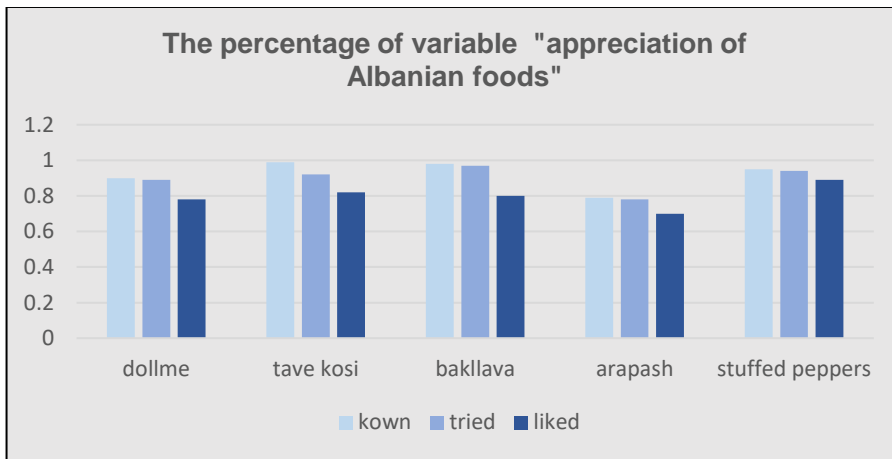
#### Graph 1



Among the five Albanian foods (see graph 2) the best known food is *tave kosi* with 98%, whereas the less known is *dollme* with 90.90% (one participant did not answer). The most tried food is *bakllava* with 94.90% (one subject did not answer) and the least tried one is *arapash* with 77%. The most liked food is *stuffed peppers* with 87.40% (five subjects did not answer), while the least liked food is *arapash* with 70.10% (23 subjects did not answer, because they hadn't tried).

Therefore Albanian foods are still quite tried and liked among the Albanian population living in Italy. This can be an indicator of the high degree of ethnic identity of our participants, who seem to keep alive the culinary traditions of the country they belong to. As for question B), 68 (68%) participants said they had tried Italian food before coming to Italy.

**Graph 2**



The analysis of the data related to question C) has shown that the most tried foods by the Albanian sample before coming to Italy are (in descending order): *spaghetti, pizza, parmesan, tortellini, mozzarella, lasagna, ham, salami, rice salad, panettone, chocolate and mortadella*. So, of the 68 participants who said they had tried Italian food before coming to Italy: 58 (85%) tried spaghetti and rated it with  $M = 8.03$ ; 51 (75%) tried pizza and evaluated it with  $M = 8.57$ ; 17 (25%) tried parmesan and evaluated it with  $M = 8.70$ ; 16 (23%) tried tortellini and evaluated it with  $M = 7.50$ ; 14 (20%) tried the mozzarella and evaluated it with  $M = 6.71$ ; 9 (13%) tried the lasagna and evaluated it with  $M = 8.78$ ; 7 (10%) tried the ham and evaluated it with  $M = 9.14$ ; 4 (6%) tried salami and evaluated it with  $M = 8.5$ ; 2 (3%) tried the rice salad and evaluated it with  $M = 9$ ; 1 (1%) tried the mortadella and evaluated it with  $M = 10$ ; 1 (1%) tried the chocolate and evaluated it with  $M = 10$ ; (remember that these answers are formulated on a scale from 4 to 10, like the grades in the Albanian school).

In conclusion, it can be said that the Albanians before coming to Italy had tried a considerable number of Italian foods.

### Acculturation

In the context of an increasingly global world the problem is how to describe and measure changes that occur in the process of acculturation. The scale of acculturation measures the integration of immigrants within the host culture.

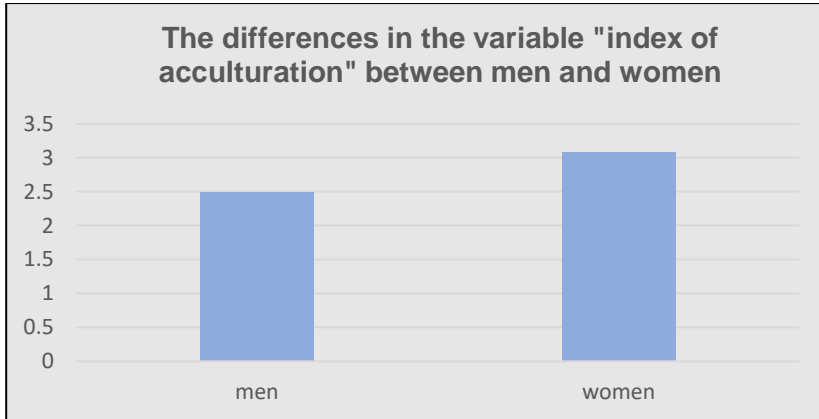
**Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the items of the acculturation scale**

Nr	Item	Mean	Deviation
1.	I think of myself as an Italian citizen	1.91	1.14
2.	I feel part of the Italian culture	2.11	1.18
3.	I speak Italian with my friends	2.40	1.38
4.	I speak Italian with strangers	3.03	1.45
5.	The parties I celebrate are Italian	2.55	1.31
6.	The food I eat at home is Italian	3.43	0.98
7.	My favorite music is Italian	2.83	1.25
8.	My favorite TV shows are Italian	3.28	1.05

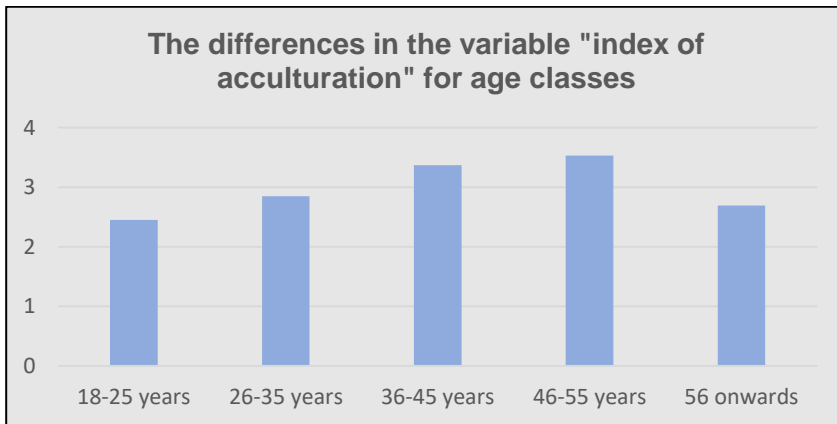
We have developed a unique index of acculturation ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), which consists of the scale items answers means. The average acculturation index is  $M = 2.69$  ( $SD = 0.81$ ). The means and standard deviations of single items are shown in table 1.

Analysis of variance shows that women ( $M = 3.08$ ;  $SD = 0.87$ ) are more likely to assimilate a new culture than men ( $M = 2.50$ ;  $SD = 0.72$ ),  $F(1,98) = 12.25$ ,  $p < .05$  (graph 3).

**Graph3**



**Graph 4**



Analysis of variance shows a significant difference in the level of acculturation based on the age of the participants,  $F(4,90) = 3.85$ ,  $p < .05$  (graph 4). Acculturation increases with age up to 55 years (from  $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = 0.70$  for the age group of 18-25 years at  $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 0.97$  for the age group of 46-55 years). From 56 years onwards we observe that the degree of acculturation decreases ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). As you can intuitively think, the data show that for older people it is more difficult to assimilate a culture different from that of origin.

### **Ethnic identity**

We have built a unique index of ethnic identity ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ), removing *item 4* ("with strangers I speak Albanian") to improve the internal consistency of the index. The mean of the ethnic identity index is  $M = 3.79$  ( $SD = 0.66$ ). The means and standard deviations of the individual items are shown in tab. 2.

**Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the items of the acculturation scale**

Nr	Item	Means	Deviation
1.	I think of myself as an Albanian citizen	4.38	1.03
2.	I feel part of the Albanian culture	4.41	0.90
3.	I speak Albanian with my friends	4.18	1.01
4.	With the strangers I speak Albanian	3.03	4.10
5.	The parties I celebrate are Albanian	3.71	1.07
6.	The food I eat at home is Albanian	3.18	0.96
7.	My favorite music is Albanian	3.42	1.13
8.	My favorite TV shows are Albanian	3.27	1.16

The ethnic identity index is not significantly different between men and women. There are no significant differences even between the age categories. However, analysis of variance highlights a significant interaction between gender and age,  $F(4) = 2.69, p < .05$ . Men obtain higher levels of ethnic identity than women aged from 18 to 35 and 46 to 55, while women aged between 36 and 45 and those aged 56 and over seem to preserve the traditions of the country of origin more tenaciously than male peers (graph 5).

**Graph 5**



Comparing these results with those related to acculturation, we see that ethnic identity index means and those of individual items of the scale are higher than means related to acculturation. The paired-sample t-test for both indices shows that this difference is statistically significant,  $t(99) = 9.84, p < .001$ . This indicates that, for our participants, the degree of ethnic identity is higher than the degree of acculturation. The subjects have sought to preserve the traditions of their country of origin more than they have assimilated the traditions of the host country.

From the perspective of Berry (1990) regarding our participants: 49 (49%) are placed in the *separation* mode (remember that it is the mode in which the participants preserve the elements of the culture of origin and do not assimilate the elements of the host culture); 47 (47%) are placed in the *integration* mode (they do not only preserve the elements of the culture of origin but also assimilate those of the host culture); 3 (3%) are placed in the *assimilation* mode (the refusal of the culture of origin and the preservation of the new culture); only 1 (1%) is placed in the *limitation* mode (the rejection of both cultures).

## Discussion and Conclusions

As concluded in the previous paragraph, before coming to Italy, the Albanians had tried a considerable number of Italian foods. This result can be interpreted by referring to three possible explanations:

- Italian cuisine is well known all over the world;
- both countries (Italy, Albania) are geographically very close to each other;
- the flows of immigrants (from the 1990s onwards) have made sure that Italian foods are widely used and appreciated in Albania.

According to these explanations, both culinary cultures (Italian / Albanian) are not so different (they interact with each other).

Secondly, (unexpectedly) it was discovered that for Albanians in Italy the ethnic identity is negatively correlated with the fear of trying Italian foods. It can be assumed that participants with high ethnic identity are not afraid of losing their identity and are willing to try new foods (which they do not see as a "threat" for the preservation of their already established traditions).

The scales (of acculturation and ethnic identity) we have used, have been built *ex-novo* for the research performed in Italy, and perhaps need to be tested for validity and reliability. However, we have no evidence to suggest that concepts have not been understood. On the other hand, it can be said that our sample is not representative of either the Albanian population or the Albanians present in Italy. This means that we can not generalize our results to the entire Albanian population.

The current research gives important information on Albanian immigrants in Italy. The fact that 47% of the sample has a high degree of acculturation (they have acquired elements of the host culture) and that these participants knew and appreciated many Italian foods before coming to Italy, can be helpful for many food producers who see the Albanian market as a potential alternative. It can also be said that all these results can also be useful for associations that deal with the interests of immigrants in Italy as well as for nutritionists interested in public health.

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