

How policy disaffirms the glocalised reality

Language tests for citizenship and integration

Piet Van Avermaet
Centre for Diversity and Learning
Ghent University

Programme

1. Change
2. Increasing conditions
3. Evidence?
4. Testing regimes in a context of social hypochondria
5. Challenges

Change

- Globalisation
 - Migration
 - Mobility
 - Localisation
-
- Super diverse ‘glocalised’ societies
 - Communities/neighbourhoods
 - Schools
 - Classrooms

A change in policy across Europe

Housing, work
and education



Equal opportunities
and integration

Integration



**LANGUAGE
(TESTS)**

Housing, work
and education

Change

□ Change in discourse:

- Need to know, learn and use languages
- Need to share common norms and values
- Need to become an ‘active citizen’

Official agenda

- “Facilitate process of integration”
- “Strengthen social cohesion and social participation”
- “Increase access to labour market/further education”
- “lever to become a (virtual) citizen of the nation:
‘inburgering’” (moral citizenship)

Hidden agenda's

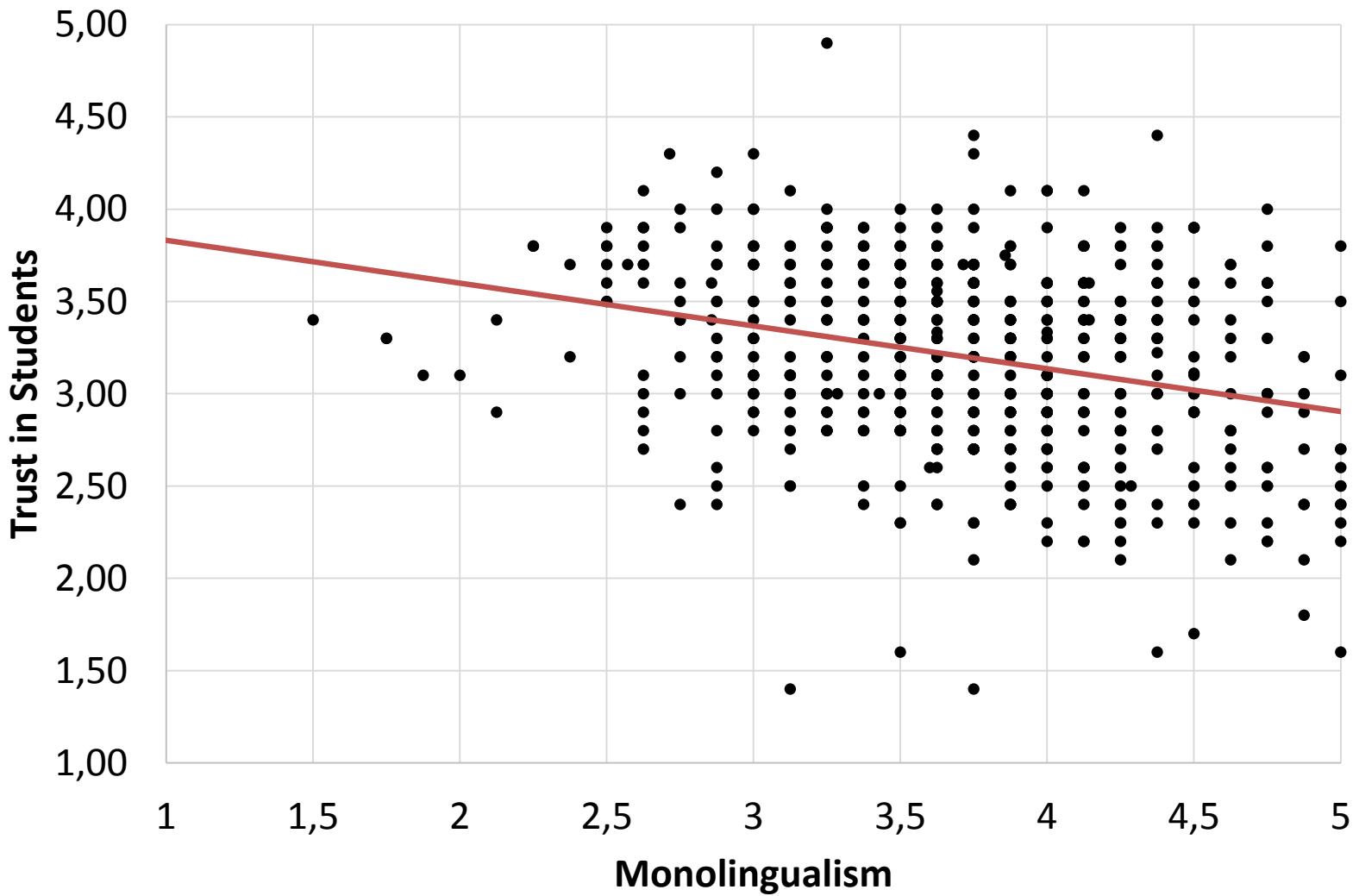
- Mechanism for exclusion
- Mechanism for controlled migration
- A discourse for the dominant voting population
- Revival of the ‘nation state’:
 - Processes of EU uniformization and globalization
 - Processes of regionalization (across national borders) and importance of the localities (large cities)

Monolingual ideologies

- Official national language: powerful index of group belonging and its mastery as pivotal for the well keeping of the national order (Agha, 2003);
- The actual integration policies (official language and norms and values of host country) are sold as common sense;
- Language and cultural knowledge are seen as the lever or lubricant for social participation, the cohesion of the nation state, the well keeping of the national order and finally of becoming a ‘citizen of the nation’;

Pulinx, 2013

Assertion	% (compl) agree.
1. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should not be allowed to speak their home language at school.	77.3%
2. The most important cause of academic failure of non-Dutch speaking pupils is their insufficient proficiency in Dutch.	78.2%
3. The school library (classroom library, media library) should also include books in the different home languages of the pupils.	12.8%
4. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language at school.	6.8%
5. By speaking their home language at school, non-Dutch speaking pupils do not learn Dutch sufficiently.	72.1%
6. Non-Dutch speaking pupils should be offered regular subjects in their home language.	3.2%
7. It is more important that non-Dutch speaking pupils obtain a high level of proficiency in Dutch than in their home language.	44.7%
8. It is in the interest of the pupils when they are punished for speaking their home language at school.	29.1%



Pulinx, 2013

Increasing conditions

- ALTE 2002: 4 of 14 countries that were included (29%), had language tests for citizenship
- ALTE 2007: 11 out of 18 countries – i.e. 61% - had language requirements as part of an integration policy
- COE 2008: in 73% (N=27) of European countries language proficiency was part of integration regulations. In 62% of the countries language is a condition to obtain permanent residency, family reunion or citizenship
- COE 2010: 75% of countries (23/31) have linguistic requirements as part of integration regulations. In 65% (15/23) of countries a language test is obligatory

Language tests and KOS tests

- 2010 language tests:
 - In 65% (15/23) of countries a language test is obligatory
 - Mainly for permanent residency and citizenship
- 2010: KOS courses and tests:
 - 87% (20/23) have KOS requirements
 - courses and or tests
 - Tests:
 - 10% (2/20) optional test
 - 50% (10/20) obligatory test
 - In 10 countries for citizenship
 - In 4 countries also for permanent residency

Evidence?

- Do pre-entry language tests serve an integration objective?
- Do language test (and integration requirements in general) enhance access to the labour market, to further education; ...?
- Do ‘language for integration tests’ contribute to processes of social participation and cohesion?

Evidence?

Official impact studies:

- focus on
 - number of attendances
 - participants in language programmes
 - participant passing an exam
- hardly any on social impact: trying to answer the questions I just raised

INTEC

INTEC report:

Integration and Naturalisation Tests: the new way to European Citizenship (Faculty of Law: Nijmegen. European Integration Fund. 2010)

- A Comparative study in nine Member States on the national policies concerning integration and naturalisation tests and their effects on integration
- National reports: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, UK
- Methodology:
 - analyses of policy documents and regulations
 - interviews (329: immigrants, language schools/education centres, public officials, NGO's)

“...Furthermore, the respondents demonstrated a broad consensus about the limited effect of language and integration policy on the actual integration of migrants. Other factors, such as a receptive society, an effective combat of discrimination and equal opportunities on the labour market, are just as or even more crucial. To be effective, integration policies should pay attention to these elements.”

Social impact study of integration policy in Flanders

- 2 social impact studies (2009/2012) with different stakeholders in Flanders (Belgium)
- 40 semi-structured interviews with teachers, employers, employment agencies, ...
- Survey

Social impact study of integration policy in Flanders

Some salient findings:

- Reciprocity emphasized in policy documents (as in many other countries)
- However two way process is made less explicit in the practical unrollment of policies
- Only the perspective of the migrant is emphasized in a conditional/obligations discourse.
- Nothing on the role of the ‘receiving society’
- International: integration requirements are exclusively linked to formal citizenship (as stages: from entry, permanent residence permit, citizenship)

Teachers

- Many teachers express that a test is not so crucial in the whole integration process and emphasize the importance of other aspects

“A test is no more than a snapshot. We also look at other aspects. Participation and commitment in the course and motivation. We are now experimenting with permanent evaluation (observation schemes, process, portfolio, ...)”

Employers

- Most of the employers do not ask for a certificate Dutch nor do they officially test language proficiency of candidates. An integration certificate has hardly any value. The impact of the integration policy is extremely limited.
- Do not “test” immigrants who apply for a job. A conversation with the applicants is seen as sufficient to form a clear opinion/picture of their language proficiency.

“I have a conversation with the people and on the basis of that I can see whether their proficiency Dutch is low, average or high.”

Economics govern language

“In the cleaning industry employers often do not have linguistic demands. Also, most of the families speak English or French”

“Because there is high need for electricians, most companies say “we give it a try, even if they don’t master the language for 100%”

“The most important is a diploma and practical skills. There is shortage of welders. Polish immigrants can fill that need. Language is not a problem in that case.”

Discrimination

- language and job interview to exclude

“Sometimes immigrant employees are send back because they cannot communicate on the shop floor. I have the impression that this is often a false argument for covert discrimination of immigrant employees”

And yet...

Integration requirements become stricter and stricter.

- Higher CEFR levels
- more countries introduce tests
- At pre-entry level: reading skills
- Introduction of point systems

Testing regimes in a context of social hypochondria

Social hypochondria (Schinkel, 2007, 2008, 2009)

- Hypochondria is defined as 'preoccupation with fears of having a serious disease based on the person's misinterpretation of bodily symptoms' (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*], 2000).
- Social hypochondria as social agents' preoccupation with fears that a given social body (e.g. school, neighbourhood, workplace, country, nation, etc.) has a serious disease/disorder, based on the social agents' misinterpretation of the symptoms occurring in that social body.

- Most important here are its preoccupations and complaints about perceived threats to ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social integration’. Schinkel (2008) argues that the social body now feels constantly threatened by those who are considered not to belong, to be non-native.
- If empirical reality indicates that the feelings of threat to the health of a given social body on account of its ethnic composition, integration and social cohesion are not accurate, than these feelings should be considered a form of social hypochondria.

Impact of tests

- Most research of the past two decades, starting from Messick, demonstrated that the introduction of tests is not an isolated event; rather it is anchored in political motivations and intentions. Research also shows that these tests lead to impacts, in the form of intended and unintended consequences (Shohamy, 2010).

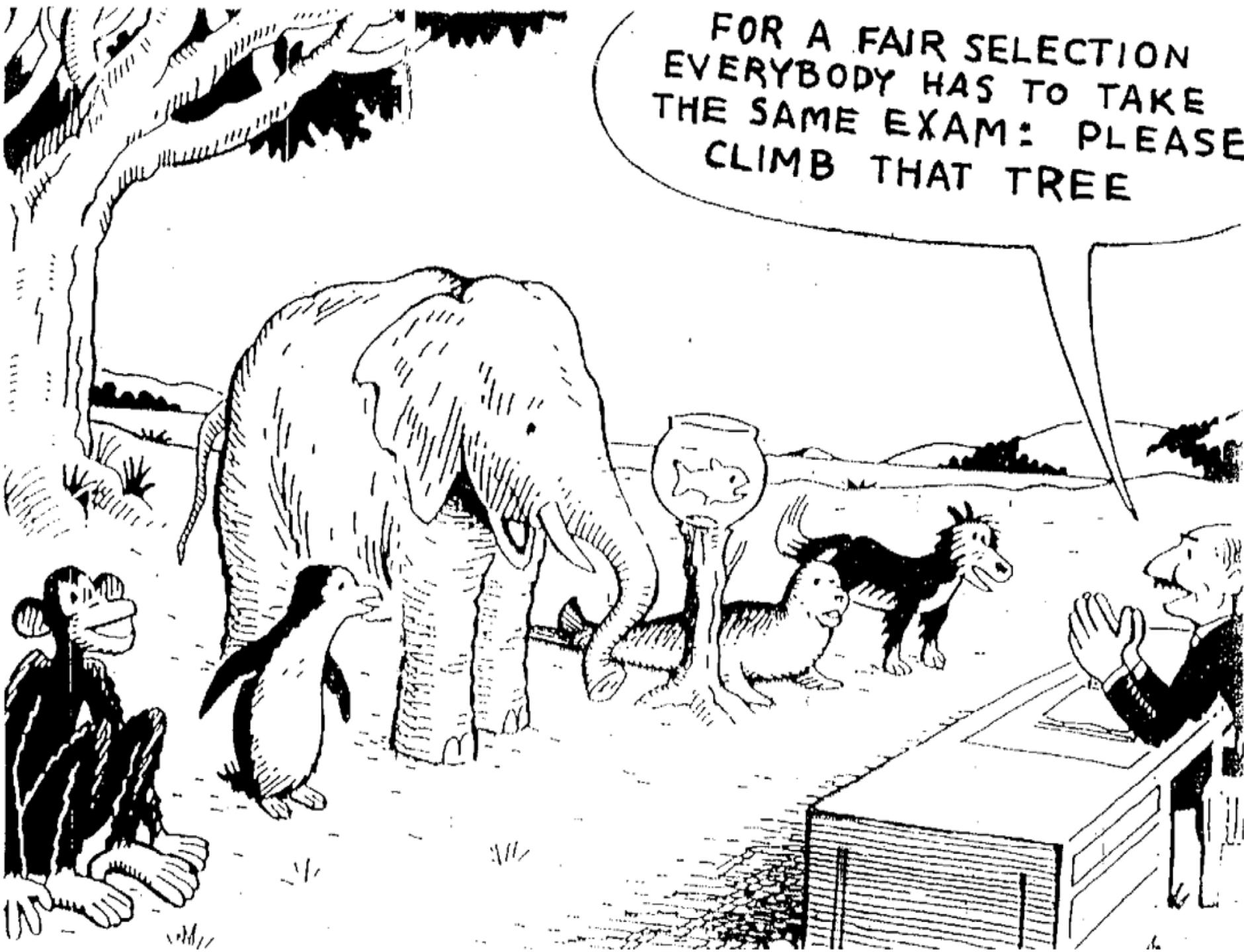
Ethical behaviour: intentional versus unintentional?

- Intentional unethical behaviour
- Unethical behaviour is not always clear for others. One can hide his intentions through discourse (e.g. integration versus assimilation)
- A test is often presented as neutral, as objective but we have to read a test as a “text”: different readings
- Unintentional unethical behaviour: is not taking into account ethics. Is ‘sloppy’ behaviour.

How fair/valid can a standardised test for immigration/integration/citizenship purposes be?

- From a validity perspective we need to be able to answer the following questions:
 - How do we define integration, citizenship, language, ...?
 - When is a person a good citizen?
 - When is a person ‘integrated? Integrated in what?
 - How much language does he need to know? What language?
 - Is a person integrated when he passes a test at A2 level?
- Is the CEFR an appropriate tool?
- What about his plurilingual repertoire?
- Are ‘autochthonous’ people who do not fully master the SL or who are functional illiterate no true citizens, not integrated?
 - What is the link between social cohesion and knowledge of the national language?
 - What about possible bias in terms of educational, cultural, ethnic, social, economic, language, ... background?

FOR A FAIR SELECTION
EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE
THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE
CLIMB THAT TREE



- I claim that most of the current language tests that have been developed to serve integration policies are not valid:
 - because we haven't been able to answer any of the questions I raised.
 - because we haven't been able to define the concept of integration, citizenship
 - Because the definition of the language concept is incorrect given the context
 - Because we use static and monolingual definitions for language (proficiency), assessment, literacy
 - because we haven't been able to set clear goals and test specifications to meet these goals
 - Because of the mechanisms of negative wash back (teaching to the test)
- Except for one goal: exclusion (Shibboleth) or controlling migration

Challenges: Reconstructing concepts and policies

Within a context where ‘super diversity’ is becoming the norm it is important to reflect on the boundaries of the current recipes (policies) and definitions of concepts that are being used to ‘promote and strengthen social and civic activity’.

Change in policy

- Development of policies that work at local level (high identity, functional, contextualised) instead of national level (low identity: feel discriminated, racism, linguicism)
- From causality between language test and integration to functional interaction between equal opportunities at school, on the housing market, to find a job, and formal and informal language learning
- From a conditional to a facilitating policy

Challenges

- Take into account the diversity of educational and cultural backgrounds. Meet migrants' and society's specific and functional language needs
- Increase migrants' multi literacy
- Professionalize teachers
- Assure quality of assessment
- From tests to continuous alternative assessment tools
- An integration policy of a more facilitating instead of an conditional nature
- Help migrants to overcome the language barrier after official courses and tests
- Encourage reciprocal processes of integration after official programmes
- Research needed

A policy that contributes to a warm and open multicultural society

- Invest in awareness raising, information of and communication between different stakeholders; involve the ‘receiving society’ (society at large) in the process;
- Invest in local activities;
- Create platforms for professional stakeholders for exchange of experiences, materials, ...;
- Accept how integration policies really take place and that it varies across individuals and adapt our policy accordingly;

- Accept how language acquisition really takes place and adapt our teaching (formal/informal, explicit/implicit) policies/practices to these realities;
- Accept assessment as an inclusive part of language and integration, in which we start from what they can instead of what they cannot, is not only more valid, but above all more powerful, and empowering;
- Always take human rights perspective into account.

THANK YOU

piet.vanavermaet@ugent.be

www.steunpunctdiverseitenlernen.be
www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/