

COMICS AND MIGRATION

Representation and Other Practices

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Comics in language education for “guest workers” in West Germany, 1970s–1980s

Sylvia Kesper-Biermann

Germany took a long time to accept immigration as a fact of life. One important milestone along this path was the Immigration Law of 2004, the first attempt at an overarching regulation of all aspects of migration policy. Among its stipulations, it charged the government with the responsibility of fostering “the integration of foreigners living lawfully in the Federal territory on a permanent basis into the economic, cultural and social life of the Federal Republic of Germany” (§ 43 [1]). To that end, it required so-called “integration courses”. These consist of a language class and an orientation course designed to provide knowledge of “the German legal system, history and culture, rights and obligations in Germany, forms of community life, and values that are important in Germany, such as freedom of religion, tolerance and gender equality” (BAMF 2021).¹ Several federal states provided additional programmes for refugees, such as Hesse’s effort to make them “fit for the rule of law” (*Fit für den Rechtsstaat*) in a programme that came with its own educational comic. The intent was to ensure a “largely nonverbal, strongly illustrative and friendly conveyance of the central messages” (“Fit für den Rechtsstaat” 2016, 3; for further examples, see Schwartz 2016). Picture stories are also recommended for language classes targeting immigrants (Hieronimus 2014). This is not unique to Germany; comics are also used both in and beyond Europe, including the United States, as part of a pedagogy of multiliteracies for educating immigrants (e.g. Boatright 2010; Danzak 2011).

The idea that comics are ideally suited for teaching migrants is not new. They were already popular in language classes targeting “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter:innen*) from Mediterranean countries in the 1970s and 1980s. This appears to have been forgotten entirely, though, and historical references to these language courses are completely absent from the current debate (zur Nieden 2009, 124). The following chapter seeks to remedy the lacuna by recalling this largely unknown aspect of (West) German immigration history. It explores which comics were used in the language education of “guest workers”, for what reason, in what ways, and to what ends. It will also take

into account the degree to which the experience of migration itself was addressed in the material. This chapter will limit itself to adult education, leaving aside the rather different issue of teaching German to *Gastarbeiterkinder* (“guest worker children”) in schools (see, e.g. Lehman 2019). Furthermore, it does not look at the situation in the GDR. I will proceed in three steps: First, illuminating the context of mass labour migration into West Germany and the status of comics in education at that time. Second, an exemplary case will be presented in greater detail, illustrating what images and conceptions of labour migration were conveyed in such materials. The comic chosen for this is *Feridun. Ein Lesebuch und Sprachprogramm nicht nur für Türken* (Feridun: A reader and language programme not only for Turks). The third part will look at the use of illustrated stories in educational practice, that is, language classes aimed at “guest workers”. The conclusion will then summarise salient findings.

The context: labour migration and comics in education

Immigration to West Germany in the 1960s to 1980s was mainly characterised by the labour migration of “guest workers” from countries bordering the Mediterranean, such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey. This process shaped the public perception of immigration until the end of the 1980s. The largest single immigrant group came from Turkey. Altogether, the share of non-German nationals in the population rose from around 1 percent in 1960 to slightly over 5 percent in 1970 to 7 percent in 1980, remaining at roughly that level for the rest of the decade. In absolute numbers, approximately 4 million foreigners lived in West Germany in the 1970s and nearly 5 million in 1989. Most of these migrant workers took on unskilled, physically demanding jobs in industrial production at low pay and often considerable health risk. Bringing comparatively low levels of professional qualification, they clustered at the lower end of the labour market: men tended to work in engineering, the auto industry, construction, and mining, and women in the textile and food industries (Herbert 2017, 196–216; Gutfleisch and Rieck 1981, 341–344). Though the general assumption had initially been that they would return to their countries of origin after a limited stay, it had become clear by the 1970s that many “guest workers” would remain in Germany and be joined by their families. This brought an entirely new urgency to the question of how to teach them German and, associated with this, the push to achieve “integration”.

This was the time when the West German educational establishment began to explore comics as educational media. Beginning in the late 1960s, they were seen as particularly suited for people considered deficient in their command of German and in need of improving their language skills, such as foreigners. Therefore, publications of the 1970s contain references to educational comics being developed as a “help for guest workers” (Kempkes 1977, 135), for example, to inform consumers about such subjects as taking out a loan or renting an apartment (Bergen 1984). This mirrors a general change in the public perception of comics, which was so thorough that Dietrich Grünewald (2010, 132) refers to a “remarkable paradigm shift”. In the 1950s and early 1960s, public discourse on comics in West Germany and elsewhere

had been highly critical. The “Campaign against Filth and Trash” (*Schmutz- und Schundkampagne*) had emphasised the dangers that comics allegedly posed to children and young people. They were claimed to cause illiteracy, picture dependency (*Bildidiotismus*), violence, and juvenile delinquency, blamed for corroding public morals through their pornographic imagery, and called into question the authority of adults over children (Laser 2000). By the late 1970s, however, Wolfgang J. Fuchs and Reinhold C. Reitberger stated in their foundational *Comics-Handbuch*: “A rejection of graphic literature or an emphasis on its negative aspects is no longer opportune today so as not to appear reactionary” (Fuchs and Reitberger 1978, 9f). The efforts of educators were central to this development. A representative sample from between 1965 and 1982 in West Germany found the proportion of comics-related literature that dealt with the potential of the medium as a teaching tool rising to 40 percent (Knilli et al. 1989, 29). Classroom instructions for subjects including German, social studies, art, and foreign languages were published, practical experience was recorded, and studies on the reception of comics were conducted. By functioning as multipliers in civil society in schools, for example, the educators who engaged with them formed “in a way the tip of the spear of the newly emerging interest in comics” (Kagelmann 1991, 55). Fuchs and Reitberger (1978, 11) concluded: “The comics readers who were talked down to in the 1950s have grown up. Their presence in government and educational institutions has generally led to a broader understanding of and regard for comics”. This movement was not limited to educational materials targeting children. Comics were equally popular in adult education, as demonstrated by the success of the instructional comic series “für Anfänger” (for Beginners) at the time (Hangartner 2016, 294f). How did this shift affect language education for guest workers?

Feridun goes to Germany: migration in the teaching material “not only for Turks”

Feridun Üstün is 30 years old. He is married, has three children, and works as a smallholder in a Turkish village in central Anatolia. Unable to support himself and his family on his income, he is in debt. That is why he resolves to go to Germany as a “guest worker” for several years to earn money. Feridun is the main character of a 1977 series of language instruction books aimed at Turkish “guest workers” in West Germany. The series was published in three volumes: a coursebook for students, a grammar book, and a teacher’s handbook (Augustin et al. 1977). It was set apart by the fact that – unlike most contemporary teaching materials – it hardly touched on life in West Germany at all. Its focus lay in the process of migration instead, thematising the journey in text and illustrations. Learners accompanied Feridun as he moved from his small Anatolian village through a nearby town and Istanbul to his train journey to Munich. Thus, the readers were familiarised with the formal requirements of immigration, the role of the Turkish employment office, the procedure of health checks, but above all with the perceptions, hopes, and fears of the protagonist. “The texts are intended . . . to help formulate and deal with the experiences of emigration”, the teacher’s handbook stated (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 3, 3). This obviously held the

still prevalent and widely criticised assumption that there is “a unifying and definitive immigrant experience” rather than a “sea of possible realities” (Boatright 2010, 469).

The authors saw the roughly 100 drawings accompanying the class book to be central elements:

The illustrations are to both motivate and create awareness, develop associations contained in the text, and encourage readers to engage with the texts. . . . The pictures are almost never ornamental additions to the text – as they often are in other teaching material. Quite the contrary – several illustrations defamiliarise the text where it otherwise allows few opportunities for distancing.

(Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 3, 4)

Thus, the illustrations were intended to serve two distinct purposes: illustrating the text and defamiliarising it, allowing distance to narrated events. These are evident in the two different styles into which we can divide the drawings, broadly speaking. Some merely accompany the lesson by depicting individuals and the everyday situations described in the text. They are illustrative and used as didactic tools, as in the case of Feridun and his family being introduced at the beginning of the book (Figure 2.1).

This image shows the attention to realistic detail that stylistically sets these illustrations apart from the second, much larger group of drawings, which are typically in an exaggerated cartoon style. The latter style makes it immediately clear that

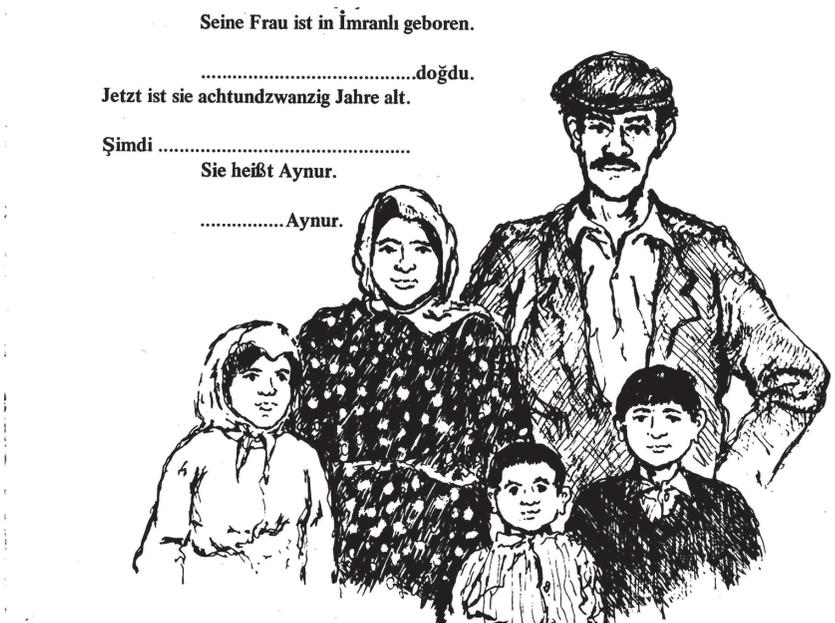


FIGURE 2.1 Illustration by Theo Scherling, *Feridun*, vol. 1, Abado Verlag, 1977, p. 9. Source: Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

they do not depict actual persons, places, and events. Instead, they serve as vehicles for distancing, enabling associations, and encouraging reader engagement by giving an occasion both to speak about and to reflect social realities and the learners' own situation. This allowed the book to take a stronger and more immediate position on certain aspects of migration than the text, which was dominated by basic speaking exercises. Thus, Figure 2.2 shows the entrance to *Almanya*, the Turkish word for Germany, in Feridun's imagination before his departure.

Feridun, standing on the right in the background in the company of his friend, watches a returnee from Germany. At the side of the gate opposite them, a man with a suitcase is kneeling, apparently about to enter "Cennet Almanya" or "Paradise Germany". All stand in awe of the returnee's wealth, illustrated by a wheelbarrow full of cash. The wealth difference between Germany and Turkey is illustrated further through the figures' different clothing styles. The Turkish men lack shoes, and their clothes are shabby and torn. Meanwhile, the returnee is well dressed, strong, and assertive. The illustration exemplifies further characteristics that are typical of the book. For one thing, we only see men depicted. Women such as Feridun's wife are marginal figures and hardly ever active participants in events. The books were clearly aimed at male "guest workers" coming to Germany without their families. Furthermore, the difference between West Germany and Turkey is depicted in terms of development along a modernisation axis. The returnee's T-shirt sports a Coca-Cola logo, associated with "Western" progress, while the man kneeling on the left is wearing a fez, evoking traditionalism and backwardness.

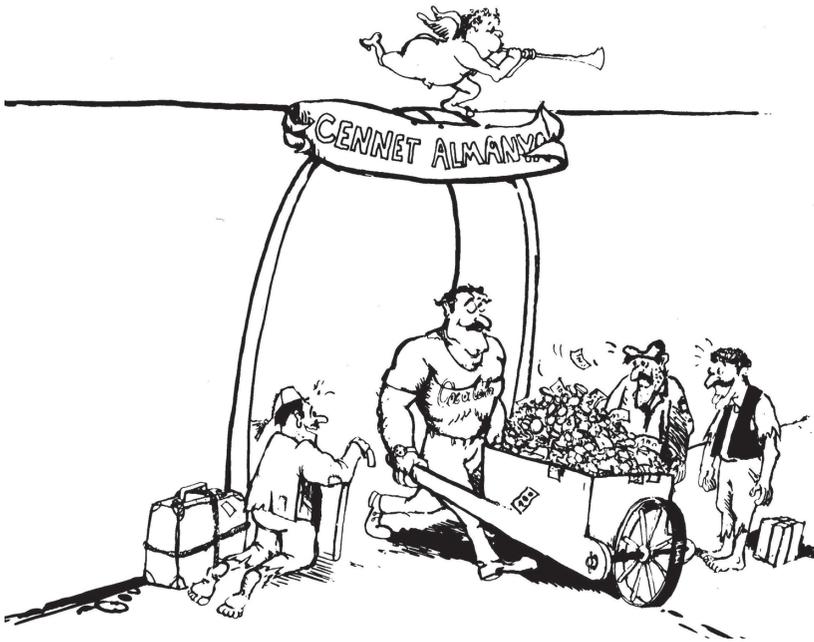


FIGURE 2.2 Illustration by Theo Scherling, *Feridun*, vol. 1, Abado Verlag, 1977, p. 58.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

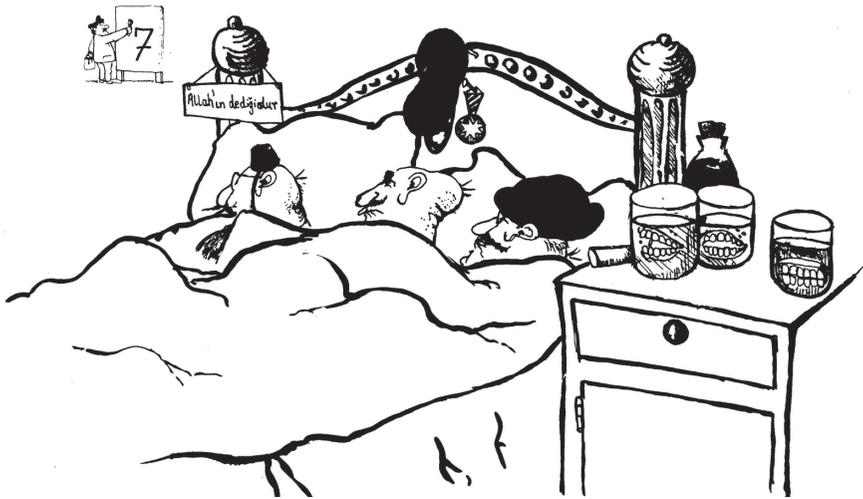


FIGURE 2.3 Illustration by Theo Scherling, *Feridun*, vol. 1, Abado Verlag, 1977, p. 60.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

This perspective is pervasive and made expressly clear in the introduction: Turkey is “a country where partly feudal ownership structures prevail and it stands at the level of early capitalist exploitation” (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 1, 4). Criticism of corruption, mismanagement, and the exploitation of the population by Turkish elites is thematised repeatedly in the illustrations. A recurring theme is the image of three old men symbolising the Turkish authorities, probably the police and military, the government, and the religious leadership. These are depicted as being literally “in bed” with each other (Figure 2.3). Toothless and ineffective, they abdicate responsibility for the country and its inhabitants with a reference, depicted in the sign hanging from the bedpost, that all things will occur as God decrees.

Accordingly, the authors saw many problems in the migration process, especially those following arrival in West Germany, as rooted in the “guest workers” transition from a developing country to an industrialised nation and from the countryside to the city. Implicitly underlying this assumption is the then-prevalent model of “modernisation” as a linear process in discrete stages that was largely identical for societies worldwide (Pollack 2017). From this perspective, labour migration to Germany took on certain characteristics of time travel, which would necessarily entail a difficult adjustment period.

The authors were not only using these depictions to connect to the experiences of their (male) migrant students but also targeting a West German audience. Not just the text but especially the illustrations were designed to help immigrants educate Germans about the culture, geography, and everyday life of Turkey. One important goal named in the book was to “enable the Turkish workers to inform German contact persons and colleagues about their previous life and potentially crack open

their prejudice” (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 3, 3). Ideally, German and Turkish workers were meant to read the book together and enter into dialogue that way. Both the text and illustrations show considerable empathy with the plight of Feridun and his compatriots. The authors had a sufficiently strong and detailed interest in their background to undertake a three-week study trip through Turkey in 1975, where they carried out interviews on the subject of migration (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 3, 31). In addition, “Turkish friends and colleagues” in West Germany took part in the development of the material (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 1, 207).

The resulting work, published in 1977, is permeated by a West German perspective on Turkish labour migration. More specifically, it is the perspective of those engaged in the field known as *Ausländerarbeit* (working with foreigners), for example, as teachers in language classes. Its authors, Viktor Augustin and Klaus Liebe-Harkort, were experienced language educators and had a background in teacher training; Liebe-Harkort became a professor at Bremen University in 1979. They saw themselves as engaged in social work, criticised recruiting practices, took a stand against xenophobia, and aimed to combat the discrimination “guest workers” often faced, in order to facilitate their integration. However, that process – which Freerk Huisken (1987, 132) polemically called an “arrogant pedagogics of understanding” – entailed the unconscious use of long-standing stereotypes about the “backwardness” of Turkey, well established in the field (Lohmann et al. 2013). This was especially pronounced in the visual depiction of differences in development. As “friends to foreigners” (*Ausländerfreunde*; Huisken 1987), the authors further contributed to practices of distinction by defining these “foreign workers” as a distinct group that was expressly not part of German society. This is very pronounced in the rendering of the illustrations in *Feridun* (Figure 2.4).



FIGURE 2.4 Illustration by Theo Scherling, *Feridun*, vol. 1, Abado Verlag, 1977, p. 117.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

Figure 2.4 shows a German on the left insulting Feridun as a “Damn foreigner”. His hat with the traditional *gamsbart* decoration identifies him as a Bavarian, the stereotypically conservative, xenophobic German. The authors obviously wish to distance themselves from this figure. His wide-open mouth indicates that he is shouting or at least speaking loudly – a common practice when encountering difficulty communicating with migrant workers. Yet for all the distance created by this (self-)ironic caricature, the Anatolian peasant in the drawing is clearly depicted as different from the German. He appears shocked, listening with his outsized ears, and responds to the insult in the kind of broken German then often referred to as *Gastarbeiterdeutsch*: “Me no understand” (“Ich nix verstehn”). This exaggerated, expressly extreme dichotomy between German and “foreigner” widely characterised public discourse and media representations of the time, and matched the expectations of the majority. It was how the self and the other were visually constructed, for example, in press photography (Czycholl 2020). Dark hair and moustaches were part of the “type” of the foreigner, especially of Turks (Thomsen Vierra 2018, 45). The context in which *Feridun* was to be used fostered this distinction. The very fact that language classes specifically for “foreign workers” existed made it clear that they were viewed as a group distinct from German society.

Comics in “guest worker” language classes

Since “guest workers” came to West Germany from several countries, they had no shared language or dialect and usually little or no previous knowledge of German. In the 1960s, West German employers often offered language classes to facilitate the integration of their new hires into the labour process and help them better understand instructions or safety briefings (Luft 2009, 232–234; Gutfleisch and Rieck 1981, 345). One reason for this was the higher ratio of work accidents involving migrant labour, which was blamed, among other factors, on communication problems (Kleinöder 2015, 104–106). Some particularly dangerous industries required language proficiency tests for non-German-speaking workers to be employed. The Corporate Mining Association *Unternehmensverband Ruhrbergbau*, which was involved in these efforts, explained in 1966 that language served only as a “primitive mode of communication” in the workplace and that four weeks should suffice to “teach the foreigners a vocabulary of 400 nouns, which we carefully selected and collected in a picture book” (Magnet Bundesrepublik 1966, 81f). Drawings were also used elsewhere to illustrate desired workplace conduct. Some employers developed their own materials. The *Hamborner Bergbau-Aktiengesellschaft* collected the most important words in a 100-page *Bildwörterbuch für ausländische Bergleute* (Picture dictionary for foreign miners) aimed at Greek recruits in 1962 (Fund des Monats 2018). Others turned to commercially produced teaching materials designed to instil basic communication competence in the workplace in the briefest possible time. These included *Hallo Kollege* (Hello, colleague), produced for a language crash course that took three weeks (Dittrich et al. 1972). The aim was to establish “basic language patterns” by practising example sentences. As the teacher

handbook explained, “Drawings and photographs are an important learning aid and offer possibilities for exercises and testing” (Dittrich et al. 1974, 113f).

Language instruction beyond this very basic level was provided mainly on a local basis (Szablewski-Çavuş 2010, 43; Thomsen Vierra 2018, 34). Native and immigrant populations met in their communities, and the local authorities recognised at a comparatively early stage that these “guest workers” were not a temporary feature. In many cities, charities, labour unions, churches, community colleges, and private initiatives took up the cause of integration and communication. They were convinced that, despite all political affirmations to the contrary, West Germany was already home to immigrants and had to respond adequately to that fact (Spicka 2015). This included language classes teaching “German for foreign workers” (Deutsch für ausländische Arbeitnehmer), though this frequently took place under less-than-ideal conditions. There were no unitary standards regarding content, goals, structure, or the qualifications required of teachers. The classes were frequently taught by a wide variety of volunteers with no pedagogical qualifications, even including the janitors of guest-worker housing (Szablewski-Çavuş 2001). In 1974, Germany’s major public welfare associations and the Federal Ministry of Labour founded the Sprachverband Deutsch für ausländische Arbeitnehmer e.V. (Language Association German for Foreign Workers; see Gutfleisch and Rieck 1981, 346f). Their goal was to “create the conditions for a more effective language education of foreign workers through close and coordinated cooperation between all stakeholders and thus to fulfil the most important condition for a successful integration” (Szablewski-Çavuş 2001, 8). Until 1989, its classes served roughly 560,000 people from the European Economic Community (EEC) and non-EEC countries that “guest workers” were recruited from (Kahl 1989). Participation in these classes was strictly voluntary. No mandatory education like today’s “integration courses” existed. Conversely, there was also no legal right to language education for “guest workers” (Rohrer 1983, 27). Among the challenges of the format was the fact that learning groups were very heterogeneous. Classes included students not only from different countries but also with widely varying levels of educational attainment, previous knowledge of German, and expectations of the course. The association was charged with standardising classes for this audience. It would serve as an institutional point of contact at the national level and as a body qualifying teachers. Moreover, it had a *pädagogische Abteilung* (pedagogical section) that recommended and produced teaching materials. These included a notable quantity of comics.

What were the reasons for the inclusion of comics? Initially, the medium of choice for educating the foreign workforce had been films. The film-based courses *Guten Tag* (Hello, 1966) and *Viel Glück in Deutschland* (Good luck in Germany, 1974) had been produced specifically for this reason with the aid of the Goethe-Institut, West Germany’s prestigious cultural organisation (zur Nieden 2009, 123, note 1). Yet, the high hopes associated with a medium seen as particularly modern were disappointed (Tumat 1972). It turned out that films were hardly ever used in actual classrooms. Instead, comics seemed to lend themselves to use with that particular target group (on the following, see also Scherling and Schuckall 1992).

The generally high regard for comics as a teaching medium among educators in the 1970s and 1980s played a role here. Moreover, their use was likely motivated by the expectation that images could be universally understood across language barriers and thus be useful in classes with participants of different native languages. They also had some practical advantages. Unlike films, comics could be adapted to the knowledge level and composition of a given class quickly and with relatively little difficulty. Reproducing the mostly monochrome drawings was technically undemanding, while photographs were still expensive to copy at the time. Moreover, comics with empty speech bubbles presented self-evident tasks for learners. This arose in response to the frustrating experience that traditional language-learning formats such as gap texts were often not understood or depended on participants being literate in their native language, familiar with underlying grammatical concepts, and accustomed to using dictionaries – something that was far from universally the case here (Barkowski et al. 1980, 38f).

In one example, the Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle des Deutschen Volkshochschulverbandes (Pedagogical Section of the German Association of Community Colleges) published a set of worksheets and transparencies (Augustin and Haase 1980) designed for individual and class work with beginners. Sheet 1 shows a sequence of images (Figure 2.5) with two men seated in a pub or restaurant. They are talking to each other, presumably about other people present outside the frame. Panel numbering provides a direction for reading the strip, whose individual panels are dominated by speech bubbles extending past their frames. This example shows clearly why comics were highly valued as teaching tools: namely, their ability to pictorially focus on the central point and concentrate on individual elements, in this case by leaving the background empty, allowing learners to focus entirely on a single object, person, or action. It also shows an effort to counteract the problem of underchallenging participants in language classes. Many of them, as the introduction to *Blasen-Geschichten* (Speech bubble stories) explains, had lived and worked in West Germany for years before deciding to improve their rudimentary knowledge of German. A beginners' class would “address them too far below their level, linguistically underchallenge them especially with regard to vocabulary, provide too little practice in grammar where they need not so much an introduction as a massive correction” (Augustin and Haase 1980, n.p.). Comics were considered well suited to remedy this. Moreover, the *Blasen-Geschichten* expressly distanced themselves from the “dull content of most teaching books”, claiming instead to address the “*native intelligence*” of participants (Augustin and Haase 1980, n.p., emphasis in the original).

The comics-specific form of reduction described, among others, by Scott McCloud (1994, 24–59), was particularly appreciated in the depiction of persons. The *Handbuch für den Deutschunterricht mit ausländischen Arbeitern* (Handbook for German classes with foreign workers) stated: “Photographs accentuate the unique, the individual, and leave little scope for ‘free’ association. The identification we wish to achieve with and through protagonists can hardly be achieved with photographs. We envisaged caricatures because they offered us the opportunity to

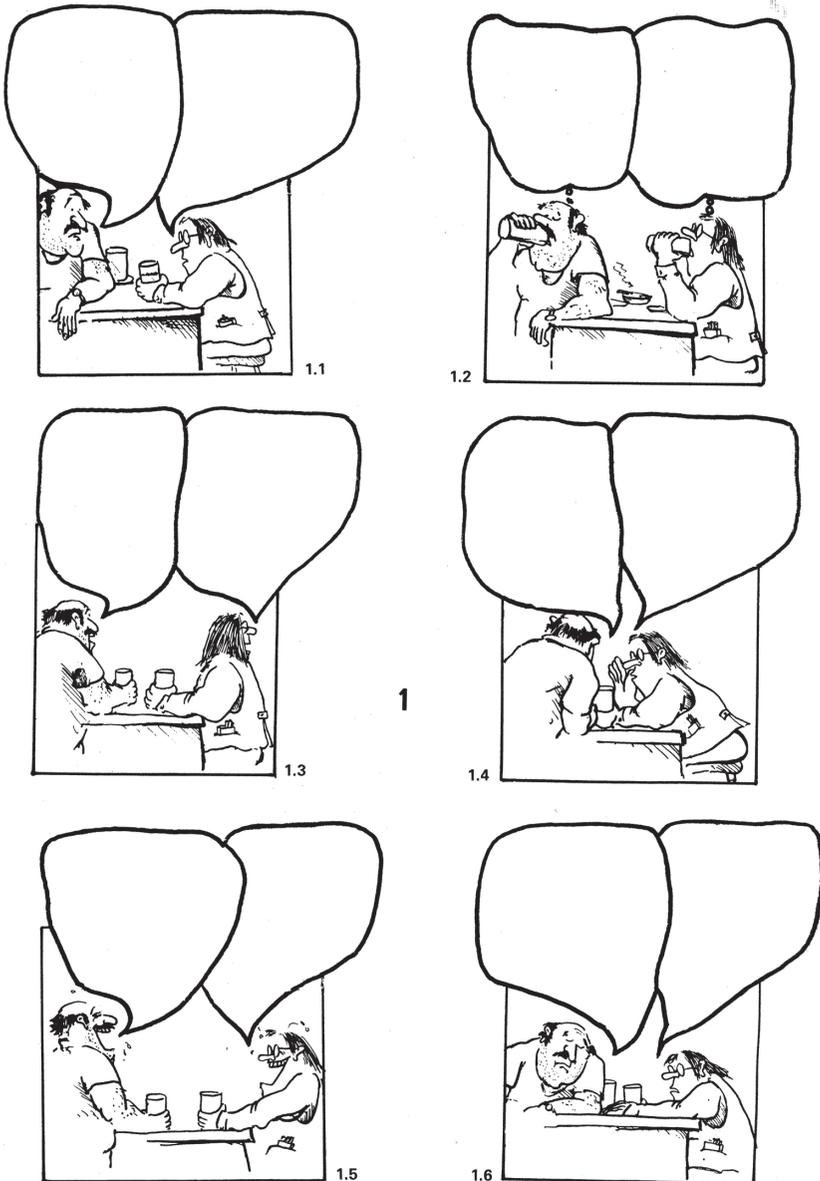


FIGURE 2.5 Illustration by Theo Scherling, in Viktor Augustin and Klaus Haase, *Blasen-Geschichten*, Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband, 1980, p. 1.

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

overemphasise certain details in order to better use them didactically, and because drawings – unlike photographs – can be changed” (Barkowski et al. 1980, 147). In this concrete example, the “protagonists” (*Leitfiguren*) – a Turkish man, a Turkish woman, a German man, and a German woman – had been developed in cooperation with a graphic artist and were re-used regularly in classes, for example, in theatre projects based on comics sequences with a set text. Drawn “artificial figures” (*Kunstfiguren*) were appreciated because their reduction and typesetting made for easier identification while simultaneously facilitating distancing through satirical exaggeration. Their very style identified them as artistic perspectives on the world, not reality. This made it possible to render visible the “psychological and social problems arising from emigration”, the handbook explained (Barkowski et al. 1980, 146).

This method of producing individualised teaching materials that took the situation of migrants into account was far from unique. It was common for teachers of such classes to do this. More than 90 percent of them used self-made teaching materials, as shown in a survey conducted by the Sprachverband in 1988 (Behrend-Roth et al. 1988, 72, 310). One reason was that, aside from the aforementioned introductory courses for German in the workplace, there were no dedicated course materials for teaching “foreign workers”. Books teaching German as a foreign language envisioned different learners, and especially more homogeneous groups. They appeared poorly suited for language classes aimed at “guest workers”. From the late 1970s onwards, several publishers developed teaching material specifically for this audience. The Sprachverband assembled a list of approved publications from among these books, and comics featured prominently in them. One such example was *Feridun*. Many arguments made for using comics are reflected in its volumes, as we have seen earlier. That may be one reason why 10 percent of teachers in the 1988 survey reported using it (Behrend-Roth et al. 1988, 128). In addition, *Feridun* also addressed another issue: “Language work with foreign workers must not merely address itself to the consequences of migration, but must look at the root causes of migration and thematise them in a dialogical process shared by locals and foreigners” (Rohrer 1983, 292).

Yet another example following a slightly different approach is *Deutsch aktiv*, a series whose first volume was published in 1979 by Langenscheidt, a traditional language publisher (Neuner et al. 1979). It was geared towards practising “speech acts” (*Sprechhandlungen*) that seemed important for managing daily life in (West) Germany, presenting different aspects of culture in chapters dedicated to food, accommodation, or schooling. It was especially in its visual design that this book explored new territory. A retrospective view notes that readers would “initially look for the text among the profusion of pictures until they noticed that it was written, as it were, into them and created opportunities for communication in concert with the illustrations to draw in the learners” (Scherling and Schuckall 1992, 6). The design went hand in hand with an attempted fundamental change in teaching method (Brill 2005, 191). Comics were to support the goal of prioritising

oral communication over grammar acquisition. Their content was thus designed to be tied into everyday experiences in Germany and to show scenes that were relevant to the students.

This approach was chosen not least because the use of comics was informed by goals beyond effective language learning. As one of the authors stated in retrospect, drawings were supposed to liven up the books, render the structure of the subject matter and the exercises more chaotic, and make them lose cohesiveness (Neuner 1996, 199, 202). Yet another reason was more decisive still: educators and others considered comics especially useful for spreading information on and providing insight into socio-economic and political realities. The authors of teaching books stated their intent to foster attitudes and values that would educate “guest workers” to be aware and active citizens. Learners should be seen as individual subjects to be supported in their self-reliance, independence, and personal growth (Brill 2005, 176f). This, too, was in keeping with the self-image of West German adult education in these years, a field that saw itself as spreading knowledge, emancipation, and active political participation throughout society (Zeuner 2015, 6–10). Accordingly, language classes were often part of a broader palette of offerings targeting “guest workers”, especially in *Volkshochschule* (community college) contexts. A Berlin branch, for example, not only offered a broad “*Türkenprogramm*” (Programme for Turks) but also sought to promote encounters between Germans and “foreigners” in its cultural programme (Thomsen Vierra 2018, 145–152).

Many people in what was called *Ausländerarbeit* (working with foreigners) – but also beyond that in welfare associations and labour unions – pursued a vision of emancipatory language learning that was clearly different from the efficient transmission of primitive communication skills the employers had intended. Teachers saw language learning as political education aimed at overcoming the pervasive discrimination suffered by foreign workers. In a sense, it was an extension of traditional working-class education. The final statement of a conference of foreign workers in 1974 read:

The language problem lies at the heart of almost all social problems facing foreigners almost daily. While they do not know German, they are largely helpless and will never be able to defend their own interests. . . . Learning German should not be a goal in itself, but only an important instrument towards the realisation of their own situation, the building of solidarity and the pursuit of their own interests.

(quoted from Szablewski-Cavuş 2001, 27)

This development would begin with the German classes themselves, as the authors of *Feridun* explained with regard to their materials: “the teacher should always permit participants to take a critical stance. He may even have to provoke them to butcher the book (as a holy cow), to cook, to devour, and not least to digest it” (Augustin et al. 1977, vol. 3, 89).

Conclusion

Comics played an important role in language teaching for “guest workers” in West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. This placed them at the intersection of migration, language, and integration in several respects. First, comics were regarded as ideal teaching materials for labour migrants for a number of reasons, some of them specific to their characteristics as a medium. Second, certain ones – like *Feridun* – served to graphically depict the country of origin or the migration process, or – like *Deutsch aktiv* – to visualise daily life in West Germany. The artistic, in this case graphic, engagement with this topic included at the very least an attempt “to see the reality of West Germany through the eyes of foreign workers”, as the *Handbuch Deutschunterricht* stated in 1980 (Barkowski and Harnisch Kumm 1980, 168f). This is also an expression of an underlying attitude found among everyone engaged in this form of language education: The materials, particularly their illustrations, as well as the approach of a “target group-specific” education, not least expressed in the creation of dedicated classes for “foreign” workers, all aided the definition and social creation of “guest workers” as a distinct, clearly discernible group different from the German majority.

One central factor for this adscription of (not-)belonging (Mecheril 2015) was the postulate of developmental differences between societies in West Germany and those that the “foreigners” came from. Migration to West Germany was seen as equivalent to a “leap from preindustrial conditions into a highly industrialised society, across several stages of development” (Barkowski and Harnisch Kumm 1980, 24). The typical attitude among *Ausländerfreunde* of the time, “well-meaning if paternalistic” (Thomsen Vierra 2018, 39), called for offering the “guest workers” help to master the unfamiliar life in West Germany and to build understanding and communication between them and the German majority. German language instruction served as a central means of integration. In the early 1980s, this was understood as a “mutual process of exchange and learning between Germans and foreigners” (Rohrer 1983, 284). The fact that West Germany was home to immigrant communities was recognised much earlier among those engaged in language education than by those in politics. However, the assumption continued that “foreigners in the country do, of course, stay foreigners and must see German-speaking countries from the perspective of the foreigner”, as the teacher handbook of *Themen*, a German-language teaching work of the time, phrased it (Gerdes et al. 1984, 12). Their status as foreigners, their fundamental alienness, was cast as unchangeable.

Note

1 All German quotes translated into English by the author.

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