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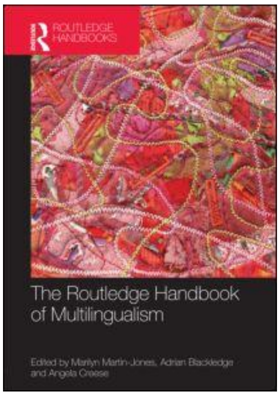

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Discourses about linguistic diversity

Melanie Cooke and James Simpson

Introduction

In many parts of the world, multilingualism is a fact of life, intensified in recent decades by processes of globalization characterized by an increase in the movement of people within and across borders, electronic mass media and online communication. Although in many quarters linguistic diversity is accepted, and indeed celebrated as an asset, at the same time it has become a source of tension and debate in public and political discourse, where multilingualism is often constructed as a problem or threat to national unity. Linguistic diversity is also a potential source of conflict in multilingual societies, particularly when choices have to be made about language use in domains such as government, broadcasting, education and public services. The work surveyed in this chapter explains how discourses about linguistic diversity produced in powerful domains such as the government and the media interact with other discourses and circulate through different levels of society, gain legitimacy and, importantly, impact on legislation. To illustrate our points we provide examples from debates in the UK where language is invoked in arguments about immigration, British identity, citizenship, multiculturalism, national security and social cohesion.

In the next section we define key terms underpinning the chapter: *discourse*, *ideology* and *power*, before sketching out some analytical approaches taken in the study of the area. We then turn to the discourses about linguistic diversity that dominate public and political debates, and illustrate these with examples from the UK. Finally, we emphasize that some of the dominant discourses about linguistic diversity are at odds with the multilingual realities of much contemporary life, examining ways in which they are contested.

Key concepts

Discourse

Discourses can be defined as ways of talking and writing that promote particular views of the world. This understanding of discourse is linked to the theoretical work of Foucault: discourses in the Foucauldian sense refer to what is ‘say-able’ or ‘meaning-able’ at a given time and in a given place, institution or society in regard to a given topic or theme; discourse constrains what it is possible for us to know (Foucault 1970). Discourses have a dual nature: they reflect the social order, i.e. they are constructed by it, and simultaneously they construct and shape it (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Burr 1996). Although language is central to discourse, some theorists view discourse as encompassing 'all forms of meaningful semiotic activity' (Blommaert 2005: 3; see also Gee 1996): visual images and representations, the body, architecture, symbols such as flags and so on. There are multiple discourses in any one society and any one individual draws on many discourses, sometimes simultaneously. Discourses are subject to contestation, hybridity and intertextuality, i.e. they interact with and inform each other. Discourses also compete with each other, some becoming more dominant than others at particular times. For analysts working in a critical tradition, the study of discourse is concerned with how sets of discourses work together to construct common sense knowledge (Fairclough 1992), which helps to bring powerful ideologies into being.

Ideology

Ideologies are made up of beliefs and assumptions that appear 'common sense' to members of a society and therefore often remain unquestioned. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998: 25) define ideology as 'any constellation of fundamental or commonsensical, and often normative, ideas and attitudes related to some aspect(s) of social "reality"'. They go on to point out that discourse is 'the most tangible manifestation of ideology' (1998: 26). An analysis of discourses and practices, therefore, can uncover the nature of the normally unexamined ideas, values and beliefs that underpin prevailing ideologies and, as we see later, the implementation of government legislation. The practices and discourses within which ideologies are constructed cut across social life. They may be, as Blackledge (2008: 51) notes, 'explicit and implicit, visible and invisible, official and unofficial, long-term and ephemeral, contested and uncontested, negotiable and non-negotiable'.

Power

The study of discourse and ideology matters because of power and its control by elites. Ideology, discourse and power are inextricably linked, and they intersect with the notion of *hegemony*. In Gramsci's account of hegemony (1971), power is retained by elites not through force but by their ability to project their own way of seeing the world onto those whom they subordinate. When they are able to match up their world view with those who are dominated, then the dominant perspective becomes the common sense one. Thus can generally accepted 'facts' – for example about culture or language – be aligned with the interests of elites. How hegemony is achieved – how and why particular ideologies about cultures and language can become dominant – is arbitrary, maintains Bourdieu (1977). He argues that for a particular view of culture and language to dominate, there must be a consensus, a shared false belief or *misrecognition*. Dominant and dominated alike need to accept, for example, that some languages have greater value than others.

Language ideologies

Pertinent to the analysis of powerful discourses about linguistic diversity is the study of language ideologies (Gal 1979; Heller 1999). Kroskrity (2001) traces the origins of this field of enquiry to Silverstein's (1979) paper 'Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology', in which it is argued that speakers' awareness of a language and their rationalization of its structure and use are critical factors in shaping its evolution; linguistic ideology should therefore be recognized as a level of language, and an important one. Kroskrity (2001: 1) describes language ideologies as 'beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states'. Language ideologies are 'always socially situated and tied to questions of power in societies' (Blackledge 2008: 51). This being so, ideological debates about language are often actually about something else, 'language' serving as a proxy for more proscribed matters such as race, class and ethnicity. Language ideologies can be deeply entrenched: notions of a standard language or of 'one nation one language' are language ideologies that are often made manifest in public discourse: they themselves are interlaced with ideologies of national identity and the dogmas of homogeneism (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998) and monolingualism. We discuss these issues, along with others that are salient in contemporary language debates, later in the chapter.

The notion of common sense in the construction of ideology points to the crucial importance of encompassing the beliefs of speakers who are not language specialists in discussion of debates about linguistic diversity. This is despite them being 'wrong' or 'mistaken' in many of those beliefs, as many linguists have it (see for instance Pinker 1994 chapter 12). In her study of popular beliefs about language standards, Cameron identifies a 'gulf between linguists and lay language-users' (1995: xi), arguing the need to attend to everyday evaluative discourse about language. Kroskrity (2001) makes a similar point: ordinary beliefs are an important level of understanding language ideologies, and can certainly be more powerful than sociolinguistic descriptions in influencing the direction of legislation, for instance. Linguistic diversity may be celebrated by sociolinguists but popular opinion draws on and contributes to powerful discourses about linguistic diversity, for example that it is a problem that needs to be managed; hence we see the invocation of language in debates surrounding migration, of the type that we exemplify later.

Approaches

Critical Discourse Analysis

A field concerned with the study of language ideologies is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a version of discourse analysis that brings together linguistic analysis (drawing principally on Hallidayan linguistics) with social theory (in particular Foucault). The aim of CDA is to 'disarticulate and to critique texts as a way of disrupting common sense' (Luke 1995: 20) and to focus on how 'language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions and bodies of knowledge' (Rogers 2008). Researchers who work in the tradition of CDA (Fairclough 2001; Wodak 2001; van Dijk 1991) are specifically concerned with the ideological nature of discourse; their attention is thus focused on spoken and written texts produced by powerful institutions such as the media, government, advertising, the law and the academy. Analysts seek to understand in particular the material interests that particular texts might serve and how that articulation works on listeners, readers and viewers. CDA has traditionally concentrated on how powerful ideologies such as racism and nationalism are produced and reproduced 'at the top' (Wodak and van Dijk 2000). Although not ignoring the fact that ideology circulates through discourses at all levels of society, critical discourse analysts believe that discourse produced by politicians and the media is more likely to influence public opinion than vice versa. In particular, they stress the need to understand the subtle, indirect and euphemized nature of modern political discourse in which discriminatory attitudes and illiberal policy might be constructed as liberal and egalitarian. This feature of modern political discourse, as it relates to debates about language in the UK, will be addressed later in this chapter, when we discuss the example of the British citizenship test.

Levels of discourse

Blommaert and Verschueren distinguish between two types of discourse data: data produced and controlled by powerful groups in society such as the media, government and academics, and 'grass-roots' data that reflect the way in which 'reigning ideologies have penetrated the commonsense theorising of those lower on the social ladder' (1998: 26). One central challenge for analysts is to show how discourses produced in different places by different speakers and writers are related to each other and work together to bring about hegemonic ideologies. Discourses and the ideologies underpinning them permeate and circulate through society at multiple levels and through historical time (Wodak 2001). This makes the issue of how different levels of discourse work together a knotty one: the same discourse is not uniformly produced throughout any given society. Individuals are unlikely to either completely accept dominant discourses or reject them outright, but rather, they develop 'complex configurations of thought in which some dominant ideological elements find expression in conjunction with individual and group-based understandings' (Augoustinos 1998: 165).

A key concept employed to address this question is *intertextuality.* The principle is that texts do not exist in isolation but connect with and refer to each other, sometimes deliberately and sometimes coincidentally, so that the same repeated and reiterated wordings, statements, themes and images appear across texts in different settings (Luke 1995). The result of this interconnectedness is the creation of a set of available discourses for readers of texts or hearers of spoken discourse (or indeed viewers of visual images). Related to intertextuality is the concept of *recontextualization*, that is, the process by which meanings shift across genres, domains and semiotic systems. When discourses move from text to text and genre to genre in different contexts they become transformed, either by the addition of new elements and voices or by the deletion of previous ones.

Here are three illustrations. In their study of debates about diversity in Belgium, Blommaert and Verschueren show how the discourses produced by politicians echo or respond to those of other 'ideology brokers' such as the media and social scientists and are then 'reproduced through an infinite series of echoes and references in secondary sources' (1998: 27) such as everyday talk and local sites where policy is enacted. Similarly, Milani's (2007: 169) study of the debates about language and citizenship in Sweden reveals a 'discursive network of voices … engaged in the process of policy making' – not just politicians but academics, journalists and individual citizens as well. Blackledge (2004, 2006, 2007), analysing similar debates in the UK, describes the complex connections between different discourses and their movement along a 'discourse chain'. He analyses a series of texts that all appear to connect a lack of proficiency in English to a breakdown in law and order. The chain starts with a speech by a politician made in response to street disturbances between local Asian and white youth and the police in her local constituency. The speech makes some discursive links between a lack of competence in English among elders in the communities where some of the youth live. Blackledge traces how this discourse moves through subsequent commentaries in Parliament, debates in the media and ends finally enshrined in law. Blackledge shows how with each move along the chain and with each recontextualization the discourse becomes 'more powerful and authoritative as it is restated and transformed in increasingly authoritative contexts' (Blackledge 2006: 65).

Dominant discourses about linguistic diversity

In recent decades, public debates about linguistic diversity have intensified in many countries and regions. In this section we outline three of the most dominant discourses in these debates, giving examples from research from around the world. These inter-related discourses are about national identity, homogeneism and monolingualism and the process of 'othering'.

For Bakhtin (1981), heteroglossia, a multiplicity of different ways of speaking that are constantly intermingling with each other, is the normal condition of language. This view is in tension with the notion of a 'unitary language' that is created by centripetal forces of centralization and regimentation that are opposed by centrifugal processes of increasing differentiation. This opposition is a manifestation of the discrepancy between the increasingly well-documented reality of multilingualism, heteroglossia and diversity in language practice in the world's cities, towns and virtual spaces, and the monolingualist – and *monolingualizing* (Heller 1995: 374) – discourses of governments and policies.

One nation one language

Western governments tend to react to multilingualism within their borders as a 'problem', something that must be 'managed' (Hogan-Brun *et al*. 2009). This ideological stance is evident in debates ranging from, *inter alia*, the 'English only' question in the USA, the public funding of translation services, the issue of bi- and multilingual education, immigration policy – especially decisions regarding the country of origin of refugees seeking asylum (Maryns 2006) – and citizenship and language testing regimes. It is also clearly at play in multilingual countries undergoing 'nation building' (e.g. Singapore) and where there are regions with large numbers of speakers of minority languages (e.g. Canada, Spain).

Although the world is very obviously *not* divided up into monolingual states (Blommaert 2006), the modernist dogma of 'one nation one language' persists (see Joseph 2004, 2006; Wright 2004), underpinned by a belief that in order for societies to be strong, stable and 'cohesive' their populations must share a common language (or in some cases a set of official languages). The association of one language with the membership of one national community, sometimes known as *linguistic nationism*, is a relatively recent phenomenon in historical terms, intimately connected to the growth of nation-states and nationalism in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hobsbawm 1990; Billig 1995). Theorists of nations and nationalism, such as Anderson (1983), regard nations as constructions, as 'imagined communities' that rely on language, in particular the mass media, for their construction. The imagined nation is seen as limited by finite boundaries, as a fraternal community of comrades ready to take up arms to defend their territorial integrity or economic interests (Kramsch 1998), linked together with a common culture and – fundamentally – language.

Homogeneism and monolingualism

The utopian nature of the 'nation' is similar to that of the view of language as shared patrimony, a self-contained linguistic system based on a homogeneous social world (Kramsch 1998). As Blommaert (2008b: 88) notes, 'language is one of the prime objects of the national order'. It follows that when nation-states perceive themselves to be under threat in some way, either from the outside or from within, nationalist and linguistic ideologies tend to become more dominant. Joseph (2006: 33) comments: 'multilingualism, language change and non-standard usage all feel like threats to the very foundation of a culture since the language itself is the principal text in which the culture's mental past and its present coherence are grounded'.

The ideology that underpins monolingualism is a theory of language and culture for which Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) have coined the term *homogeneism*. This they define as: '*the idea that the ideal society should be as uniform or homogeneous as possible*' [their italics]. They continue: 'Homogeneity is not only seen as desirable, but also as the norm, i.e. as the most *normal* manifestation of a human society' (1998: 117).

The dominant discourse of monolingualism is the linguistic dimension of the broad ideological stance of homogeneism. Homogeneism, explains Blommaert:

> holds monolingualism (and by extension monoculturalism) to be the norm or the desired ideal for a society, and which axiomatically projects this monolingualism-monoculturalism onto individuals, each individual being 'normally' monolingual and member of one culture.
> *(1999: 427)*

Monolingualist discourse is dominant in part because it is hegemonic: accepted as an unquestioned common sense 'given' by the majority of people in the areas where it is dominant. Hence the dominant position of the standard variety is *reproduced* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Monolingualist policies appeal to, and resonate with, people's beliefs and everyday notions or ideologies about language and standards. For instance, the common sense understanding of the importance of a standard language as a unifying 'glue' for a nation (a case of *misrecognition* in Bourdieu's terms) works in the interests of the political elite whose interests national unity serves. In accepting ideologies about language that quite clearly work against them, they become subject to what Bourdieu terms *symbolic violence*: that is, the symbolic capital of the standard language is used against the dominated with the effect that they remain oppressed (see Simpson and Cooke 2010).

Monolingualist discourse dominates in the development and maintenance of a national identity. As such it is the preserve of the elites in whose interest such nation-building primarily takes place. Blommaert (2008a: 12) contends that 'the space in which languages are situated is invariably a *national* space, the space defined by states that have a name and that can be treated as a fixed unit of knowledge and information'. This is despite the notion of a stable distribution of languages following national boundaries running counter to the lived language experience and polyglot repertoire of people around the world. Mar-Molinero and Stevenson (2006: 1) point to the tension between 'the static framework of the national, with its fixed parameters, and the fluid forms of the transnational'. Yet in many parts of the world, monolingualism is promoted in the interests of nation-building and central power. As Joseph (2006: 45) says, monolingualism demands 'the marginalisation or outright ignoring of anyone who speaks something other than the majority language, or speaks the majority language in a way that diverges from the general norm, or both'.

State- and elite-driven discourses of homogeneism can be found around the world, and somewhat paradoxically are also prominent in many countries that have some sort of official status as bi- or multilingual. In those that are engaged in a process of nation-building, and in those that have strong regionalist nationalist movements the discourses are strongly evident, although debate itself might be more or less muted. In the case of Singapore, Bokhorst-Heng (1999) describes how the linguistic diversity characterizing the Chinese community has been homogenized through government decree and a series of 'Speak Mandarin' campaigns. As she notes, the Prime Minister's statements on language in relation to culture, ethnicity, history and society prove 'how easily certain linguistic ideologies can be transformed or absorbed into political ideologies, and how easily a rhetoric on language, culture, history and identity can become an instrument of societal streamlining and disciplining' (1999: 262). In Flanders

(Belgium), the Flemish language is promoted by elite political groups, and supported by public discourse in the media, as a dimension of Flemish nationalist movements (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998).

To maintain their hegemony, monolingualist discourses need *legitimization*. Political and media discourses of monolingualism and the privileging of a standard variety in the interests of unity tend to invoke an authoritative voice. This imbues legitimacy on the position of arguments that point out, for instance, the decline in standards in schools, the absolute necessity of a citizenship test, that multilingualism is a problem that must be 'managed', or the desirable position that a nation's inhabitants should be expert users of the authorized variety of the dominant language. Such discourses would also lack force if they were not able to make reference to the linguistic (and sociocultural) 'other', to which we now turn.

Othering

Concomitant with a homogenizing discourse, users of languages that are not the dominant language, or of non-standard varieties of the dominant language, are positioned as 'other'. *Othering*, or the creation in discourse of in-groups and out-groups ('we' and 'they'), is strongly evident in much homogenizing discourse in media and public debate, for instance in the campaigns of the English Only movement in the USA. The English Only movement encourages the use only of English in political and educational contexts, and presses for the establishment of English as the country's national language. From this perspective, the business of unifying (or homogenizing) the nation is equated with positioning English as the only acceptable language of the public sphere (Ricento 1996, 2003; Dicker *et al.* 1995). English Only debates are fuelled by a powerful discourse of monolingualism. To illustrate the discursive processes of othering, here is an example from a CDA perspective, which examines pronominalization on US-based electronic discussion forums. Lawton (2008: 93) quotes the following message-board post: 'If we keep on making it easy for people of another country to live here without even as much as learning our language then hell … we'll be over-run soon'. As Lawton points out: 'the poster refers collectively to monolingual and perhaps even Anglo-Americans as "we", while bilingual Spanish-speaking Latinos are collectively referred to as "people of another country"'. Lawton's example demonstrates the point made by those working in the tradition of CDA that 'the public' draws upon discourses that are also prevalent among elites: that is, discourses are produced and reproduced at different levels.

Othering is evident in language teaching, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT) (Pennycook 2001; Holliday 2005; see also Phillipson 1992; Hélot, this volume), echoing the othering in anti-diversity discourse more generally. Holliday discusses an essentialist view of non-Western culture that pervades ELT in his discussion of the 'unproblematic self' and the 'culturally problematic other' (2005: 19–20). In a 'native speakerist narrative', maintains Holliday, the 'non-native speaker' appears 'as a *generalized Other* in which we easily speak of *all* "East Asian students", "Arab teachers" and so on in very similar ways' (2005: 19).

Notably, the term 'speakers of other languages' (and its variants) is increasingly used to refer to migrants who are users of non-standard or non-dominant languages. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998: 131) talk about a 'rhetorical change': 'the gradual replacement of the term "migrants" as a problematized target group in educational policies with the notion of *anderstaligen* "speakers of other languages" or "linguistically other"'. Pennycook (2001: 122) wryly re-works the well-used acronym *ESOL* as: *English for speakers of othered languages.* In some sense then, the learning and teaching of English has – like language itself – become a proxy for other debates. Hence in the flow of public discourse associated with the English Only argument, things are said about the learning of English that would probably not be said about ethnicity and immigration. We take this point up again in the next section, where our examples are from the UK.

Linguistic diversity debates exemplified

In this section we illustrate some of the tensions between the reality of multilingualism on the one hand, and on the other, monolingualizing discourses. Our examples show how the tensions have manifested themselves in the UK since 2001. Several dominant discourses and ideologies from across different domains combine together in debates about linguistic diversity and the legislation introduced in this period: immigration, British identity, multiculturalism (and its purported failure), national security, 'social cohesion' and the distribution of resources – all of which draw on homogenizing nationalist and monolingual ideologies, 'othering' discourses and the problem-management notion of linguistic diversity.

The common sense ideologies underlying the UK debates, policies and legislation surrounding linguistic diversity are:

- that linguistic diversity and multilingualism (and by extension, immigration) are problems and they need to be managed; that some members of ethnic minority communities are unwilling to learn English; that they choose to live in enclaves; and that this is detrimental to social or 'community' cohesion.
- that Britain is a monolingual country, or at best tolerates a certain degree of regional bilingualism in Wales and parts of Scotland: that is, the ideology of one nation one language.
- that resources are scarce and that the costs incurred by linguistic diversity in public institutions such as health and education are very high and cannot be met from the public purse without jeopardizing other, more deserving public services.

Linguistic diversity as a problem

Since 2001, there has been a shift of emphasis in UK policy away from broad official support for multiculturalism to one which foregrounds 'social cohesion' and 'integration', which some regard as a return to an explicitly assimilationist approach to minority ethnic populations (van Avermaet 2009). Such an approach rests on the acceptance of the proposition that the policy of multiculturalism has failed and that 'too much diversity' (Goodhart 2004) is the main cause of a breakdown in cohesion. This is often played out in debates about culture and religion and what Vertovec and Wessendorf (2005: 15) call 'the iconic issues of diversity' – for example, about the wearing of the veil in schools and the vilification of undifferentiated Muslim 'communities' and practices (i.e. othering discourses) – and, increasingly, language. Indeed, media and government discourse since 2001 has been concerned with issues of language with an intensity and frequency previously unknown in British public life. However, as we noted earlier, studies in language ideology consistently point out that debates about linguistic diversity are rarely about language alone (Woolard and Scheiffelin 1994; Blackledge 2008): they are often proxies for other concerns such as race relations and immigration, and about how public resources should be prioritized.

The connection in public discourse between language and other, broader issues such as security, immigration, racial integration and 'social cohesion' gained prominence after certain events in 2001, both in England, namely the disturbances in the north of England involving Asian and White youths and the police in July that year, and on the world stage ('9/11'). High profile inquiries after the July disturbances (e.g. Home Office 2001) proposed that communities were 'fractured' and segregated along religious, ethnic and linguistic lines and that people in those communities were living 'parallel lives'. This marked a shift in public discourse: previous analyses of urban disturbances (e.g. the Scarman Report into the Brixton riots in the 1980s) had traced the cause to the deprivation and marginalization of some ethnic minority youths, but not on their refusal to integrate (Young 2003). In 2001, however, the prevailing discourse was that separatism and people living apart is a choice, and that immigrants are *unwilling* to learn English and therefore to integrate. The notion of people living parallel lives arose frequently in political and media discourse, and the analyses of the events in northern England in 2001, although very specific to certain towns, were generalized to other populations.

Language and citizenship

At the same time, legislation was being prepared that would tighten controls on immigration and introduce for the first time a test of language and citizenship for those wishing to become British citizens. In addition to the English language and citizenship test, the White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (Home Office 2002) proposed changes in the law regarding war criminals, work permits, people trafficking, illegal entry, marriage visas and legislation covering refugees seeking asylum. Thus, competence in English became closely tied, in discourse and in law, to immigration, national identity and citizenship. Drawing on the experience of the 2001 disturbances, the White Paper and the subsequent 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act stressed 'the need for us to foster and renew the social fabric of our communities and rebuild a sense of common citizenship, which embraces the different and diverse experiences of today's Britain'. The key to this would be English as a common language, which would enable all individuals 'to engage as active citizens in economic, social and political life' (2002: 30).

Some commentators have pointed out that there is little evidence to suggest either that ghettoization is more than a minor trend in Britain or that it is on the rise (Poulsen and Johnston 2006). Amin (2008) notes that the very specific problems affecting particular neighbourhoods or particular groups within some communities have been generalized across the board: 'the parallel lives led by elders, veiled women and very young children in a small number of neighbourhoods in Britain should not be read as the proxy for most minority ethnic communities' (2008: 1). There is a similar absence of research evidence confirming the notion that speaking languages other than English leads to a breakdown of social cohesion. Despite this, the links between the two have been made frequently in political discourse since 2001. The Member of Parliament for one of the troubled towns in northern England spoke of the need for minority families to use English in the home 'in addition to Panjabi and Bangla' (see Blackledge 2005: 97) in order to prevent educational disadvantage. This was closely followed by the now notorious comments of the former Home Secretary, David Blunkett, who wrote of the 'schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships' in bilingual families (2002: 77).

In order to legitimize their discourses and to distance themselves from extreme right-wing ideologies, politicians who link English competence with citizenship and social cohesion usually couch their point in 'liberal' terms, that is, English is necessary for everyone to access their rights, to be able to fully participate in British society and to avoid being economically and socially marginalized. According to Blackledge (2005), masking illiberal proposals by embedding them in liberal discourse is one of the chief characteristics of British political debate. In Britain, though, as the first decade of the twenty-first century progressed, the discourse of politicians became less liberal and less apologetic about their views regarding

English, linguistic minorities and social cohesion. This might be because the public became more used to the terms of the debate. Perhaps also the debate aligned closer to right-leaning popular opinion on race and immigration from which governments had previously distanced themselves. This series of quotes from senior politicians demonstrates how their stance towards English learned by migrants had hardened.

Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister, in a speech given shortly after 7 July 2005, announcing a package of measures to combat Islamic extremism, stated: 'There are people who are isolated in their own communities who have been here for 20 years and still do not speak English. That worries me because there is a separateness that may be unhealthy'.

Margaret Hodge, the former Minister for Work and Pensions, said in October 2005: 'We have to make the learning of English an unavoidable must … immigrants have to see language acquisition as an essential part of the contract they enter into when they settle in Britain. People should not opt out of their obligations on the back of multiculturalism'.

Gordon Brown, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, said in June 2006: 'People who come into this country, who are part of our community, should play by the rules … I think learning English is part of that. I think that understanding British history is part of that … I would insist on large numbers of people who have refused to learn our language that they must do so. If someone is unemployed, who does not speak English, they should have to learn English to make themselves employable'.

The Britishness debate

A theme running through the language and citizenship agenda and surrounding public discourses is that of national identity and 'Britishness'. In the UK 'national identity' is complex and fraught: first, the UK is a multinational state characterized by struggle over the status of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and by the common conflation of 'English' with 'British'; second, because the relationship of British 'subjects' to the Crown is historically problematic (Cohen 1994); and third because of the association of British nationalism with colonialism and construction along racial lines. British culture has been represented for much of its history as 'white' and English-speaking, a representation that has been contested by critics such as Gilroy (1987). Overt nationalism tends, therefore, to be associated with traditional conservatives and shunned by liberals or those on the left who wish to dissociate themselves from Britain's colonial past. The fact that nationalism is contested, and not embraced overtly by many, however, does not mean that it is not ever-present in day-to-day life: as Billig (1995: 6) points out, national identity is constantly flagged in the media through routine symbols and habits of language, and 'nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition'.

The report of the committee set up to develop the citizenship agenda, *The New and the Old* (Home Office 2003: 11), claimed that 'we neither need to define Britishness too precisely nor to redefine it', although this disavowal is less convincing given that much of the citizenship test is about British political, legal and cultural customs and traditions. The key to 'Britishness', said the report, is to be found in respect for 'the laws, elected parliamentary and democratic political structures, traditional values of mutual tolerance':

> To be British is to respect those over-arching specific institutions, values, beliefs and traditions that bind us all, the different nations and cultures, together in peace and in a legal order.
>
> *(ibid.)*

The other thing that 'binds' Britain together in this ideology is of course the English language. Although the British citizenship agenda stresses respect for difference and promotes the UK as a multicultural society, this does not stretch to an acceptance of the UK as a multi*lingual* society (apart from the concession that people can take the citizenship test in Welsh or Scottish Gaelic). The citizenship agenda does not permit the possibility that a person can be a 'citizen in the full sense' (Home Office 2003: 13) in any language other than English. According to the rhetoric of the handbook 'the English language itself' is the key to the participation of diverse communities in a common culture sharing common values – values that include respect for difference and diversity, but not, it would seem, linguistic difference and diversity. The ideological assumptions underpinning the belief that multilingualism is a problem are that only English (in its standard variety) can serve as an efficient means of communication, that migrants have no existing language tools that might be of use to them in the UK and that only if they learn English will they increase their opportunities for work, education and social mobility. This ideology, however, does not take into account the linguistic and cultural resources held by migrants – resources that in fact may well help, not hinder, their integration into many multicultural neighbourhoods (van Avermaet 2009; Vertovec 2006).

Contesting monolingualism

In many places, monolingual ideologies are strengthening and becoming enshrined in law. Some countries have seen legislation that imposes language and citizenship tests on prospective new citizens, for example. It is striking that these contexts are societies where the day-to-day reality is one of increasing linguistic diversity. Globalization, the attendant mass movements of people and dramatic developments in communications technologies have made multilingualism and hybridity in contemporary language use ever more prominent, and have given rise to explorations of notions such as cultural hybridity (Werbner and Madood 1997), new ethnicities (Hall 1992), 'third spaces' (Bhabha 1994; Kramsch 1993), liminality (Turner 1969; Rampton 1999; Baynham and Simpson 2010) and transnationalism (Stevenson 2006). These post-modern notions challenge modernist certainties of 'grand narratives', especially those of nationality, race and of cultures with fixed boundaries. There is a discrepancy, in fact, between post-modern realities and modernist responses to them (Blommaert 2008a: 2).

Sociolinguistic features of individuals' communicative repertoire such as codeswitching (Lin, this volume) and language crossing (Rampton and Charalambous, this volume) are foregrounded in areas of social life not previously noted for their linguistic variety. The emergence of new ethnicities and global cultures is accompanied by novel and transnational ways of using language (Harris 2006; Pennycook 2007; Block 2007). The dissociation of language from geographical space in online interaction also contributes to the destabilization of linguistic and cultural boundaries (Lam 2004; Leppänen and Peuronen, this volume). Moreover, some sociolinguists, pointing to the instability of language, the socially constructed idea of language as a concept, and the lack of correspondence between language varieties and national borders, increasingly question whether it is reasonable to talk in terms of discrete languages at all. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) take the position that language, conceptions of *languageness* and the metalanguage used to describe languages are inventions.

These multilingual realities challenge and potentially undermine monolingualist discourses. At a supranational level monolingualism is probably not the dominant force it is at the level of the nation-state. For example, in the European Union, multilingualism is promoted as the key to European citizenship and economic prosperity. And on a more individual level, multilingualism is valued as a personal asset, albeit unevenly: for people in the UK, for instance, the acquisition of 'modern foreign languages' – i.e. languages such as French and Japanese learned to be used 'abroad' – tends to be privileged over the learning of widely spoken 'community languages' – i.e. those spoken among migrant populations in the UK. Multilingualism remains most problematic at the national level: as we have seen in this chapter, discourses about multilingualism tend to treat it as a problem produced by migrant communities. In cases where diversity – including linguistic diversity and multilingualism – is not denied or ignored by elites at the centre, it might still be appropriated and commodified, as Heller (2003) records in her description of the emergence of state-sanctioned versions of heteroglossic practices. Diversity becomes a far more problematic notion – for elites and non-elites alike – when its contestation is overt; that is, when there is a demand to accommodate on equal grounds, for instance, different deep-seated cultural practices like religions.

It is not an entirely uneven world. Collins notes that people find agency even where the dominant structures may seem monolithic. He maintains that 'we need to allow for dilemmas and intractable oppositions; for divided consciousness, not just dominated minds; … for creative, discursive agency in conditions prestructured, to be sure, but also fissured in unpredictable and dynamic ways' (1993: 134; see also Lin 2008). This agency can be witnessed in the emergence of new hybrid codes and practices such as 'crossing' among youth in multicultural towns and cities documented by Rampton (2005) and Harris (2006). And agency can be achieved even in contexts where power differentials are quite extreme – for example in asylum hearings. In these situations, as Shuman and Bohmer (2004) have shown, counter-discourses *can* get heard, when they are presented in ways that align with authorized practices (for example, by observing established patterns of courtroom interaction), when social actors engage in a kind of strategic compliance.

Related topics

Language rights; linguistic diversity and education; multilingualism and social exclusion; multilingualism and the media; heteroglossia.

Further reading

Blackledge, A. (2005) *Discourse and Power in a Multilingual World*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

(An in-depth critical analysis of the way a monolingual ideology is reproduced and achieves hegemony in a multilingual society, exemplified by the 2001 'race riots' in England.)

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(An edited collection examining the role of language ideologies and discursive practices in the formation of states and the creation of identities.)

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