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Policy and adult migrant language education in the UK

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1. Introduction

This chapter is about adult first generation migrants, and how their language learning is supported – or not – in UK government policy. Adult migrants are defined for the purposes of this chapter as people beyond school age who move from another (nation) state to the UK with the intention of staying more or less permanently and building their life in their new country. In the UK, as in many other English-dominant countries, language education for adult migrants focuses on the teaching and learning of English, and the field known as ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages. This chapter adopts a critical stance towards the intertwining of English language education, ESOL and immigration policy in the UK, noting the unpredictability and inconsistency of the relationship.

The overall environment of adult migrant language learning is itself inherently unpredictable, given that a defining feature of 21st Century globalisation is the mass movement of people from potentially any country to any other. Around 244 million people in the world are migrants, representing approximately 3.3% of the world's population (United Nations 2017), and many more are on the move internally, within national borders. In the UK between 1993 and 2015 the population born outside the country more than doubled, from 3.8 million to 8.7 million (ONS 2017), and motives for their migration are far from uniform. People move because of a shortage of labour in certain sectors, or to be with their families, or as refugees to escape war, civil unrest, poverty, or fear of persecution. Much migration involves risky journeys to what people regard as centres of successful modernity (Mishra 2017), including the countries of Europe, which have recently faced hundreds of thousands of asylum applications. In 2016, more than 1.2 million people sought asylum in Europe (Lyons & Duncan 2017). In the UK, asylum applications, which peaked at 103,100 in 2002, ran at 38,500 in 2016 (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; ONS, 2017).

The movement of large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds from all over the world creates spaces where languages and cultures come into contact in new ways, indicating cultural and linguistic diversity of a type and scale not previously experienced. Diversity extends beyond countries of origin, and which first language people claim to speak. The term *superdiversity*, coined as a description of the 'diversification of diversity' (Vertovec 2006: 3), aims to capture this new paradigm of uncertainty. In superdiverse contexts, groups of adult migrants learning the dominant language of their new country will themselves often be diverse, in terms of language background and geographical origin, and also in educational trajectory and schooled experience, command of literacy in an expert language, immigration status and reasons for migrating, age and gender, and employment, *inter alia*. Individuals who share a similar background differ as well of course, in terms of personality, a sense of agency, motivation and investment in learning, and aspirations for the future. Language education for adult migrants ought therefore to be viewed through an intersectional lens as it cannot be considered in isolation from students' and potential students' ethnic or gendered positioning, their social status (often as unwelcome migrants), the

conditions in their new home, often facing poverty, precarity and housing stress, or the social, cultural and political contexts through which they make their trajectories – including the new contexts faced by migrants following the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

The response of national governments to large-scale and unpredictable mobility – and to the growth of superdiverse populations – has been inconsistent and paradoxical, with a tendency towards a progressive strengthening of borders and control. The response of successive UK governments is no exception here. Notably, the English language is central to debates about migration control, citizenship, nationality and belonging. The emphasis on the English language as a condition of citizenship and as a marker of integration is now well-established in policy. Indeed in the absence of targeted intervention strategies for integration, English language tuition for adult migrants has in the past two decades been the main means of fostering integration (Spencer 2011). This makes ESOL an area of English language education which rubs up very closely and immediately with immigration and citizenship policy, with a concomitant weight of expectation on ESOL as a mechanism for integration, to the discomfort of many ESOL practitioners. At the same time, the field of ESOL itself suffers from a largely incoherent approach at national policy level bordering on neglect (in England at least, if not in the other countries of the UK), with responsibility for its funding in particular oscillating between government departments, and without overall direction.

In this chapter I will sketch out the key issues around ESOL in policy over the past two decades. In section 2 I locate ESOL in current government policy, noting how the situation in England differs from that in Scotland and Wales, and I note attempts by non-government policy actors to press for strategic direction for the field. In so doing, I draw attention to the pervasive monolingualist ideology which informs policy debates about adult migrant language education. In Section 3 I develop the discussion about language ideologies further, identifying the connection between a dominant monolingualism in policy and media rhetoric and populist anti-immigration sentiment evident in public and media discourses. This link became very obvious in the run-up to, and post- the 2016 referendum which led to Britain leaving the European Union. In the subsequent section (section 4) I examine specific immigration policies which require a certain level of English. These requirements are either implicit, e.g. the Life in the UK naturalisation and citizenship test which can only be taken in English, Welsh or Scots Gaelic, or explicit, in the form of language tests which need to be passed before entry visas are granted or settlement is allowed. In section 5 I conclude by challenging the policy neglect of ESOL. I draw attention to the multilingual reality of contemporary communication in Britain's urban and increasingly its rural areas, and I note policy-making at scales other than that of national government, which at least recognises this reality.

2. ESOL in current UK policy

The treatment of ESOL in national policy has been inconsistent, and has followed divergent paths in the different countries of the UK, as I have described elsewhere (Simpson 2015). The response to the language learning needs of post-second world war migrants to the UK was at first typically *ad hoc* everywhere, and organised on a voluntary basis. In the late 1970s and 1980s the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) as it was then known, became more organised and better funded, and in some

places classes were set up in colleges and workplaces (Rosenberg 2006; Cooke & Simpson 2008). In this chapter I pick up the time-line at the turn of the century. In England, early in the first New Labour government, a review of basic skills (the Moser report, DfEE 1999) recommended implementing a national strategy, Skills for Life, to reduce the number of adults with low levels of basic skills, literacy and numeracy. ESOL was not originally a 'skill for life' but politically-active ESOL teachers and researchers viewed its inclusion as a chance for proper funding, as well as an opportunity for professionalisation, and after successful lobbying it was included. Skills for Life brought with it the creation of a national curriculum for ESOL, classroom materials to support that curriculum, teacher-training and inspection regimes, and qualifications mapped against national standards. The *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* (AECC; DfES 2001) was statutory under Skills for Life, and to the present provides a framework for syllabus planning and assessment in many contexts in England.

The statutory curriculum dictated the nature of the English language education that adult migrants were able to gain access to, and the way they were positioned in formal education. As Cooke and Simpson maintained (2009: 22), 'by bringing ESOL under the Skills for Life umbrella, the Government effectively bought control of ESOL.' In 2006 the report of the NIACE enquiry on ESOL, *More than a Language*, noted both the high cost of English language provision, as well as the ambiguous status of the field, both as an adult basic skill (at Entry level) and, at higher levels, as more general foreign language instruction for migrants. Ultimately the then New Labour Government signalled the end of ESOL as a central component of Skills for Life, relinquishing both responsibility for, and control of, the field. While some central government funding via the Skills Funding Agency was to remain, the New Approach to ESOL (2009) required ESOL outside Further Education colleges to be coordinated locally, at the level of local authorities and councils. The election of the Conservative-dominated coalition government in 2010 brought with it 'austerity measures', including cuts to local government funding, which severely compromised local authorities' ability to fulfil their obligations to coordinate English language provision for adult migrants.

ESOL in England became a fragmented field (Simpson 2012) and so it remains at the time of writing. It is also one which is poorly-resourced. Central government funding for ESOL, particularly that provided by Further Education colleges, is mainly through the Education and Skills Funding Agency's adult skills budget. This fell from £203 million (2009-10) to £90 million in 2015-16 (Martin 2017). Other government funding for ESOL arrives in an unstructured way as project funding. From 2013 to 2016 the Department for Communities and Local Government funded £6m worth of projects to 'engage isolated adults with poor or no English', under the Community-based English Language Competition (DCLG 2013). Since 2015 the British Government has made £10m available for ESOL under the Syrian Refugee Resettlement programme (Home Office 2017). In 2016, the Government launched the Controlling Migration Fund, with the express purpose of easing the pressure that migration puts on local services, which included ESOL-related projects in its remit (DCLG 2016). This piecemeal and partial approach to the funding of ESOL at the scale of national policy means that much responsibility for ESOL provision has become shouldered by the voluntary sector. Though there is some excellent innovatory practice here, volunteer teachers are often inexperienced and untrained, centres are poorly resourced, and provision itself lacks cohesion within and beyond local areas (Simpson 2012; 2015). The source of some of the current funding is

also problematic and divisive. For example, as is clear from the Syrian Refugee Resettlement programme, Syrians have been singled out for special attention in migration policy. It is an indication of the power of the media that there was a profound shift in public attitudes towards Syrian refugees in late 2015, arguably due, at least in part, to the widespread coverage of stories such as that of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, who drowned with his mother and brother off the Turkish coast while attempting to reach Europe. Syrian refugees currently benefit from European-funded resettlement programmes which attract more funding than migrants of other nationalities, who – as the very title of the Controlling Migration Fund suggests – are positioned in policy as a problem.

Elsewhere in the UK, ESOL has followed a somewhat different path in the early 21st century. In Scotland, where there have long been settled ethnic minority communities, and where inward migration is encouraged in national policy, the demand for ESOL classes has experienced something of a boom in recent years. Glasgow in particular became host to a sizeable number of refugees seeking asylum who were removed from London and the south east of England under a programme of dispersal after 2000. The other major rise in numbers came after the Eastward expansion of the European Union in 2004 when workers started to come to Scotland from the new accession states. In response the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) ratified a suite of qualifications which come under the same framework as mainstream Scottish education, with levels entitled Access, Intermediate and Higher. Moreover, the ESOL Higher qualification is accepted as a university entrance level language qualification, which is particularly helpful for school-age ESOL students. In 2007 The Adult ESOL Strategy for Scotland was introduced; its main work was to prepare a national curriculum. With its tradition of a 'social practices' approach to adult literacy, Scotland's curriculum is different in conception and principle to that in England, and avoids some of the problems that have attracted criticism there, namely that it is prescriptive and too skills-based. The Scottish Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework is flexible, and is oriented towards guidance rather than prescription. The strategy itself was updated in 2015 with the aim of further establishing the field as an aspect of public services, and of ensuring that ESOL provision is coherent at national, regional and local level (see Education Scotland 2015). Recently, too, the Welsh Government distanced itself from ESOL policy in England with the release of an ESOL Policy for Wales (Welsh Government 2014).

The fragmentation, incoherence of provision and neglect of ESOL national policy in England have led to calls for a similar strategic framework for ESOL at national policy level. Grounds for this rest on the idea that a coherent strategy will enable local authorities to provide a comprehensive service, and that anomalies in provision can be ironed out. The role of ESOL in promoting the social integration of migrants is also present in discussions about the strategic direction of ESOL. The ESOL teacher's organisation NATECLA is leading on the development of a strategy for ESOL in England, drawing on the experience of Scotland for support. Its rationale rests on arguments about timing and about integration: that is, that immigration is a major issue in the public perception; there are uncertainties about the future implications of the Brexit vote; and that social integration remains a key plank of government rhetoric if not concrete planning (NATECLA 2016).

The think-tank DEMOS published an influential report in 2014, *On Speaking Terms*, in which integration and social cohesion are also prominent:

> England lacks a national ESOL strategy. ESOL in England is not functioning as well as it could – or as well as it will need to, to meet the demand associated with demographic projections… A coherent ESOL policy should be fit to unlock migrant capabilities, save costs to public services in the long term, and promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society.
>
> (Paget & Stevenson 2014: 9-10)

This position is elaborated in the conclusions of the DEMOS document, which makes very prominent the relationship between English language education and integration, and indeed the notion that the need for migrant integration provides the rationale for ESOL. As the authors go on to say: 'it is not just individuals who stand to gain; unlocking migrants' potential will result in widespread and long-term benefits to society as a whole' (Paget & Stevenson 2014: 81).

Underpinning these benign pronouncements is an understanding of the linguistic dimension of integration which relates only to gaining competence in the dominant language, English. This is problematic for three reasons. First, it fails to recognise migrants' multilingualism as a resource for meaning-making. This leads to a disregard of the need that people have to develop competence in English as part of a multilingual repertoire – they will after all be integrating into a multilingual society, regardless of how it is typically represented in policy – and to the role of ESOL practice in supporting this. Second, it betrays an understanding of integration as being primarily the responsibility of the newcomer (*they* must integrate with *us*), without considering the role of the established population in processes of settlement and belonging. And third, there is a connection between a discourse of English as a necessity for integration, well-meaning though it may be, and the rhetoric around migration and the rise of linguistic xenophobia in the UK, particularly evident around the time of the Brexit vote and since. I turn to these issues now.

3. Policy and public discourses about language and migration

Ways of speaking about language and migration in policy circles and the public sphere help shape the policy landscape of adult migrant language education in the UK. These ways of speaking – or *discourses* – are informed by ideology, and in particular by *language ideologies*, defined by Irvine (1989: 255) as 'the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.' A central language ideological debate in recent years has been around the position of English in the construction of national identity, that is, the connection of the English language to the notion of 'Britishness'. Adult migrant language education is part of this debate, one in which migrant language learners frequently find themselves centre-stage. For equating the English language with national identity creates categories of those who belong, i.e. English speakers, and those who do not, non-English speakers, with the latter being the object of concerns over social cohesion, integration and security. These concerns grew through the years of New Labour governments from 1997 to 2010, and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that followed. Recently, a more virulent discourse has also permeated political and public debate: later I identify a discursive link between the rise of linguistic xenophobia and the Brexit vote in 2016.

Language, social cohesion and the securitisation of ESOL

The UK is very obviously multilingual, in many of its urban and increasingly its rural areas. It is nonetheless often represented as a monolingual state, or one that at best tolerates a degree of regional bilingualism in Wales and Scotland. The association of a British national identity with English is underpinned by an ideological position whereby in order for British society to be cohesive and stable, its population must share a common language. A 'one nation one language' ideology is evident not just in Britain of course: similar monolingualist discourse is a key feature of nation state-building almost everywhere. There is nonetheless variation between states in the rationale for supporting and maintaining the dominance of the standard language, associated with the social, political and historical trajectory of particular nations. In UK language policy, even while ESOL in practice suffers some neglect, understanding, using and being tested in the standard language of the new country is not only a proxy for national unity, but is a *sine qua non* of integration and social cohesion, and increasingly the countering of religious and political extremism.

The association between English language use and testing (on one hand) and security (on the other) can be traced to a string of government-commissioned reports in the early 2000s which together promoted a discourse that projected a lack of English as a cause for community tension (Blackledge 2006). Khan (2016) maintains that these reports and the policy response to them lie at the root of the *securitization* of migrant language education in the UK. He draws attention to the Cantle report, published in 2002 in the aftermath of social disturbances in towns across northern England between British Asian youths and far-right National Front supporters in the previous year. Cantle concluded that racially segregated 'parallel lives' dividing white British and British Asian communities were due in part at least to supposedly low English language proficiency among the British Asians.

If, as appears to be the case, language is implicated in resurgent ideologies of national identity, the language policies that developed in the wake of the Cantle report, and the ideologies that lie behind them, link back to the broader, contradictory politics of migration and community relations in the UK. The discourse of 'community cohesion' supported in particular by Tony Blair's New Labour government in the early years of the 21st Century signalled a broad retreat from multiculturalism as a mode of managing race and community relations. At the same time a policy of 'managed migration', that is, privileging only certain types of migrant applying to enter and stay in the country, was presented to the public and the electorate on the premise that immigration could be both controlled and economically advantageous. This suggests a tension in government and social life at the time between the promotion of migration for its economic benefits (on one hand), and (on the other) populist arguments regarding the perceived negative impact of migration on established communities and a view that causes of social tensions in inner-city areas were essentially cultural (Kundani 2007) and even linguistic.

Cantle's conclusions were embraced by members the government of the time. For instance, and likewise side-stepping the greater effect of economic precarity on social cohesion, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett focused on the 'schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships' in bilingual families (2002: 77). This time also saw

the introduction of the Life in the UK test in 2002, and the associated English language requirements for citizenship discussed below. It was to be one of many similar pronouncements by senior politicians which were to come in the following years, drawing a connection between social cohesion – and later the threat of terrorism –and migrant language use. Three years on from 2002, immediately after bomb attacks in London in July 2005, Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, said: '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.' Some years on, the same discourse was evident in the rhetoric of another Prime Minister, the Conservative David Cameron, who suggested in 2011 that immigrants who do not speak English cause 'discomfort and disjointedness' in their own neighbourhoods.

Regardless of the evidence – or lack of it – that associates competence in English with social unrest and a realistic threat of extremism, such political rhetoric encourages the creation of a perceived danger that migrants, and indeed the children of migrants, pose. This perception has been strengthened by media discourses in the past two decades which discursively position migrants in general in negative terms. As Gabrielatos & Baker memorably identify, migrants are represented in the British press as 'fleeing, sneaking or flooding' into the UK (2008). When migrants are constantly and widely talked and written about as unwelcome outsiders, it becomes possible for them to be viewed in political discourse, and in policy itself, as a risk. Migrants become people whose way of life, as Bigo (2002) puts it, calls for measures to ensure integration. These include the requirements for settlement – including language requirements – which I outline in section 4, and according to which they must demonstrate their willingness to comply and their ability to integrate.

Linguistic xenophobia and Brexit

In 2013 Theresa May as UK Home Secretary introduced a new Immigration and Naturalisation Bill, which highlighted the fact that policy creates categories of migrant, who can then be treated in law in certain ways according to the category that they happen to fall into. Among other things, the purpose of the new Bill was: 'To make provision about immigration law; to limit, or otherwise make provision about, access to services, facilities and employment by reference to immigration status' (UK Government 2014). May's own aim for the bill was to create – in her words – 'a really hostile environment for illegal migrants' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 10 Oct 2013). The discourse and legislation about 'illegal' people was reinforced by a Government publicity campaign at the same time, which sent vans into areas of high immigration, on the side of which was prominently displayed the message: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest'. Such blunt practices ignore the complexity of migration and its motivations: people move for all sorts of reasons, including escape from poverty as well as from political oppression, for example. Categorising migrants does however make them more subject to regulation. With Theresa May now as Prime Minister, her party's manifesto for the election of 2017 still positioned immigration as being in need of control. Certain categories of migrant were valued, others not, and the aspiration to cut net inward migration to the 'tens of thousands' per year remained Government policy:

> The nature of the immigration we have – more skilled workers and university students, less abuse and fewer unskilled migrants – better suits the national

> interest. But with annual net migration standing at 273,000, immigration to Britain is still too high. It is our objective to reduce immigration to sustainable levels, by which we mean annual net migration in the tens of thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands we have seen over the last two decades.
>
> (2017 Conservative Party Manifesto)

These sentiments align with similar discourses in the media, where a campaign of misinformation about migration was fought by sections of the national press, particularly in the run-up to June 2016 when the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Front page headlines such as 'Britain is a Migrant Magnet', 'We Must Stop the Migrant Invasion' and 'Britain Must Ban Migrants' (all from the right-wing anti-EU newspaper the *Daily Express*) underline the unpleasantness of the debate at the time, and this political and media rhetoric doubtless played a role in the outcome of the Brexit vote. European Union membership has for a variety of reasons never had full support across the political spectrum: indeed although the Labour Party campaigned against Brexit in the 2016 referendum, withdrawal from the then European Community was Labour Party policy between 1975 and 1983 (Sassoon 2010). Yet while never about one thing only, it is clear that by the time of the 2016 referendum, the idea of leaving the EU had become associated with the discontent, fear and anxiety about immigration. Anti-immigrant prejudice (and in turn increased support for the campaign to leave the EU) was in part associated with 'negative intergroup contact experience' (Meleady et al 2017). It had also been stirred up by the media and had been exploited by politicians (particularly those belonging to the extreme populist right-wing party UKIP) over many years.

The outcome of the referendum was interpreted by some as permission to express hatred towards foreigners through abuse and violence and racist hate crime (Burnett 2016). Some such violence took the form of linguistic xenophobia, symbolic linguistic violence involving abuse directed towards people heard speaking another language, or speaking with a 'foreign' accent. Linguistic xenophobia can range from subtle disapproval, to open expressions of hostility, to extreme physical violence. The blog of the project Translation and Translanguaging[1] quotes Barbara Drozdowicz, director of a project partner the East European Advice Centre in London, describing the issue and its impacts on its victims:

> Poles and other Eastern Europeans have been victims of racially-motivated harassment at work and in schools for the last 10 years at least. Symbolic linguistic violence, for example singling Polish workers out to ban them from using the Polish language during breaks, has been so deeply normalised that many of us treat it as a deal we have to accept when moving to the UK. Linguistic responses follow: many Eastern Europeans refusing to use their mother tongue among friends on public transport, or changing first names to make them sound more British. The post-referendum wave of hate speech acts only as a reminder that migrant and BME communities are always vulnerable to tensions lurking under the cover of political correctness and words hurt as much as slap in the face.

The UK is moving into an uncertain post-EU future. Many migrant language learners are European Union citizens, and might have previously felt confident of their place in the

UK. Now, their political belonging is not as certain as it was prior to the referendum. Moreover, they – like other migrants – will be aware of a public and political discourse which positions them as less than welcome.

4. Language and immigration policy

The linguistic ideologies that inform the discourses of monolingualism and securitization discussed above are also tangibly evident in specific policies relating to citizenship. The UK has formal language proficiency requirements for meeting the demands of citizenship, naturalisation and right to remain, and even to enter the country. I now move from political discourse to actual policy, focusing on how language tests are used as instruments of immigration policy, and I consider the justice of using such tests for these powerful purposes.

Top-down policy imposition

Language proficiency has become progressively embedded into UK immigration policy and law. This is not a UK-specific phenomenon: by 2016, 28 of the 36 Council of Europe member countries (78%) had some kind of language requirement for migration purposes, up from 58% in 2007 (ALTE 2016: 9). Other chapters in this volume address various aspects of obtaining citizenship for newcomers, and how citizenship implies the acceptance of rights and benefits as well as civil obligations. In this section I examine the language requirements for newcomers. Across the global north, two types of evidence are commonly required for migration purposes, that provided by language tests (for entry and right to remain) and some kind of Knowledge of Society test (for naturalisation, often in combination with a language test). Knowledge of Society tests are normally only allowed to be taken in the dominant language or languages of the new country, and are thus *de facto* language and literacy tests. The implementation of these tests varies. The language proficiency required to pass them ranges from high (as in the UK and the Netherlands) to low (Spain and the US). They can also be cripplingly expensive.

There was no condition to show evidence of suitability for naturalisation by means of an assessment prior to 2002. The White Paper introduced by Home Secretary David Blunkett in 2001, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* sets out the case for a requirement for knowledge of English in terms of its common-sense association with social cohesion: 'We need to develop a sense of civic identity and shared values, and knowledge of the English language […] can undoubtedly support this objective' (Home Office 2001: 32). The introduction and raising of the requirements of language competence in UK immigration policy have followed a steep trajectory since then. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 required UK residents seeking British citizenship to show, through a test, 'a sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic and about life in the UK' and to take a citizenship oath and a pledge at a civic ceremony. The test is multiple-choice, taken on a computer, with questions drawn from the publication *Life in the UK: A Journey to Citizenship*, known as the Life in the UK handbook. Originally, those who had not reached the level of English necessary to take the test, or who did not have the required level of literacy, were entitled to enrol on an approved course of English language in a citizenship context; they were deemed to have achieved a satisfactory knowledge of 'Life in the UK' if they progressed one level according to a standardised English language test benchmarked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

In 2007 the citizenship rules were extended to those applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain. That is, passing the Life in the UK test was no longer only associated with the *right* to apply for citizenship; instead it became a *requirement* for those wishing to remain in the country. In 2009 a tiered system of 'managed migration' into the UK was introduced, involving selection of migrants according to the qualities they possess which are deemed desirable by the state. For most visas under this system, a certain level of English language proficiency is an eligibility requirement. And in 2010 an English language requirement was introduced for spouse or partner visas prior to their entry into the UK, thus effectively extending the nation's political borders well beyond its geographical ones. This has profound implications for peoples' mobility and their family lives. The level for this test is set at A1 on the CEFR in speaking and listening. Although seemingly low and therefore accessible, it is an unattainable requirement for anyone who has not had an English language education. It also excludes people who cannot gain access to a centre which provides a test at Level A1, which is not available in every country in the world.

A slew of fresh legislation and requirements was introduced in 2013. First, people applying for settlement were required to pass an English language examination at level B1 on the CEFR *in addition to* the Life in the UK test. The entitlement to take an ESOL and Citizenship class in lieu of the Life in the UK test (for lower level learners) was scrapped. And the 3rd edition of the Life in the UK handbook was released, a very different publication from the earlier editions.

The Life in the UK test

The consequence of making language proficiency tests (among other things) the gatekeeper for inward migration, is that the state discriminates against people on the basis of their language proficiency, and by extension their literacy, their schooled background and their economic situation. In short language tests and the test of Knowledge of Society become tools of exclusion. The problematic and arbitrary nature of language proficiency as an actual or *de facto* stipulation for citizenship, naturalisation and permission to remain in a country has long been the subject of debate in the field of Critical Language Testing, where McNamara and Ryan's (2011) discussion of fairness and justice is frequently invoked. McNamara & Ryan suggest we pose two questions about language tests for citizenship, residency and entry to a country: the first relating to their fairness and the second to their justice.

> Questions of test *fairness* involve not only a concern with equal treatment of groups and avoidance of psychometric bias but all aspects of the empirical validation of test score inferences in the interests of yielding reasonable and defensible judgments about individual test takers. Questions of the *justice* of tests include considerations of the consequential basis of test score interpretation and use but also, and particularly, the social and political values implicit in test constructs.
>
> (McNamara & Ryan 2011: 167)

In other words – and to paraphrase McNamara elsewhere (2000) – does a test test what it should? And should a test test what it does? The Life in the UK test falls short on both counts. The first question is about test design and development, relating to a test's

validity. The Life in the UK test is a test of knowledge about a country that requires of test-takers competence in literacy in the dominant language as well as a measure of computer literacy. Hence it is unfair, in testing terms: its validity as a Knowledge of Society test is compromised because by principally testing reading comprehension in English, as well as computer literacy, it does not test what it should. On the justice question (should it test what it does?), it is reasonable to ask what makes language and particularly literacy such an important criterion for entry to a country and for residence. For an answer, we can consider the role of language in the building and shoring up of national identity, in the interests of the nation state in the face of globalization, as discussed above.

Moreover, a justification for Knowledge of Society tests such as the Life in the UK test is that they purport to cover general knowledge of the values and customs deemed essential to civic participation. The earlier editions of the handbook upon which the test is based covered content relating to rights and civic responsibilities. The third edition however, published during the years of the Conservative-dominated coalition Government, contains an esoteric (not to say absurd) range of topics, with a strong emphasis on British history. In 2013 Thom Brooks, an expert in immigration law, wrote a comprehensive critique of the test and the handbook upon which it is based. He concluded that both the test and the handbook are impractical (i.e. they do not provide information that will facilitate integration into society) and inconsistent (applicants need not know the number of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons, but they must know the number of members of the Welsh Assembly), contain trivial facts (e.g. the date of the opening of the first curry house in the UK, 1810), have gender imbalance (the handbook's historical chapter provides the dates of birth for 29 men, but only four women) and were immediately outdated (the handbook states that former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is alive although she died shortly after its publication). There is also a linguistic penalty inherent in the test, which must be taken in English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic[2]. An analysis of pass-rates for the test suggests that users of non-European languages and those from countries without a strong tradition of compulsory schooling and literacy education are disadvantaged: Government figures from 2013/14 record low pass-rates for applicants from Afghanistan (40%) and Bangladesh (47%) compared with very high ones for those from Canada (95%) and Iceland (100%) (Garuda 2017). Yet despite its questionable validity and its inherent injustice the test continues to play a major role in life-changing experiences for migrants.

5. Conclusion: Supporting adult migrants' language development

It is a truism to say that adult migrants have a need to gain access to the dominant language of their new country, for the benefit of themselves and for more established residents alike, in work, social and personal contexts. A well-resourced ESOL sector is central to this. Political rhetoric typically stresses the requirement, and indeed the obligation, that migrants are under to use English, rather than the practicalities of providing them with opportunities to learn. This chapter began with a survey of ESOL in current UK policy, noting the neglect of the field in recent years, and the consequential denial of opportunities for new arrivals to gain access to English. I then moved to an examination of policy and public discourses about language and migration, emphasising the relationship between these and more general ideological debates about the nation state, immigration and social cohesion. I linked these debates to concrete and high-

stakes language policies which impinge on new arrivals in the UK, even affecting their ability to stay in the country or not.

I end by returning to the point made at the outset, that over the past two decades the contexts of migrants' lives have changed considerably: their language learning now happens in conditions of superdiversity, heightened complexity entailed by the multiple communicative processes and effects of migration. At a time when the world is experiencing rapid demographic change and varied conditions of transnational mobility, the language learning purpose of adult migrants is now primarily to communicate within, between and across linguistically and culturally diverse and unpredictable domains of practice. As a result of this contextual change, the expectations of migrants' everyday language use now include communication in a dominant language – English, in the case of the UK – as part of a multilingual semiotic repertoire. Migrants need to move flexibly across languages, styles, registers and modes as they come into contact with others from around the world, i.e. they draw upon their multilingual repertoire as they translanguage (García & Li Wei 2014). The field of ESOL should acknowledge this in practice, through curriculum, materials, training and pedagogy.

Even at times when language education for adult migrants has received policy attention, this multilingual reality has however been largely ignored in practice and in political discourse. There is some international policy interest in multilingual education, and in language education that recognises languages other than the new language. For example UNESCO (2003) stresses the importance of mother tongue instruction, and encourages UN member states to view it as a strategy for promoting quality in education. The Council of Europe's Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM) project is a supranational policy initiative attending to adult bilingual language support (see www.coe.int/lang-migrants). The Council of Europe authors set out their principles thus: 'A plurilingual and intercultural approach to the teaching of the language of the host society ensures that languages become instruments of inclusion that unite rather than segregate people' (Council of Europe n.d.). Such a sentiment would surely be welcome in rhetoric and in policy at national level, at a point in history when walls between countries are erected, and as borders are re-enforced.

Notes

1. 'Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities'. (AH/L007096/1), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

2. A Freedom of Information request revealed that between 2009 and 2015 a total of two LITUK tests were booked in Welsh and one in Scottish Gaelic. Only the Scottish Gaelic test actually took place: the candidate was successful. (https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/291040/response/713051/attach/3/FOI%20Response%2036749.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1)

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