

Socialism, Multilingualism and Language Policy

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British socialists who came of age during the Thatcher era may remember the opening lines of a satirical number performed in the early 1980s by the ‘alternative’ comedian Alexei Sayle: ‘It’s not class or ideology/ Culture, creed or roots/ The only thing that unites us/ Is Dr Marten’s boots.’ Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the English language has become the Dr Marten’s boots of political discourse on British national identity, security and social integration. The political class, the media and the public at large have united around a narrative that fosters increasing intolerance of the use of other languages, and increasing support for policies whose effect is to stigmatise and punish those who cannot or (allegedly) will not speak English. Here I consider how socialists might reframe the narrative, and why it is important to do so.¹

The Story So Far

In 2013 the annual British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey found that speaking English was considered to be an important part of being British by 95 per cent of respondents (in a sample of 3,000).² This was a striking finding, not only because the percentage was so high, but also because it had risen sharply since the previous decade, suggesting a definite shift in attitudes. In fact, that shift might better be described as a *hardening* of attitudes towards people who do not speak English. The years between 2001 and 2013 were a period of escalating political and popular concern about the status of English in Britain, of a kind that in many respects fits the template for what the sociologist Stanley Cohen dubbed ‘moral panic’.³ A problem was discovered and a ‘folk devil’ identified; the problem was amplified by the rhetoric of politicians and the media; the predictable result was increasing public anxiety and resentment, which was then mobilised by the authorities to justify various punitive measures.

The initial discovery of the problem occurred in the wake of two events that took place in 2001. One was local: during the summer, several northern English towns experienced civil disturbances sparked by tensions between the white and Asian communities (whose members were in competition for scarce resources, notably housing and jobs, in the economically depressed former mill-towns where they lived). The other was global, and its effects transformed the geopolitical landscape: the al-Qaeda attacks launched against several US targets on 11 September 2001.

The Labour government of the time responded to the local problem by ordering a review of what it called 'community cohesion'. The report produced by the review body⁴ suggested that while respect for cultural differences was important, more emphasis needed to be put on shared national values: among the specific values they identified was acceptance of the English language. That suggestion was positively received by the Home Secretary David Blunkett. In his response to the 2001 disturbances he suggested that British Asians could help their children integrate into British society by using English at home. This caused some controversy and, as Roxy Harris would later observe,⁵ it was an odd point for him to emphasise, given that broadcast interviews with some of the young Asian men involved in the fighting had left no doubt that English was their native tongue: indeed, they spoke it with accents very similar to David Blunkett's.

Harris's own work with young British Asians in west London (or as he calls them, in a term that draws attention to the hybridity of their identity and culture, 'Brasians') suggests that this is typical of the rising generation. Many of his subjects had acquired a South Asian language as their mother-tongue in early childhood, but few had maintained it into adolescence: English was the language of the peer group and the Brasians' use of other community languages tended to be very limited, in part because they had never acquired full adult proficiency in them. Despite the evidence that intergenerational language shift is taking place, however, politicians have continued to argue that the use of community languages among British Asians constitutes a barrier to integration.

The issue of integration took on a new urgency as the government turned its attention to the threat of terrorism after 9/11. In July 2005 the threat ceased to be hypothetical: more than fifty people were killed in the '7/7' attacks on underground trains and a bus in London, and it soon became clear that those attacks had been perpetrated by 'home-grown terrorists', most of them British-born Muslims of Pakistani ancestry. Efforts to foster cohesion through the promotion of British values and the English language acquired a new focus on preventing 'radicalisation', the process that turned disaffected young British Muslims into extremists and potential terrorists. Again, it was not entirely clear what language had to do with this problem. There was no indication that the 7/7 bombers had known any language except English: the martyrdom videos some of them produced were in English and reports suggested they had been influenced by the preaching of the Arab-American Anwar al-Awlaki, whose greatest value to al-Qaeda lay in his ability to reach a global audience by harnessing the combined power of English and the internet.

In 2006 a new government department for 'communities and local government' was set up, with cohesion and integration as part of its remit.

It soon became (and has remained) an important locus for the promotion of English. By this time, however, the main focus of public concern had begun to shift away from the issue of social cohesion as that had originally been defined (i.e. as a matter of community relations in places where there were established minority ethnic populations), and towards the problems associated with what some considered to be excessive numbers of new immigrants entering the UK, especially from the Eastern European countries that had recently joined the EU. Increasingly, political rhetoric about 'social integration' became a coded way of talking about immigration, and in this coded discourse willingness to learn and use English became the clearest symbolic marker of the difference between 'good' migrants, who were economically productive and socially well-integrated, and 'bad' migrants, who were freeloaders, abusing the hospitality and consuming the resources of a society to which they had contributed nothing and to which they had no real desire to belong. The figure of the migrant, or the member of a minority community, who did not speak English or make any effort to learn it became the 'folk devil' in the unfolding moral panic.

Since this particular folk devil came in several guises – the freeloading Eastern European, the bogus asylum seeker from the middle East or Africa, the British Asian who voluntarily confined him- or herself to an ethnic ghetto – it was easy to get the impression that he or she was everywhere, making British people who did speak English feel like foreigners in their own country. By the beginning of the present decade the problem or threat this presented had become a staple theme in speeches made by politicians of all parties. In 2012 the Labour leader Ed Miliband promised (in a speech widely interpreted as an admission that his predecessors had 'got it wrong' on immigration) that the next Labour government's strategy for social integration would 'start with language'.⁶ In 2013, the Conservative Communities Secretary Eric Pickles expressed outrage about the recent census finding that 5 per cent of UK households did not have English as their main language, describing their failure to adopt the majority language as 'frankly incomprehensible' and assuring readers of the *Sun* that it would not be allowed to continue.⁷ In 2014, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage made a speech whose most frequently quoted sound bite described an 'awkward' train journey through London during which he claimed to have heard no English until the train reached the outer suburbs.⁸

The alleged problem of migrants' failure to integrate by learning and using English has been addressed not only in politicians' rhetoric, but also by a steady stream of policy interventions. Language requirements that did not previously exist have been put in place for non-EU citizens seeking to enter the UK on work or family visas. Since 2005, applicants for citizenship

or permanent residence have been required to pass a test that had to be taken in 'a recognised British language' (in practice, almost invariably English).⁹ Since languages can be learned, states that have language requirements for immigration and citizenship can argue that they are treating everyone equally: it is not like discriminating on the basis of nationality, race or religion. In practice, however, the new requirements have favoured certain nationalities and also, indirectly, ethnic groups. They give an advantage to applicants who are native English speakers – the highest pass rates in the citizenship test are achieved by nationals of majority English-speaking countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA (most of whom will also be white) – while conversely they are particularly disadvantageous to poorer and less educated migrants from non-Anglophone countries (most of whom will not be white).¹⁰

Speakers of other languages already resident in the UK have been targeted by policies intended to decrease reliance on community languages and increase the use of English. There has been a sustained attack on the provision of information and services in translation, which is said to constitute not only a burden on the taxpayer but also an obstacle to integration, depriving people of incentives to become proficient in the majority language. Eric Pickles's remarks on the census, mentioned above, prefaced an announcement that funding for translation was to be cut – the latest in a series of cuts that had begun under the Labour government a decade earlier. Both Labour and the Conservatives promised further reductions in funding after the 2015 general election. This was not the only language-related measure to feature in the campaign. In his 2012 speech on social integration Ed Miliband announced that a Labour government would introduce a test of English language proficiency for public sector workers whose jobs required them to interact with members of the public, and require parents whose home language was not English to accept shared responsibility for their children's acquisition of the language. For the Conservatives, Home Secretary Theresa May pledged to crack down on benefit claimants who refused to learn English by cutting their benefits, and floated the suggestion that health professionals might be given a legal duty to refer patients with poor English to language classes.¹¹

These proposals were evidently meant to make the parties look tough on the integration issue, and one might suspect that some of them would prove to be unworkable in practice (for instance, health professionals have neither the time nor the expertise to assess patients' language-learning needs). But there is a more general problem with the assumption they are based on, that intervention is needed because of the presence in the UK of large and growing numbers of people who are unable to speak the majority language. That belief is doubtless shared by a significant proportion of the British public (especially if they rely on the media for their information, as I discuss below), but it is not

supported by the best evidence to which politicians have access, namely the figures compiled by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) using data from the 2011 national census.¹²

In 2011 the census form, which everyone resident in the UK on the census date is legally required to complete, contained a section on language in which respondents were first asked to name the main language spoken in their household and then, if the language they named was not English, to indicate the level of their proficiency in English (whether they spoke it ‘very well’, ‘well’, ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’). The data collected for England and Wales showed that 92 per cent of residents (about 50 million people) reported English (or in Wales, Welsh) as their main household language; among the 8 per cent who used some other language at home (the most frequently reported other languages were Polish, Punjabi and Urdu), the great majority (79 per cent or 3.3 million) reported speaking English well or very well. The number who reported not speaking English at all was 138,000, around 0.3 per cent of the population. For a country with relatively high levels of immigration this is a very low figure. The census data do not rule out the possibility that the 0.3 per cent includes some people who have chosen to remain obdurately monolingual in their mother-tongues because they are uninterested in integrating or too lazy to make the effort. But they do make clear that such people cannot exist in the worryingly large numbers implied by recent discourse about the problem. (The ONS analysis also makes clear that people who know no English are concentrated in particular localities, notably the poorest London boroughs, while in many parts of the country their numbers are negligible.)

If we ask why there is such a mismatch between the perceived number of non-English speakers in the UK and the actual number, there is a clue in the way the census findings were reported by the media. Though the most significant finding was the one noted above – that 99.7 per cent of residents of England and Wales in 2011 did speak English and 98.4 per cent reported speaking it well, very well or natively – almost none of the reports that appeared in the media made that the main story. Many chose to focus instead on the large increase in the number of Polish speakers since 2001, or to draw attention to the finding that over a fifth of households in London reported a main language other than English – a much higher figure than in any other part of the country. It cannot be said that these editorial choices directly misrepresented the census findings, though arguably they were indirectly misleading. But as Mark Sebba notes in a detailed analysis of the way the census was reported,¹³ there was one key point on which the media clearly and repeatedly misrepresented the findings, by interpreting ‘English is not the main language in X per cent of households’ to mean ‘no one speaks English in X per cent of households’. In fact, the statistics make clear (and the ONS presentation of them explicitly

points out) that around four out of five people living in households where English is not the main language are bilingual: the fact that they converse in (for instance) Polish with partners and family members at home does not mean they cannot use English in other contexts, such as work or socialising with friends. Nevertheless, journalists and commentators continued to assert that worryingly large numbers of UK households contained no one able to speak the UK's majority language.

An example of this misrepresentation, used by Sebba to illustrate the wider problem, occurred in an article by the BBC's political editor Nick Robinson, which appeared on the BBC news website under the title 'How has Immigration Changed Britain?'¹⁴ Drawing on the 2011 census findings, Robinson asserted that in Peterborough, a small city in East Anglia which has experienced significant in-migration since 2001, '10% of households have no one at home who speaks English'. If that were true, it would arguably give cause for concern; but in fact it is a serious misreading (one that has still not been corrected two years later). It is true that 10 per cent of households in Peterborough reported that English was not the *main* language used *at home*, but Sebba points out that if that figure is set alongside the data on English proficiency, it is evident that the percentage of households in which no one speaks English at all cannot be higher than 1.9 per cent. In fact, it would only be as high as 1.9 per cent in the unlikely event that every individual non-English speaker in the city constituted a separate single-person household. Individual residents who reported having no proficiency in the language made up only 0.8 per cent of the total population of Peterborough – slightly fewer than one in a hundred people rather than the one in ten implied by Robinson's article.

The question about English proficiency was included in the census for the first time in 2011, and what motivated its inclusion was the concern that large numbers of people were unable to speak English. Yet although the census findings suggested that the scale of that problem had been exaggerated, the original concern was reinforced, in the event, by inaccurate and sensationalised media reporting. This gave a new impetus to the competition among politicians to propose ever more draconian measures, as can be seen from their 2015 general election pledges. It was/is a vicious circle, and no political party – even if one looks outside the electoral mainstream – has made any serious attempt to break out of it.¹⁵ For the mainstream parties the dominant narrative has the advantage of being popular: the BSA survey cited above suggests that on the language question public opinion is virtually unanimous. Even people who do not favour stricter controls on immigration itself appear to agree that it is both reasonable and desirable to make entry to the UK, continued residence in the UK and access to the UK's public services conditional on speaking English. For many people, moreover (including politicians like Nigel Farage

and Eric Pickles), 'speaking English' appears to mean speaking *only* English, and forswearing the use of other languages even in casual conversations on a train or in your own home.

If one compares the rhetoric of Conservative and Labour politicians, it is apparent that the Conservative version of the narrative puts more emphasis on learning English as a duty the immigrant owes to the host community, while the Labour version puts more emphasis on the benefits of speaking English for the immigrant. I say 'emphasis' because both themes appear in the rhetoric of both parties: the difference is a matter of balance, and sometimes tone. In his 'social integration' speech, Ed Miliband made the point that being unable to speak the majority language of the UK not only restricted economic opportunities for migrant workers, it also rendered them vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords. This is as close to a socialist argument as any recent speech on the subject by a senior UK politician has come. But Miliband's good intentions are arguably undermined by the overall framing of the issue in terms of 'integration' and 'Britishness', terms which presuppose that the ideal British society would essentially be monolingual and (with a few key exceptions such as religious observance) monocultural.

The problem with this is not only that it effectively condones discrimination and the demonisation of migrants. It also suggests a failure to grasp the bigger picture. The Left is in need of a different and better narrative than the 'social integration' one: even if at present a counter-narrative would be unlikely to make a major impact on mainstream electoral politics, it might at least prompt parties like Labour, which make some claim to be influenced by socialist values, to rethink their approach to language policy.

A Different Story

Mark Sebba suggests that the persistent misrepresentations found in media coverage of the census reflect, first and foremost, a lack of understanding of multilingualism among the monolingual English-speaking majority (Sebba, 17). Eric Pickles can only find it 'frankly incomprehensible' that 5 per cent of households do not have English as their main language because he does not appreciate that bilingual speakers' use of their linguistic repertoire is influenced by context (they may use one language at home and another in the workplace, for instance), and even in a single context it will reflect other factors such as topic and interlocutor (a bilingual will not choose to speak English to an elderly relative in the same household who does not understand it well, but may speak it to a child when the topic is English homework). On its own, the fact that someone reports a language other than English as their

main household language says nothing about their competence in English, and politicians whose responsibilities include language policy would do well to educate themselves on that point. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I am most interested in critically examining the larger narrative that frames the display of ignorance to which Sebba draws attention. This narrative depends on two implicit assumptions that need to be challenged: first, that societal multilingualism is the temporary and socially disruptive effect of conditions which national governments could and should seek to change through measures promoting 'integration'; and second, that there is some necessary and essential connection between speaking a particular language and subscribing to a particular set of values.

The first assumption is discussed in a thought-provoking article by Mary Louise Pratt about the case of the US, where popular movements and state laws promoting the exclusive use of English have a longer history than they do in England.¹⁶ Pratt argues that the dogmatic insistence on English monolingualism as both the ideal state of the US and in some sense its 'natural' state (though currently disrupted by the uncooperative behaviour of some migrants) displays a kind of perpetual bad faith. The phrase often used about the US – 'a nation of immigrants' – describes a state formed through settler colonialism, in which the creation of wealth depended from the beginning on two processes: the seizure of the land from its indigenous inhabitants and the importation of labour power from other parts of the world. The second of these processes has never stopped. Imported labour means imported languages: though the usual pattern is for each wave of incomers to shift to using English as its main or only language within two or three generations, it is always and necessarily succeeded by a new wave, making societal multilingualism a permanent structural condition. The people and the languages change over time (the demonised position occupied today by bilingual Spanish speakers was once occupied by German speakers), but multilingualism itself will persist for as long as the US grows its capitalist economy by importing labour.

It follows that complaints about migrants not speaking English are in one sense a red herring. If multilingualism is a permanent structural condition, reproduced by a continuous flow of new immigrants, then its existence and overall prevalence will not be affected by efforts to speed up language shift in any particular migrant group. How quickly or completely today's migrants assimilate is absolutely irrelevant to the bigger picture. However, the conviction that multilingualism is only a temporary disruption caused by the uncooperative attitudes of *these particular* migrants (the claim is commonly heard that in the past, other groups of migrants 'made the effort' to assimilate) serves ideological purposes. As Pratt says:

Monolingualism in English is coded ... as the essential outward sign of loyalty; bi- or multilingualism becomes the outward sign of divided loyalty... This monolingual loyalty is the precondition of the right to equality. In its absence, discrimination ceases to be an outrage. (15)

Britain's development as an industrial capitalist (and imperialist) power took a somewhat different path from that of the US, but in the current era of globalisation and neoliberalism the UK has become more similar to the US in both the extent of its dependence on imported labour and in its ideological stance on the specific issue of language and 'integration'. Pratt's analysis of the US case is strikingly applicable to the UK situation as described in the previous section – though one difference is that Britain does not have a long tradition of representing itself as a 'nation of immigrants' (even though in fact it is – the Anglo-Saxons were settler colonists), and the view of multilingualism as temporary and disruptive is paralleled in some sections of the majority population by a similar view of immigration itself. Right-wing anti-immigration parties like UKIP pander to the idea that the UK's economic position could be maintained with little or even no immigration, but mainstream politicians know that this is unrealistic. Instead they deal with popular agitation for drastic reductions in immigrant numbers by promising more integration of migrants and punitive sanctions against those who fail to become integrated. In that case, as Pratt says, 'discrimination ceases to be an outrage'. Denying people access to information in a language they understand, or refusing them welfare benefits on the grounds that they do not speak English well enough, are seen as reasonable and proportionate rather than self-evidently unjust.

Although the Labour Party has tried to tell a more positive story than the parties to the right of it about the economic contribution made by migrants, it has not opposed discriminatory measures like the ones just mentioned. In government it pursued the same policies (it began the attack on translation, for instance), and in opposition it made every effort to appear as tough as, or even tougher than, the Conservative-led coalition government. Miliband's 2012 social integration speech emphasised this toughness, while also presenting the policies he proposed to introduce as being in immigrants' own best interests. This is a profoundly un-socialist argument. Socialists should not support unequal treatment on the basis of language proficiency. They should recognise that multilingualism is a structural condition, a consequence of adopting certain economic policies (albeit, for Labour, policies not made under conditions of their own choosing), and that it is unjust to stigmatise or penalise migrants for the position they occupy within an already unjust economic system.

That is not to dismiss Miliband's argument that learning English benefits migrants. As the 2011 census showed, most of those who come to Britain have

learned it, and in many cases they will have known at least some English before they came. In all the political rhetoric about migrants' proficiency in English, it is ironic that no one ever mentions the possibility that their pre-existing knowledge of the world's most widely-taught second/foreign language is one of the 'pull factors' which make the UK an attractive destination – just like Miliband, they reason that they will be better equipped to work in a country where they have some proficiency in the language. For the smaller number whose English is limited or non-existent, however, it is of course important they should have the opportunity to learn. Socialists should support the principle of making language teaching available and accessible to all those who need and want it.

However, the socialist argument for this is not the one most often heard now: that instruction in English will both display and help to inculcate respect for British values. Mary Louise Pratt offers a more radical argument for the value of superordinate languages to subordinated groups in multilingual societies:

Where there is multilingualism, there will also be lingua francas, shared second languages that enable communication across linguistic difference. Where there is empire, the imperial power quickly ceases to own the imperial language, as English stopped belonging to England, and Spanish to Spain. Imperial languages tend to become the lingua francas of the dominated, through which, among other things, they demand justice or emplot the demise of empire. (27)

This potential has been harnessed by socialists in the past. In her history of twentieth-century American women's movements, for instance, the historian Annelise Orleck mentions that trades unions in the first half of the century sponsored classes in which immigrant workers of many nationalities learned English alongside the techniques of labour organising and political campaigning.¹⁷ The purpose was not to integrate workers into the system that exploited them, but to enable them to challenge that exploitation more effectively.

Pratt's point is relevant to the case of contemporary Britain in another way. Current integration policies often seem to be based on the assumption that there is some necessary connection between the language(s) someone speaks and the values or belief systems they subscribe to. Above I cited two occasions (the civil disturbances in 2001 and the London bombings in 2005) when the issue of 'not speaking English' was raised in commentary on the problem of the disaffected young British Muslim who engages in rioting or terrorism, even though in both cases the British Muslims concerned were indisputably native

speakers of English. In the case of the 7/7 bombers particularly, it was as though commentators could not reconcile the Britishness of their speech with the un- and anti-Britishness of their beliefs and their actions.

Similarly, the applied linguist Sohail Karmani notes that after 9/11 the US initiated a policy of funding the teaching of English to both primary and secondary school pupils in countries such as Pakistan, which were seen as centres for the radicalisation of future terrorists, through educational aid packages worth millions of dollars. This policy was intended to assist in de-Islamicising the education system and fostering more positive attitudes to the West. In assuming that English teaching would have those effects, though, the policymakers overlooked Pratt's point about 'lingua francas of the dominated': they are not simply vehicles for the ideologies of the imperial power, but may equally serve as resources for those who wish to 'emplot the demise of empire'. Karmani points out that global terrorism, no less than global trade, is facilitated by global languages – the 9/11 hijackers could not have executed their plan if they had not had some knowledge of English.¹⁸

As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, when language is presented as a problem in political discourse it is usually serving as a proxy for some other problem which people prefer not to broach directly.¹⁹ In this case, the issue of language is being raised in response to perceived threats that can be related to the economic and geopolitical upheavals of the period since the end of the Cold War: the steady shift of power and economic control away from national governments, the increased dependence of countries like Britain on importing labour to maintain their economic position, the growth in ethnic and cultural diversity entailed by that dependence (and also by associated political developments such as the enlargement of the EU with its open labour market) and the insecurities which are one by-product of post-Cold War global conflict and competition. These issues need to be talked about directly, not buried under a pile of platitudes about integration, 'British values' and the English language. Conversely, where language actually is a legitimate object of discussion and policymaking it should be discussed on its own terms rather than made into a symbol or proxy for other issues, and the discussion should be based on evidence rather than prejudice (it would be an advance on the current situation, for instance, if it were acknowledged that 99.7 per cent of the population of England and Wales already speaks English, and that English is the main language used in 92 per cent of households). The scapegoating of people who do not speak English well should cease, along with the endless competition between political parties, including the one that claims to represent Britain's socialist tradition, to find new ways of stigmatising and punishing them. For socialists there can be no linguistic preconditions for equality, no form of discrimination that is not an affront to our principles. There can also

be no advantage in denying that, in Mary Louise Pratt's words (used about the US, but also applicable to Britain, and particularly to those parts of it, like London, where the effects of ongoing change are at present most visible): 'alongside a powerful lingua franca, multilingualism is a permanent, systemic aspect of how this society puts itself together' (Pratt, 28).²⁰

Notes

- 1 This article was written several months before the referendum in which the UK voted to leave the EU. That decision may have implications for future language policy, but at this stage any discussion of them would be purely speculative. The article has therefore been published without alteration.
- 2 <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-31/key-findings/britain-2014.aspx> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 3 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of Mods and Rockers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).
- 4 'Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team, chaired by Ted Cante' (Home Office, 2001), <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=96&file=PDFVersion> (accessed 1 October 2015).
- 5 Roxy Harris, *New Ethnicities and Language Use* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 6 'Ed Miliband: Every Briton Should Speak English', *The Guardian*, 14 December 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/dec/14/miliband-english-language-integration> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 7 Eric Pickles, 'We'll Use Millions Lost on Translations so EVERYONE Can Learn English'. *The Sun*, 13 January 2013, <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4741905/Eric-Pickles-on-Government-drive-to-get-everyone-speaking-English.html> (accessed 12 October 2015).
- 8 'Farage "felt awkward" on train', *Evening Standard*, 28 February 2014, <http://www.standard.co.uk/panewsfeeds/farage-felt-awkward-on-train-9158785.html> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 9 English is the majority language of the UK but it does not have the legal status of the UK's national or official language. Sensitivity on this point reflects the fact that the UK is a union of four historic nations, in three of which English was a colonial imposition, displacing (though not completely extirpating, despite the colonisers' best efforts) an indigenous Celtic language. Welsh and Gaelic predated English in the British Isles (English was the language of Germanic migrants who arrived in the early middle ages), and they have 'recognised' status in the nations where they are used. Citizenship applicants in those nations are entitled to take the test in either English or Welsh/Gaelic. However, the number of applicants who have chosen to take it in a language other than English since 2005 is so small that the Home Office does not supply figures.
- 10 'British Citizenship Test: One in Three Immigrants Fails', BBC News website, 27 May 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8707152.stm> (accessed 12 October 2015).
- 11 'Migrants to Learn English or lose More Benefits', *Sunday Express*, 26 March 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/566370/Migrants-learn-English-housing-benefit-Theresa-May-Tory-welfare-plan> (accessed 29 March 2015).

Deborah Cameron

- 12 Census data on language are not unproblematic: in this case one obvious potential problem is that people may have over- or underestimated their proficiency in English. It is also possible that the true number of non-English speakers has been underestimated because certain groups who are particularly likely to lack proficiency in English are also particularly likely not to have been counted in the census at all (for example undocumented migrants). However, I will take it that the 2011 census data are a reasonable approximation of the relevant facts, and certainly more reliable than anecdotal observations made by politicians and media pundits. All figures cited are taken from the ONS website: it should be noted that they are for England and Wales rather than the whole UK. See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/language-in-england-and-wales-2011/style-language-in-england-and-wales.html> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 13 Mark Sebba, “‘English a Foreign Tongue’: the 2011 Census in England and the Misunderstanding of Multilingualism”, https://www.academia.edu/11388840/_English_a_foreign_tongue_The_2011_Census_in_England_and_the_misunderstanding_of_multilingualism (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 14 Nick Robinson, ‘How has Immigration Changed Britain?’ BBC News website (2013), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22339080> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 15 I looked at the current policy statements of several parties to the left of Labour, and found no specific discussion of language policy at all, though the UK Green Party does propose that immigration and citizenship requirements be reformed to make them less discriminatory, which might be taken to entail the abolition of the current language qualifications.
- 16 Mary Louise Pratt, “‘If English was Good Enough for Jesus’: monolingüismo y mala fe”, *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 12–30, <http://cms.arizona.edu/index.php/multilingual/article/view/10/21> (accessed 29 March 2015).
- 17 Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 18 Sohail Karmani, ‘English, “Terror”, and Islam’, *Applied Linguistics* 26, no. 2 (2005): 262–7.
- 19 Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene* (2nd edn) (Milton Park: Routledge, 2012).