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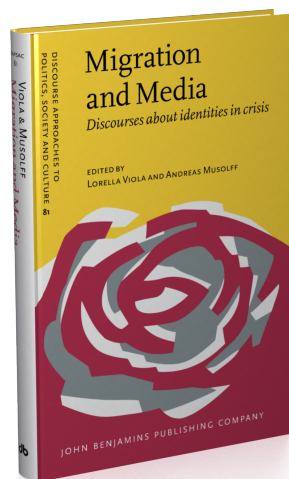
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“They have lived in our street for six years now and still don’t speak a word [!] of English”

Scenarios of alleged linguistic underperformance as part of anti-immigrant discourses

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Whilst sociolinguistic superdiversity is often viewed as an almost irreversible global development, there may be a question mark over whether the ‘mix of cultures’, which mass migration allegedly fosters, does in fact lead to an acceptance of multilingualism and/or multiculturalism in the respective societies. On the basis of public discourse data from press media and Internet forums, this paper explores popular attitudes the effects of mass immigration, which appear to express an endorsement of monolingual/monocultural societies. Using methods of argumentation theory, pragmatics and discourse-historical triangulation, the article argues that findings of a global rise in superdiversity as regards usage data need to be complemented by studies of divergent perception patterns at local/national levels.

Keywords: computer-mediated communication, culture mix, immigration, migration, multiculturalism, multilingualism, on-line forums, scenario, superdiversity

1. Introduction

One of the most productive discussions of present-day sociolinguistics is the debate about the concept of “superdiversity”, which is closely related to the effects of globalised migration patterns:¹ Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton, two of its most ardent proponents characterise it thus:

1. For an overview (by no means exhaustive) see Arnaut et al. (2015a, b, 2016); Blommaert (2010, 2013a,b, 2015); Blommaert and Rampton (2015); De Fina et al. (2017); Goebel (2015); Meissner (2015); Meissner and Vertovec (2015); Pavlenko (2014a,b); Rampton (2016); Silverstein (2015); Reyes (2014); Vertovec (2007); Toivanen and Saarikivi (2016).

Due to the diffuse nature of migration since the early 1990s, the multiculturalism of an earlier era [...] has been gradually replaced by what Vertovec (2007) calls 'superdiversity'. Superdiversity is characterised by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on.

(Blommaert and Rampton 2015: 21–22)

Using as an illustrative example an accommodation advert in a shop window in the Belgian city of Antwerp, scripted in two Chinese script conventions, Blommaert highlights the fact that "in superdiverse environments (both online and offline), people appear to take any linguistic and communicative resource available to them [...] and blend them into hugely complex linguistic and semiotic forms" (Blommaert 2013: 8). For Blommaert, superdiversity requires a paradigm shift across socio- and contact-linguistics that includes epistemological and methodological changes in the conceptualisation and scientific investigation of home or 'native' languages, multilingualism and foreign language acquisition (Blommaert 2015).²

Beyond these wider theoretical aspects, empirical studies have shown that language diversity itself has become 'much more diverse', so to speak, especially in centres of immigration such as, in Britain, London or Southampton.³ But even in less 'cosmopolitan' areas of Britain, such as, for instance, the county of Norfolk, more than 80 languages are used across local communities and need to be catered for by a language-service provider called "INTRAN" that works in liaison with police, courts, health services etc. (INTRAN 2018). Thus, though perhaps not amounting to pervasive superdiversity, the extensive practise of multilingualism and provisions for institutional translation and interpreting services are the rule rather than the exception in present-day Britain, and they are widely discussed in the media, in politics and, predictably, in educational contexts.⁴ In 2016, for instance, the then

2. Blommaert's (2015) demand for a paradigm shift that helps to transcend 'traditional' concepts of *multilingualism* on account of linguistic and cultural superdiversity, casts an ironic light on the fact that multilingualism itself has only relatively recently been elevated to an object of academic research and an institutional and political goal in Europe. From the 19th century onwards and reaching far into the twentieth century, *monolingualism* was an ideologically and institutionally safeguarded ideal (for English, see Bailey 1991; Barbour 2000); the multidimensional paradigm shifts resulting from its partial demise are still to be explored in full, cf. Jostes (2010).

3. See e.g. Cadier and Mar-Molinero (2014); Duarte and Gogolin (2013); King and Carson (2016).

4. See e.g. Balabanova and Balch (2010); Balch (2015); Balch and Balabanova (2014); Blackledge and Creese (2010); KhosraviNik (2010); KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski and Wodak (2012); Musolff (2015); UK Department for education: National curriculum; <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/key-stage-3-and-4>, (accessed 10 May 2017), House of Commons 2012.

Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a £20m public fund would be created to “provide classes for all women struggling with English”, targeted at an estimated “38,000 Muslim women who could not speak the language and 190,000 with limited skills in it”, and that those who did not pass the obligatory test after two and a half years in the country would face having to leave (*The Guardian*, 18 January 2016). During the following days, a public row erupted over whether such an initiative would be fit for purpose or, on the contrary, might stigmatise the intended target groups even further.⁵ In one of the comment articles in the right-wing tabloid *Daily Mail*, the well-known columnist Katie Hopkins stated that compelling immigrant minorities to take language classes was fine but should not be funded by the taxpayer:

- (1) I’m totally behind asking Muslim women to learn English but asking me to pay for it is a liberty in any language. [...] I am just another idiot British taxpayer paying tax at the top rate in order to fund the endless list of things migrants need me to pay for to make their segregated lives easier. And if it’s not free English classes, it’s translation services. [...] Unless you learn our language, how can you hope to fit in? And if you aren’t seeking to fit in, integration was never top of your agenda. In which case you aren’t migrating into Britain, you are colonising it. (Hopkins 2016)

Hopkins evidently had no problem with the compulsion aspect of the envisaged test but still compared migrant minorities’ lack of competence in standard English with her own lack of foreign language skills as a tourist in Greece, “the locals hardly expect me to have learned the language” – this, she claims, is fine because “I have paid to holiday in their country and have no intention of outstaying my welcome” (*ibid.*).

In the run-up to the “Brexit” referendum about whether the United Kingdom should withdraw from the European Union, the ‘migrant language’ question became again prominent, with Brexit proponents promising tough legislation to ensure that migrants “spoke good English” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2016). After the referendum vote in favour of Brexit and the subsequent resignation of Cameron, the envisaged plans for legislating on and enforcing migrant language compliance seem to have been shelved but remain a potent issue.⁶

Such prominence cannot come as a surprise given the fact that the impact and cost of language policies targeted at immigrants have become topics of high political and social significance (Bastardas-Boada 2012; Duchêne et al. 2013; Krumm 2012).

5. See e.g. *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* 17–19 January 2016.

6. See e.g. *The Guardian*, 14 March 2018: “People in the UK should learn English. But without free classes, they can’t.”

However, we may ask, what status do such questions have outside the spheres of academic research and political debates, and their echo in the mainstream media? Is the question of immigrants' language competence (or lack of it) at all an object of interest and/or concern for the general public, and if yes, what role does it play in the debate about immigration? This chapter provides an exploratory study of postings to the BBC's *Have Your Say* (HYS) discussion website that articulate popular attitudes towards multilingualism, which point in the direction of strongly felt resistance to (super-)diversity. Like Hopkins., they allege that migrants do not wish or try to acquire (standard) English, question the necessity of language mediation services (such as translation and interpreting) for foreign language speakers and suggest that a monolingual national community is the primary or even ideal form of social coherence. Following data presentation and analysis, we discuss the question how the apparent discrepancy between superdiversity in actual usage and its perception and (largely negative) evaluation in the community can be resolved.

2. Data and methodology

Data from internet discussion forums provide a chance to study the development of popular attitudes towards topics that are of public concern, even though the opinions expressed cannot be taken simply at face value but have to be critically compared with other media data and qualified for the specific types of computer-assisted communication (CMC) (Giltrow 2013; Herring et al. 2004). Even within the CMC subgenre of internet forums, there is a wide variety of different sub-types, ranging from maximally open forums with hardly any restrictions regarding messages or 'netiquette' through those managed and controlled by an official monitor such as a specific news organisation or even a public authority to more or less closed chatrooms or Blogs, where a specific "community of practice" (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999) communicate mainly among themselves.

The advantage of the more open forums such as *Have Your Say* is that they allow a glimpse at opinion-building in the internet using part of society; however, they still cannot be viewed as representing the whole public sphere. Forum posters constitute a subgroup of the general public, with their own group-specific characteristics (Johansson 2015; Korenman and Wyatt 1996). Nevertheless, especially when analysed in comparison with further data, forum-based CMC can reveal the extent to which discourse contributions of prominent public voices (politicians and other opinion leaders, including mainstream media but also marginal voices), are taken up, repeated, changed and reinterpreted by the wider public.

Originally designed to investigate figurative language use in British immigration debates from such a comparative angle, the corpus used here comprises three

media sub-genres, i.e. a press sample,⁷ a sample of three online discussion forums that were maintained on the BBC under their *Have your say* website and Internet weblogs (Blogs) with readers' comments (as far as these have been kept accessible by the Blog managers). For the purposes of this chapter, we will concentrate exclusively on the forum data. This means that due to the lack of comparison with other media, our analysis can only lead to tentative results which need further testing and corroboration. The *Have Your Say* sample consists of three discussion strands (for convenience called HYS 1–3), which were elicited by the BBC from April–June 2010 in the run-up to and immediate aftermath of the 2010 general election as responses to the questions: (a) "Should politicians be talking about immigration?"; (b) "How should immigration be tackled?"; (c) "Are immigration rules fair?" (BBC 2010a–c).⁸ They generated altogether 2473 postings (566, 881, and 1026 for the respective discussion strands), which amount to 333.518 tokens. The forum is actively monitored by the BBC, which means that aggressively polemical and/or inflammatory postings are removed and that such exclusions are explicitly indicated: in our case 81 postings were removed from the three discussion threads.

The main topical forum questions on *Have Your Say* were all followed up by explanations that specified some of their implications and referenced current prominent debates, as in the case of the third question, "Are immigration rules fair?"; which explicitly flagged up the language issue:

- (2) Immigrants marrying UK citizens will be asked to prove they have a command of English under new rules. *Should immigrants to any country have to prove they have a command of the language?* The measures will apply to partners coming to the UK from areas outside the EU, such as South Asia. *Home Secretary Theresa May wants to "help promote integration", but campaigners say the plans are discriminatory. Will the rules promote integration and remove cultural barriers? Are they discriminatory? Will you be affected by the changes?*
(HYS 3, italicisation by AM)

Prompted by the language-focused elaboration of *Have Your Say's* guiding question, 809 postings, i.e. 81% of the altogether 1026 comments in the third thread included explicit arguments about immigrants' perceived lack of language skills, whereas

7. The press sample was drawn from the following newspapers and magazine: *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian/Observer*, *The Independent*, *The Scotsman*, *The Spectator*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times/Sunday Times*. It includes 278 articles amounting to 220.756 word tokens. The K. Hopkins article cited in example (1) is part of this sample.

8. Since 2011, the question-based format (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/haveyoursay/>) has been changed to a news story-based version: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/have_your_say (last accessed 18 March 2018).

in the two other *Have Your Say* threads only 10–15% touched on this subject. In the following section we will introduce the main argumentative *topoi* associated with the language issue in all three discussion threads and then try to explain their function within the wider figurative-narrative ‘scenarios’ of immigration perception in Britain, as represented in the *Have Your Say* forum.

3. Arguments about and scenarios of immigration to Britain

Whilst not always being explicitly raised, the alleged lack of immigrants’ language skills provides a background assumption for most postings. One main *topos* associated with it is the explanation that immigrants do not want to learn English because it isn’t essential for their well-being in Britain. The following examples are typical of such arguments (spelling and formatting have been left unaltered in all quoted examples).

- (3) I live next door to a woman from Malaysia – sweet, generous and kind but very difficult to understand when she speaks. However she is easy compared to the Turkish family just across the road. They have lived in our street for six years now and still neither mother or father speak a work [*sic*] of English
 (“thomas”, HYS 3)
- (4) I have come across too many people during my job from EU who can’t speak or understand single word of English
 (“TrueChange”, HYS 3)
- (5) there are those who have spent over twenty years in this country without making efforts to speak local tongue
 (“Enny2012”, HYS 3)
- (6) An 18-year-old student, son of immigrant parents but himself born in this country, told me that his mother did not have a word of English. When I asked him how she coped with day-to-day life, he said she just sat at home and watched foreign-language TV – other family members who had taken the trouble to learn to speak English had to do everything for her, even the shopping. That kind of idleness is unacceptable.
 (“Megan”, HYS 1)
- (7) it hurts seeing immigrants sticking together, refusing to learn English, to socialize with the british neighbours, refusing to eat british food and ignoring british history and culture
 (“Cesarina”, HYS 2)

Despite the fact that these statements are presented as descriptions of the forum member’s own everyday experiences, the presence of hyperbolic formulations (“can’t speak or understand single word”, “not have a single word of English”) and of overgeneralisations (especially in Examples (5) and (7)) underline the stereotypical nature of the notion that immigrants have ‘no wish to learn English’. It is highly

implausible that the forum posters have reached their conclusions on the basis of systematic observation; at best they have encountered a few cases of communication difficulties, which are often extrapolated to long-term conditions (e.g. lasting for 6 or even 20 years) and then moralizingly judged (cf. “[immigrants] refusing ... ignoring”, “That kind of idleness is unacceptable”). The responsibility for the alleged lack of English language competence is firmly allocated to the immigrants themselves, often comparing their alleged idleness with the forum poster’s own readiness to learn another language:

- (8) I don’t even go for a week’s holiday somewhere without learning enough of the language to be polite (please, thank you, may I have ... etc., go a long way!); and as my long-term plan is to retire to Greece in 10–15 years’ time I am already making headway in Greek well beyond that. (“Megan”, HYS 3)

“Megan” concedes later on in her comment that “a panicked asylum-seeker who may have had to do a runner with little notice from wherever he feels under threat may not have had time to learn any English” (ibid.) but still insists that any migrant’s “preparations” should include “learn[ing] at least a little English” (ibid.). The majority of migrants are conceived of as being almost on a par with a Western tourist visiting another country at their leisure and following the convention to speak enough of the ‘local lingo’ to be “polite”. The dismissive presentation of “a panicked asylum-seeker” as “doing a runner”, which is normally associated with fugitive criminals, and as only “feeling” under threat makes it clear that even concrete impediments to learning English are doubtful by “Megan”.

As the immigrants ‘have only themselves to blame’ for their lack of competence in English, the provision of language services (multi-language signing in public places and documents, translation, interpreting etc.) is seen as principally superfluous and especially infuriating on account of being paid for by the public purse. Many forum members therefore take a similar stance as Katie Hopkins (Example 1), namely in favour of advocating cutting all or some such services:

- (9) Why is bankrupt Britain allowing local councils to waste vast sums of taxpayer’s money on translations services ...? (“Pure Evil”, HYS 3)
- (10) It’s totally ridiculous that the fire service have to be issued cards with phonetic spellings of terms like “Get out of the building because it is on fire”. (“AGnomeCalledJimmy”, HYS 3)
- (11) I do not see why the Tax Payers of this country should fund a service that provides translators for those that will not make the effort to assimilate. You only have to walk into a doctors [sic] surgery to see how many notices/leaflets are published in foreign languages. Benefit Offices provide Translators and so does the legal system all at the expense of the Tax Payer, where else does this happen? (swerdna, HYS 3)

In a few cases, forum members seem to assume that British schools have to teach all the migrants' languages or that they systematically tolerate complete ignorance of English among most of their pupils:

- (12) What will be the consequence of schools where children do not speak English and teachers have to accommodate 50 different first languages – its totally insane! How are local authorities to cope in places like Peterborough, London, Manchester or Birmingham? I like cultural diversity – but places like Birmingham no longer resemble English cities at all! It's like a vision of Babylon (“The Ghosts of John of Galt”, HYS 2)
- (13) What about our Children who go to schools where 90% of the children cannot speak English. This is England, if I moved to Spain then I would expect to learn Spanish and I would expect the Spanish to expect that I would.
(“Nina”, HYS 3)

Whilst there are some *Have Your Say* posters who acknowledge that learning a foreign language to a good level of proficiency takes considerable time and who self-critically compare their own or British tourists and ex-pats' foreign language achievements to those of migrants,⁹ there is little evidence of any trust in the British education system's ability to teach English to migrant children. Moreover, provision of foreign languages translation and interpreting by public institutions (police, courts, fire service, health system, social services) is exclusively associated with immigrants' needs and hardly ever considered in the context of fostering 'inward' tourism, businesses and international cooperation between British and public institutions of other countries (e.g. international law enforcement). The language services appear in the forum postings as a grotesquely expensive luxury that serves no other function than to make life in Britain easier for lazy migrants. The debilitating effects that a withdrawal of such language services would have for the working of the UK's institutions are not at all discussed on the HYS threads in question.

Instead, any evidence of foreign languages being used in everyday situations is considered a threat to national cultural identity, as highlighted in a third major argumentation strand for this topic, e.g. in examples such as the following:

- (14) some parts of out [sic] country doesn't even feel English/British any more! last Christmas the decorations in my town were ALL in well what looked like Urdu nothing in English! how is that right? it's first class segregating.
(“It's all pants”, HYS 2)

9. On the other hand, there are also those who like “docthebiker” assume that “average people can learn a foreign language within 3 months” (HYS 3).

- (15) Sit on a London bus, and you'll hear very little English spoken. What's the point of multiculturalism, when you can't understand each other?
(“Argonaut”, HYS 2)
- (16) In Manchester we hear so many foriegn [sic] languages on the streets, the city has really changed in the last 5 years and I do not necessarily think that this is a good thing.
(“wisp”, HYS 3)
- (17) Yes, hearing someone talking in English is almost becoming a novelty in many parts of the UK, and in London particularly
(“Wu Shu”, HYS 3)
- (18) One of the most annoying things apart from ignoring the main religion of the UK (Christianity) is the non ability to speak English and wherever we go people around us take no notice and gabble away in whatever language they speak. UK children are being held back due to the large number of children who cannot speak english in the schools.
(“2squirrels”, HYS 3)

Again, hyperbole and overgeneralization are apparent in the claims that English is “not” or “very little” used in British cities, on buses or in the streets. The sheer occurrence of any foreign language in everyday life is viewed as an imposition on or a threat against the collective British-English ‘Self’. This ‘protective’ posture concerning English is combined with an aggressive and dismissive attitude towards all foreign “gabble” or illegible symbols (“what looked like Urdu”). In the rhetorical question-part of Example (15) multilingualism is implicitly treated as a contradiction of multiculturalism, which to forum poster “Argonaut” seems acceptable only when it is formulated in English. London’s cosmopolitanism in particular, which features prominently in London’s own tourism marketing,¹⁰ is seen in this perspective mainly as a loss of identity, not in any way as a desirable phenomenon.

This last argumentation strand links up with a larger narrative *topos* across all three forum threads, i.e. a supposedly exemplary account of how the respective speaker realised that Britain as a nation has lost (or is fast losing) its cultural identity as a result of mass immigration from other cultural contexts. Supposedly based on their everyday experiences, forum members express a feeling of fundamental alienation when they ‘step out in the street’:

- (19) When I walk down the street these days I think I am in a foreign country. Even 5 years ago in the city where I live this was not the case. Britain as we have known it, along with its established culture, is in danger of disappearing completely
(“ITMakesense1”, HYS 1)

10. See e.g. praise of London as European and global metropolis in the “Cultural tourism vision for London 2015–17”, commissioned by the then Mayor and later Brexit proponent Boris Johnson, at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cultural_tourism_vision_for_london_low_res_version.pdf (last accessed 18 March 2018).

- (20) they came in here in droves and changed our once settled and BRITISH cities into the streets of Bombay and Karachi (“jack”, HYS 1)
- (21) I visited a town in leicester last week and it was like coronation street had been moved to Pakistan! (“J Workerbee”, HYS 1)
- (22) Why are all todays migrants so intent to make us adopt their culture and rescind ours – after all we didn’t make them come here (“EvilPandora”, HYS 3)

These examples show that the perception of immigrants’ alleged lack of English language competence not only tends to overgeneralise and to rely on stereotypes but is often framed by figurative-narrative “scenarios”, which border on fantastical constructions, such as visions of the British TV soap opera “Coronation Street” moving to Pakistan or the “streets of Bombay and Karachi” moving to Britain.¹¹ What is expressed here is not just the fear of the exotic ‘Other’ as such but of it getting ‘too close for comfort’ or, in Cap’s terminology, of it being “proximated” into the “home zone” of the speaker’s we-group.¹² “Karachi”, “Bombay” or other metonymic indications of migrants’ origins delimit an imaginary scenario of CULTURE-MIXING that is endowed with feelings of fear, repulsion and ethical disapproval. This MIX scenario, like the other main scenarios of immigration discourse, such as CONTAINER, MOVEMENT, INSIDER (RE)ACTION, GAIN, SCROUNGE (Musolff 2015), tells a story of immigration in terms of supposedly self-experienced changes in one’s home environment that affect the speaker’s identity.

The formulaic localisation ‘in the street’ functions as a signal of authenticity and typicality at the same time; it could be paraphrased along the following lines, ‘When(ever) I go into the street(s) these days, I am confronted with an unacceptable change in my home environment: ...’. Hearing, reading or just vaguely noticing other languages being used is one of the key-changes which are experienced as identity-threatening, regardless of whether the speakers explicitly renounce “multiculturalism”. In fact, postings that defend this ideal *in principle* are not infrequent on HYS and form a substantial minority of 25–30%, but such disclaimers seem to be no obstacle for speakers declaring their hostility to foreign languages. The forum threads show very few counter-narratives or -arguments that question the scenario of CULTURE-MIXING.¹³

11. For the partly phantasmagorical nature of immigration in British public in Britain see Kureishi (2014). For figurative-narrative “scenarios” as a subtype of conceptual frames see Musolff (2006).

12. See Cap (2013, 2014 and in this volume); for the construal of immigration as a threat to the ego-center physical and social deixis see also Hart (2010, 2011a,b).

13. One of these exceptions is a refutation of a post by “Dave666” on HYS 3 endorsing compulsory “retrospective” (!) language tests for immigrants after the author had allegedly “recently

Such evidence from the HYS forum (which is a closely monitored and ‘politically correct’ web forum by comparison with more polemical and ideologically biased forums and blogs dealing with migration) puts the public awareness of linguistic and cultural (super-)diversity in sharp relief. The global and national spread of multi-culturalism and –lingualism and its present-day acceleration and intensification through globalisation and mass migration is regarded by sociolinguists as an empirical fact whose practical linguistic consequences, i.e. increasing code-, language- and dialect-switching and -mixing, are not in themselves good or bad and demonstrate the infinite human capacity for cultural adaptation and creativity (Auer 2011; Trudgill 2011; Blackledge and Cries 2010; Bhatia and Ritchie 2012). In the context of the immigration debate, on the other hand, at least those parts of the public that participate in the HYS forum appear to suspect cultural and especially linguistic (super-)diversity as a symptom of social disintegration and as an imminent threat to their collective identity. They conceive of monolingualism as the ‘gold standard’ of cultural identity as expressed in the admirably concise, if linguistically and politically dubious formulation by one forum participant: “one country, one language” (“Kevr”, HYS 3)! Clearly, the two perspectives are not just opposed but they seem irreconcilable. What, then, are we to make of such a contradiction?

4. Conclusions and tasks for the linguistic investigation of attitudes towards migration-related language issues

It would be too easy to simply dismiss foreign-language hostility such as that expressed on HYS as being factually erroneous and/or distorted by nationalist or xenophobic ideologies. Of course, linguistic xenophobia fits well with the rise in fear of and hostility to migrants and migration as a threat to ‘home’ identities, as highlighted in most chapters of this volume, but it also makes a specific contribution by setting up monolingualism as the ‘gold standard’ for cultural loyalty. This quasi-taboo on migrants’ (and other foreign) languages taps into a stock of long-standing, highly persistent “language myths” of monolingualism as ‘normal’ linguistic behaviour and multilingualism being an extraordinary burden on individuals and society (Andersson and Trudgill 1990; Bauer and Trudgill 1998; Watts 2011). Whilst being falsifiable on account of their transparent *non sequiturs*, overgeneralizations and lack of reliable data, the denigration of foreign language competence goes largely unchallenged and is believed and reinforced among the

passed a family with young Children using either Pashtun or Urdu in the street”. Another forum member, “Jokimoto” polemically proposed: “For those of you complaining about hearing “Pashtun or Urdu” *in the street*, may I suggest earplugs?”

forum community in the form of exemplary stories that are allegedly based on authentic experience. They provide 'explanations' for the perceived communication problems between the host society and immigrants by presupposing (1) the migrants' lack of desire or need to adapt to British culture and learn English, (2) the uselessness of language provision by the state and (3) an alleged disappearance of English language from public life in Britain as part of an ongoing CULTURE-MIX in Britain at the expense of the British-English home culture. When read in isolation, especially in the hyperbolic examples, these arguments may seem implausible or fantastic; however, as part of a coherent narrative of a once great (British-English) culture succumbing to the onslaught of an alien culture-mix they reinforce each other to the point of 'making sense' in an informal, everyday logic that is apparently convincing for the majority of forum members.

There is one further important reason to take such pseudo-arguments and narratives seriously: not only do they help to entrench xenophobic attitudes among the 'home' population but, as Piller and Takahashi (2011: 595) point out, "in the absence of the recognition of [...] coherent language strategies, [transnational migrants] often blame themselves for their social exclusion and internalize their communication difficulties". Indeed, a (small) number of forum posters identify themselves as migrants and while they obviously refrain from polemical xenophobic rhetoric, they in fact *share* many of the language myths expressed by the 'home' speakers, such as the aversion to "paying for language services for new immigrants" through their taxes.¹⁴ As a result, forum readers might be forgiven for assuming that there is almost a consensus across their community that trying to tackle immigration-related language issues through fostering multilingual literacy is a waste of public resources.

In view of the discrepancy between popular resentment of multilingual and –cultural competence and any policies that might enhance them on the one hand and sociolinguistic theories of (super-)diversity as sketched above, research on migrants' language practices and the acquisition of the majority society's language faces a massive challenge to engage in demystification and information work. Both the public and the migrants should be helped by a research culture that connects detailed description of linguistic diversity with the experiences and narratives of the

14. See e.g. a posting on HYS-3: "I am an African immigrant and live in the Borough of Brent. I have noted that Brent Council is very hot on offering a variety of translation services to those who cannot speak English. And who is paying for it? Me – the council tax payer! [...] If I went to Thailand, Spain or any other country, and I could not speak the language, I would not be (a) allowed to enrol on a course that was paid for by the Council at tax payers' expense; and (b) I would not be offered the free services of a translator!

languages users themselves so as to combat the repetition and further entrenchment of xenophobic language myths. Data from public internet forums such as those from HYS provide a good starting point for assessing popular migration-related attitudes beyond mainstream political, institutional and mass media voices.

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