

Hostility towards immigrants' languages in Britain: a backlash against 'super-diversity'?

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Abstract

Sociolinguists have adopted the concept of “super-diversity” from cultural anthropology to analyse multidimensional changes in ethnolinguistic identities resulting from recent mass migration. Sociolinguistic super-diversity is thus understood as a central aspect of shifts in migration patterns that have increased the complexity of cultural identities beyond traditional, more static ‘multicultural’ diversity, both in Britain and globally.

How is the presence of more complex and diverse linguistic identities viewed by the public? This paper explores attitudes towards perceived increased multilingualism and multiculturalism expressed in the BBC's *Have Your Say* Internet forum. The majority of postings blame immigrants for communication problems with the British ‘home’ community and allege their unwillingness to learn English; many also assume that (only) a monolingual national community guarantees social coherence and they are dismissive of any language mediation services.

In view of these ‘folk-sociolinguistic’ assumptions and linguaphobic attitudes, the notion of super-diversity needs to be reconfigured so as to include the (unintended) adverse impact of the migration-induced increase in the diversity and complexity of imagined ethnolinguistic identities

Keywords:

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1. Introduction

One of the most productive discussions of present-day sociolinguistics is the debate about the concept of “super-diversity”,¹ which has been adapted from cultural anthropology’s findings of new, quantitatively increased and qualitatively much more complex globalised migration patterns (Meissner and Vertovec 2015; Vertovec 2007). Blommaert and Rampton describe sociolinguistic super-diversity as “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” (Blommaert and Rampton 2015: 21-22). 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 2013a: 8). Hence, super-diversity requires a paradigm shift across socio- and contact-linguistics that involves fundamental changes in conceptualising ‘native’ languages, multilingualism and multiculturalism (Blommaert 2015).²

¹ See Arnaut et al. 2015a,b, 2016; Blommaert 2010, 2013a,b, 2015; Blommaert and Rampton 2011; De Fina et al. 2017; Goebel 2015; Rampton, 2016; Silverstein 2015; Toivanen and Saarikivi 2016; critically: Pavlenko 2014a,b; Reyes 2014.

² Blommaert et al.’s demand for a paradigm shift that helps to transcend ‘traditional’ concepts of *multilingualism*, casts an ironic light on the fact this latter category itself has only relatively recently been deemed an object of academic research and an educational goal in Europe. From the 19th century onwards and reaching far into the twentieth century, *monolingualism* was still taken for granted (see e.g. Bailey 1991; Barbour 2000, Jostes 2010) and has even been revived as part of a backlash against multiculturalism in the last decades (Vertovec and Wessenborn 2010).

Empirical studies for Britain have indeed shown that over the past decades language diversity has indeed become ‘much more diverse’, so to speak, especially in centres of immigration (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Cadier and Mar-Molinero 2014; Duarte and Gogolin 2013; Kerswill 2013; King and Carson 2016). But even in less ‘cosmopolitan’ areas of Britain, such as, for instance, Norfolk, more than eighty languages are used across local communities and catered for by Language-service providers for liaison with police, courts, health services etc. (INTRAN 2018). Extensive practise of multilingualism and the public need for institutional language mediation services have become the rule rather than the exception in present-day Britain and they are widely discussed in the media, in politics and in educational contexts.³ In 2016, for example, the then 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 stigmatising the intended target groups even further.⁴ In a comment in the right-wing tabloid *Daily Mail*, the columnist Katie Hopkins stated that compelling immigrant minorities to take language classes was fine but should not be funded by her, as a taxpayer:

³ See 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.

⁴ See e.g. *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, 17-19 January 2016.

(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. (Hopkins 2016).

For Hopkins, any communication problems of (im)migrants in Britain were exclusively their problem, i.e. to be solved and paid for by themselves as a corollary of their decision to settle in Britain. In the following months, which saw the run-up to the “Brexit” referendum about whether the United Kingdom should withdraw from the European Union, the migrants’ alleged lack of English remained prominent, with both the Prime Minister and also the Brexit proponents promising tough legislation to ensure that migrants “spoke good English”.⁵ After the referendum vote in favour of Brexit and the subsequent resignation of Cameron, his specific plans for enforcing migrant language compliance were shelved but the allegation that immigrants were resisting linguistic integration remained a prominent controversial issue (Runnymede Trust 2018).

Such prominence cannot come as a surprise given the fact that language policies targeted at immigrants, their social impact and financial cost have become topics of high national and international significance for some time (Duchêne et al. 2013; Krumm 2012). However, we may ask, what status do such questions have outside the spheres of political debates? Is the question of immigrants’ language competence (or lack of it) at all an object of interest and/or concern for members of the general public, and if yes, what role does it play in the debate about immigration? This article provides an exploratory study of postings to the BBC’s *Have*

⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2016: “EU referendum: Boris and Gove pledge tough new immigration system after Brexit.”

Your Say (HYS) discussion website that articulate popular attitudes towards multilingualism, which point in the direction of strongly felt hostility or resistance to (super-) diversity.

2. Data and methodology

This study is part of a larger research project comparing press media, internet forum and blog data in the immigration debate in Britain, initially with a view to highlighting differences in the use of immigration-specific metaphors across the three media genres (see Musolff 2012, 2015).⁶ Here we will concentrate exclusively on the forum data, which means that due to the lack of comparison with other media, their analysis can only lead to tentative results which need further testing and corroboration. The BBC's *Have your Say* website is, of course, only one of many forums and cannot be seen as representative of the whole British public; rather, it caters for a highly articulate sub-section of the public that relies on the BBC's reputation for political even-handedness and values its "netiquette" management system that rules out excessive polemic (Belair-Gagnon 2015: 27-46).

The *Have Your Say* sample includes 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 and consist of responses to the HYS-typical 'guiding questions': "Should politicians be talking about immigration?", "How should immigration be

⁶ The findings showed that strongly dehumanising metaphors such as denunciations of immigrants as *parasites* appear in all three genres but in are used in different ways: only in the blogosphere are they employed emphatically and assertively, whilst in the BBC internet forum *Have Your Say*, they are highly contested and in the press they are almost exclusively quoted as belonging to the vocabulary of racism and xenophobia. The press sample was drawn from tabloids, broadsheets and magazines across the political spectrum, with 278 articles amounting to 320.756 word tokens. Example (1) above is part of this sample.

tackled?”, “Are immigration rules fair?” (BBC 2010a-c).⁷ These discussion strands generated altogether 2473 postings (566, 881, and 1026 each, with 81 postings removed by forum managers) and amount to 333.518 (word) tokens. The main topical forum question on the *Have Your Say* were all followed up by short explanations that specified 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)

Prompted by these language-focused elaboration, 809 postings in the third thread (= 81% of the 1026 comments) included explicit arguments about immigrants’ perceived lack of language skills, whereas for the two former questions only 89 postings touched on this subject, giving a total of 898 relevant postings. In the following section we highlight the argumentative *topoi* associated with the ‘immigrant language question’ in these postings and explicate the folk-linguistic assumptions and attitudes on which they are based.

⁷ Since 2011, the question based format of *Have Your Say* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/haveyoursay/>) has been changed to a news story-based version: www.bbc.com/news/have_your_say).

3. Scenarios of communication problems caused by immigration

The alleged lack of immigrants' language skills provides the central background assumption of almost all postings on the *Have Your Say*, which was arguably prompted to some degree by the guiding question and its explanation. Significantly, however, this is the case even for participants who defend continuing immigration and oppose xenophobic arguments and/or concede that there are different attitudes to English learning among the immigrant population. However, they are in the minority of c. 20% whereas in most cases posters link this *topos* with the argumentation that immigrants (or subgroups of them) cannot be bothered to learn English because it isn't necessary for their well-being in Britain. The following examples are representative for four fifths of all postings (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 respective forum member’s own experiences, the hyperbolic formulations (“can’t speak or understand single word”, “not have a single word of English”) and generalising allegations of migrants’ wholesale refusals to integrate in any way into British society (examples 6-7) underline the stereotypical nature of the notion that immigrants have ‘no wish to learn English’. It is in fact highly implausible that the forum posters have reached their conclusions on the basis of own observations; at best they have encountered a few cases of communication difficulties, which are extrapolated to general and long-term conditions and moralizingly judged (“[immigrants] refusing...”, “That kind of idleness is unacceptable”). The responsibility for the alleged lack of English language competence is, as in Hopkin’s comment (1) allocated to the immigrants themselves. Their “idleness” is even quite often unfavourably compared with the poster’s own (pre-)supposed readiness to learn another language, as in the following postings:

(8) [The government are not asking [the immigrants] to take an English degree. But speaking the language to the standard of one of those 'teach yourself Spanish in 6 weeks' books is pretty much essential if you're living in a new country. I dust off one of those before going on holiday, not least as being able to ask where the toilet is can be quite important! (Peter_Sym, HYS 3)

(9) 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)

Learning a language as an immigrant is compared by several posters to “dusting off” a *Teach Yourself*-handbook for small talk on holiday, which of course makes L2 acquisition during immigration look strangely easy. “Megan” concedes later on in the discussion thread 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 immigrants’ language needs are conceived of as being on a par with a Western tourist visiting another country at their leisure and following the convention to speak enough of the local language to be “polite”, or with a would-be British “ex-pat” who prudently includes language learning plans in his or her retirement.⁸ “Megan’s” dismissive presentation of asylum seekers

⁸ Many of the 27 posters who mention the British ex-pats as a relevant example do concede, however, that their record in learning the language of their new home country is not too impressive; e.g. “How many ex-pats in Spain speak Spanish? How many in Dubai speak Arabic? How many bother to learn another language. We (in a lot of cases) don't do it, why should they? Smacks of hypocrisy to me” (“deleted”, HYS 3). However, this self-critical assessment is not uncontested either: some posters

as “doing a runner”, a phrase which is usually associated with fugitive criminals, make it clear that even their motives to flee are dubious and due to their “panicked” feelings rather than a factual threat.

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 coming out of the public purse. Many forum members again take a similar stance as K. Hopkins (example 1) by advocating cutting all or most of these services. In a few cases, forum members even assume that British schools have to teach in all the migrants’ languages and/or tolerate that their pupils do not learn English (see examples 10, 11):

(10) 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! [...] 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)

(11) 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)

do assert their own successful L2 acquisition as ex-pats in European countries and others even claim that such L2 acquisition by British ex-pats is not needed: “mostly brit ex-pats are retired, have money set aside and require virtually no services from their host country, (remember no NHS abroad), they will be paying for their own accomadation, and will not be starting a family to over populate the country in question etc.” (“doug”, HYS 3).

- (12) Why is bankrupt Britain allowing local councils to waste vast sums of taxpayer's money on translations services ... ? ("Pure Evil", HYS 3)
- (13) 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)
- (14) 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 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 these examples, the *topos* of immigrants' (and their children's) alleged unwillingness to learn English is used as a presupposition to justify two near-contradictory allegations. On the one hand, linguistic diversity in British schools is grotesquely exaggerated by assuming that all pupils who speak another language cannot speak or learn English at all. If taken seriously, this emergency would call for an urgent massive investment in English language teaching for pupils and multilingual/multicultural communication training for teachers. On the other hand, the existing public provision of foreign mediation, translation and interpreting services by the police, public and health services is deemed expendable because it is exclusively associated with the immigrants' needs (examples 11-13), without consideration of its role in fostering inward tourism, businesses and international cooperation (e.g. law enforcement). Language mediation services appear in these postings as an expensive luxury that serves no other function than to make life in Britain easier for lazy migrants. The debilitating effects that a

withdrawal of language services would have for the working of the UK's institutions are not at all discussed in the postings.

Instead, the public appearance and practice of foreign languages in Britain is considered a threat to national cultural identity, as highlighted in the following examples:

(15) some parts of our 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)

(16) 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)

(17) In Manchester we hear so many foreign 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)

(18) 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)

(19) 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 propositions that English is “not” or “very little” in evidence 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’, which is combined with an emphatically dismissive attitude to foreign “gabble” or “what looked like Urdu”. In example (16) multilingualism is implicitly treated as a contradiction of multiculturalism, which seems to be acceptable to forum poster “Argonaut” only when it is formulated in English. In (16) and (18), the cosmopolitanism of London, which features prominently in the capital’s own tourism marketing,⁹ as a loss of identity, not in any way as a desirable phenomenon.

This latter argumentation strand links up with a larger *topos* across all three forum threads that has more of a narrative than argumentative character, i.e. the depiction of Britain as a nation that has lost (or is in the process of losing) its cultural identity as a result of mass immigration from other cultural contexts. Again, supposedly relying on everyday own experiences, forum members express a feeling of fundamental alienation when they ‘step out into the street’:

(20) 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

⁹ See e.g. the (self-)praise of London as a global metropolis in the “Cultural tourism vision for London 2015-17”, commissioned by the then Mayor of London B. Johnson, at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cultural_tourism_vision_for_london_low_res_version.pdf.

known it, along with its established culture, is in danger of disappearing completely (“ITMakesense1”, HYS 1)

(21) they came in here in droves and changed our once settled and BRITISH cities into the streets of Bombay and Karachi (“jack”, HYS 1)

(22) I visited a town in leicester last week and it was like coronation street had been moved to Pakistan! (“J Workerbee”, HYS 1)

(23) 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 last examples show that the perception of immigration in Britain – and of its specific sub-aspects such as the alleged lack of English language competence – not only tends to overgeneralise and rely on stereotypes but is often framed by figurative-narrative “scenarios” that border on fantastical fiction, such as visions of the British TV soap opera “Coronation Street” moving to Pakistan or the “streets of Bombay and Karachi” moving to Britain. What is expressed here is not the fear of the exotic ‘Other’ as such but of it getting ‘too close for comfort’, or in P. Cap’s terminology, of it being “proximated” into the “home zone” of the speaker’s we-group.¹⁰ Blending “Karachi”, “Bombay” or other metonymic indications of migrants’ origins with British locations creates an imaginary scenario of CULTURE-MIXING that is endowed with feelings of fear, repulsion and ethical disapproval. This scenario, like the other main scenarios of the HYS immigration discourse, such as CONTAINER, MOVEMENT,

¹⁰ See Cap 2013, 2014; for the construal of immigration as a threat to the ego-center physical and social deixis see also Hart 2010, 2011a,b.

INSIDER (RE)ACTION, GAIN, SCROUNGE (Musolff 2015), does not provide testable information but tells a mini-story of immigration that is charged with emotional associations and appeals for social identity-restitution.

Formulas such as “When I walk down the street” or “I visited.... and it was like” function as rhetorical signals of authenticity to introduce a narrative that leads into a near-catastrophic turn-around, i.e. the alleged radical CULTURE CHANGE, which needs to be resolved by some unnamed authority so that the “once settled and BRITISH” home environment is reinstated.

Hearing, reading or just vaguely noticing other languages being used by others is one of the key-changes which the HYS posters experience as identity-threatening in this way, regardless of whether they explicitly renounce “multiculturalism” or “multilingualism” in principle. In fact, some 30% of postings on HYS claim to defend these ideals, but such assertions serve as disclaimers so that the specific criticism of annoying foreign language presence is mitigated. Challenges to the scenario of CULTURE-MIXING as a threat are extremely rare.¹¹

Such evidence from the HYS forum, which has to be considered a ‘well-behaved’ and closely monitored public forum by comparison with more polemical and ideologically radical forums and blogs dealing with migration, puts the public awareness of and attitude to linguistic and cultural diversity in Britain in sharp relief. The spread of linguistic super-diversity through globalisation mass migration and new media is regarded by sociolinguists as an established empirical fact whose practical linguistic consequences, i.e. increasing code-, language- and

¹¹ One such exception is the refutation of a posting that endorsed the introduction of language tests for immigrants after the poster (“Dave666”, HYS 3) allegedly had “recently passed a family with young Children using either Pashtun or Urdu in the street” by another forum member, “Jokimoto”: “For those of you complaining about hearing ‘Pashtun or Urdu’ *in the street*, may I suggest earplugs?”.

dialect-switching and -mixing, are not in themselves good or bad and demonstrate the infinite human capacity for cultural adaptation and creativity. However, those members of the public that participate in HYS take a much less sympathetic view of super-diversity as a symptom of social disintegration and an imminent threat to their traditional national, social and linguistic identity. Some of them even conceive of monolingualism as the ‘gold standard’ of cultural identity as expressed in the concise formulation by one forum participant: “one country, one language”, “Kevr, HYS 3)! Clearly, the two perspectives – acknowledgement of super-diversity as a fact vis-à-vis its emphatic denial and/or rejection are not just different but utterly irreconcilable. What, then, are we to make of this contradiction?

4. Conclusions: can super-diversity and advocacy of monolingualism be related?

Despite their fundamental opposition, linguistic super-diversity and aggressive linguaphobic attitudes that presume monolingualism to be an ideal for social cohesion may be seen as two sides of the same coin in relation to present-day mass migration.¹² Compared with traditional migration patterns that posed little challenge to a dominant monolingual majority ‘home’ culture, recent multidimensional increases in socio-cultural diversity appear to have led to a radicalisation of popular narratives of a multilinguistic ‘chaos’ engulfing in Britain. Hostile attitudes to allegedly foreign- and/or migration-induced language change have of course been part of xenophobic “language myths” for a long time (Andersson and Trudgill 1990; Bauer and Trudgill 1998; Thomas 1991; Watts 2011). However, their main concern was ‘language decay’ due to contact language ‘interference’, whereas the statements on HYS reviewed here demonstrate a more sweeping, emotionally charged hostility to the public presence of foreign languages in Britain. The main scenarios of immigration-related communication problems

¹² See Toivanen and Saarikivi 2016 for a comparable linkage of the apparent opposites ‘Linguistic Genocide’ and ‘Superdiversity’.

that forum members give – i.e., a) the migrants’ lack of desire (or need) to adapt to British culture and learn English, b) the utter uselessness of language mediation provision by the state, whether in the form of public translation and interpreting services or in the education system, and c) the alleged disappearance of English language from public life in Britain – all fit into an overarching narrative of CULTURE-MIXING that has taken/is taking place at the expense of the British-English home culture and will eventually to its extinction. Read in isolation, especially in the more hyperbolic examples, these scenarios may seem grotesquely exaggerated but, as parts of the coherent story of ‘a once great English culture/language succumbing to culture-mix’, they fit together and reinforce each other to the point of ‘making sense’ for the majority of the forum public, accounting as they do for roughly two thirds (n=612) of the 889 relevant postings. Counter-narratives about successful solutions of such communication problems are not represented at all. The few arguments levelled against the suspicion of immigrants’ lack of (willingness to learn) English, which amount to less than five percent of the postings are wistful remarks about ‘us British ourselves not being good at learning foreign languages’ (e.g. tourists, ex-pats) or apologetic hints at the economic and social pressures on sub-groups of immigrants, such as refugees from war. They do not add up to anything resembling the seemingly coherent narratives of ‘mass immigration causing the English language to disappear from England’.

How can this worrying result be reconciled with or related to the findings of an increase in super-diversity, i.e. more and more complex multilingual practices in British (and other) discourse communities? Our tentative response would be that the increase in linguaphobic attitudes and narratives of communication breakdown present the – evidently distorted and exaggerated – *reaction* from the home public (as represented in HYS forums) to perceived communication problems which they associate with every new ‘wave’ of immigration that is being announced and commented on in the media and in political discourse. The alleged

breakdown in intercultural communication is presented as if it had been experienced by the speakers regularly, but the figurative qualities of their formulation (hyperbole, stereotypical, formulaic narratives and the sweeping pseudo-conclusions based on non-sequiturs) betray their origin in stereotyping assumptions and scenarios of CULTURE-MIX and CULTURE LOSS. Whether these fears are in fact ‘triggered’ by increased sociolinguistic super-diversity is an empirical question that would need historical comparisons of the relationship between actual and perceived multilingualism in specific discourse communities, which is outside the remit of this article. It would require a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to establish if variations in multilingual practices correlate significantly with variations in the public expression of linguaphobic hostility towards migrant languages. Whilst such a research programme may seem daunting, it could complement the “paradigm shift” of acknowledging the ever more complex forms linguistic and cultural diversity of modern communities by facing the obstacles to better understanding their origins and help devise policies to overcome them.

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