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The University of Manchester

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A Comparative Study of how Ideologies inform the Representation of Language Policies in the British Press

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1 Introduction

The United Kingdom has a high level of linguistic diversity. Despite some regional policy responses to such a linguistic diversity, there is no overarching policy on multilingualism. This leads to the intense debate about language policy, the nature of which is the conflict of ideologies. Considering the important role the press plays in the interplay between language policies and ideologies, we decide to conduct a comparative study of how ideologies inform the representation of language policies in the British press. In this study, we are going to address the following questions: what language policies as well as the mechanisms used to perpetuate corresponding language practices are represented in the British press? What ideologies inform such representations? How will the audience with different ideologies respond to these representations?

Current literature provides some approaches to dissecting news as discourse and studying news' ideology (e.g. structural approach and multidisciplinary approach) and a thorough analysis of language policies and their ideologies (Van Dijk, 2009; Schmidt, 2000; Ricento, 2013). To facilitate this study, we adopt Ozolins' (1993) definition that language policy is both social and bureaucratic attitudes towards languages and their representation in institutional proposals and practices. Besides, we use Van. Dijk's (2009: 183) definition that ideologies are fundamental social beliefs "underlying the social representations shared by a group which may be used or abused by each social group to impose, defend or struggle for its interests."

We initiated our study by using keyword search to collect a corpus of news articles which can be roughly classified into a group covering monolingual policy and the other covering multilingual policy. We found five news articles covering Boris Johnson's English-only policy, which are put into group A, and made a comparative analysis of how different news represent the same language policy. In group A, three news articles focus on reporting this policy while others focus on responding. Therefore, we further classified them into reporting group and responding group to do discourse analysis. We also found four news articles covering multilingual policy in education domain and put them into group B. Then we employed structural approach to dissect how and why they represent contradictory outlooks on multilingual education in the UK.

Adopting the multidisciplinary approach which highlights the cognitive process of news representation and comprehension involving the interplay of ideologies of all participants, we did some research about journalists' background and the articles they have written to study their ideologies which inform their representations of language policies (Van Dijk, 2009). Additionally, we gathered information about netizens' backgrounds by looking into their online profiles to facilitate the study of their ideologies which motivate different responses.

2 Findings

Group A

The three news in the reporting group all represent three main points of Johnson's speech: first, there are many parts of Britain where English is not spoken as the first language; second, to speak primarily English facilitates people to become functional parts of the society; third, immigrants must learn English since to speak English is essential to be British or feel British.

Different from Halliday and Brooks' simply citing Johnson's speech, Mahmood and Zeffman quote some political figures' remarks on Johnson's proposal. Mahmood (2019) first presents the criticism about Johnson's second point from Jane Dodds, leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, that not speaking English as the first language will not hinder the prosperity of the community. Then he quotes the comment of Angus MacNeil who uses his own example to justify the use of regional languages aiming at Johnson's first point, criticizes Johnson's policy as domination policy to exclude immigrants, and urges for the celebration of multilingualism (Mahmood, 2019). Additionally, he shows Chi Onwurah's concern about the decreasing government funding's influence on implementing English-only policy (Mahmood, 2019). Zeffman (2019) quotes the remark of Steve Ballinger who welcomes Johnson's proposal and interprets it as assimilation policy, saying "speaking English is the foundation for integration." Noteworthy, Ballinger highlights the need to speak "decent English." This opinion aligns with the *standard language ideology* described by Wiley and Lukes (1996), which identifies the language spoken by the dominant group as standard language and associates people speaking other varieties with bad characteristics like ignorance and immorality.

The two news in the responding group represent negative responses to Johnson's language policy based on different reasons. Nour Al-Baarini (2019) interprets Johnson's language policy as an urge for immigrants to learn English as a foreign language and indicates that the decreasing fund for English classes and the difficulty of accessing English lessons have prevented immigrants from learning English and integrating into British society. Metcalfe (2019) attacks the link between speaking English and "Britishness" established by Johnson and argues that "being British is historically, culturally, and linguistically more nuanced than simply being or speaking English" and calls for "an appreciation for multi-indigenous, multi-ethnic, multicultural Britain." Cranmer (2019) believes the interpretation made by many reports that Johnson's proposal about immigrants learning English is about them improving English as a foreign language to be wrong, suspecting that English-only Policy aims at excluding immigrants whose first languages are not English.

After reading the comments of netizens below the reports, we find that these comments can be roughly classified into five types according to their attitudes and reasonings. The first type supports English-only policy for it believes English to be necessary to promote international business, the example of which is *Netizen 1* arguing that English as "a national, and international language for high business transactions" is more beneficial for Britain's international trade than using different languages in different regions, as shown in figure 1.

Netizen 1



Unfortunately a national, and international, language for high business transactions is always needed for international trade in the UK.

To not speak with a national business language for the entire country is to become a regional lost vicinity for which foreign companies refuse to give business to.

The international language, for business deals, is rapidly becoming American English although British English is still understandable, in America, despite its spelling differences in the year 2019.

Our only international language for business deals, in the UK, is British English. However American English has taken over as the norm, for international trade transactions, and it may be no longer possible to write, and speak in, British English at some stage in the future due to Internationalisation of commerce and business.

Ok. we have the Kernow language in Cornwall,, Gaelic in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Welsh, Manx in the Isle of Mann, and if we delve deeper then Cambric in Cumbria; and it is even possible to recover the original Brigantia language of the country now known as Yorkshire if we really try hard enough!!

Is splitting a unified country into smaller smuggling factions good for international trade either reasonable or in the interests of gaining international trade for that country???

The answer is no!!!!!!! ; it loses trade for that country, or smaller region in question, and is not of any benefit in the 21st century is such a country becomes a cut off third world wealth styled entity.

Is there any benefit to secondary languages? Yes; it's a matter of tourism promotion and promotion of the culture for sub regions.

Sub regions play no role, what so ever, in attracting finance, or international business, from elsewhere on this planet of ours but are good locally for tourism!

Regards

Figure 1

The second type sides with English-only policy, arguing that speaking English helps immigrants integrate into British society. Noteworthy, there are some differences between the comments of netizens from different backgrounds despite they share the same opinion. As shown in figure 2, some netizens (*Netizen 2 and 3*) who are white British describe Johnson's proposal as "wisest utterances from a British politician" and "a first step to assimilation." They comment that immigrants must learn and speak English so as to integrate into British society and enjoy "our benefit," otherwise they will be "invisible in the local community." Analysing the terms they used, we find that white British netizens are more likely to use terms like "they" and "our community, our benefit" to distinguish themselves from immigrants.



Figure 2

As shown in figure 3, Netizen 4, a netizen from immigrant background, acknowledges that immigrants have the responsibility to learn English while criticizing that “the opportunity for the majority community to use the mastery of English as means of belittling immigrants is unacceptable.”

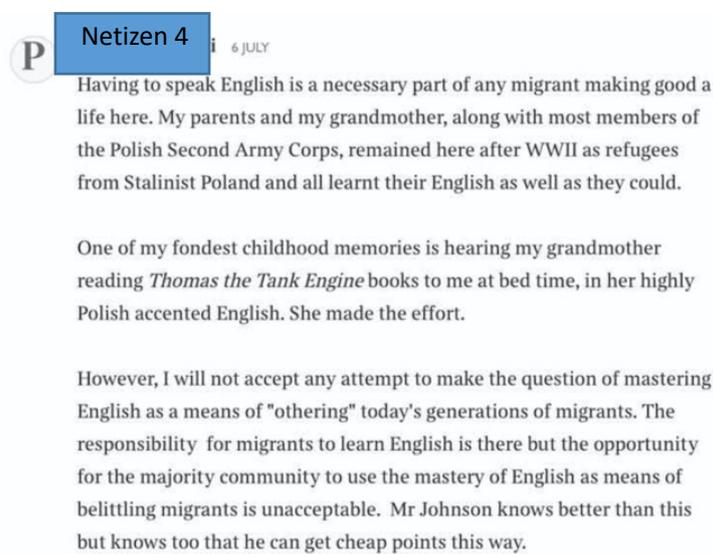


Figure 3

There are also netizens from immigrant background complaining that they do not have time or money for English classes and suggesting that English classes should be provided for immigrants, as exemplified in figure 4.

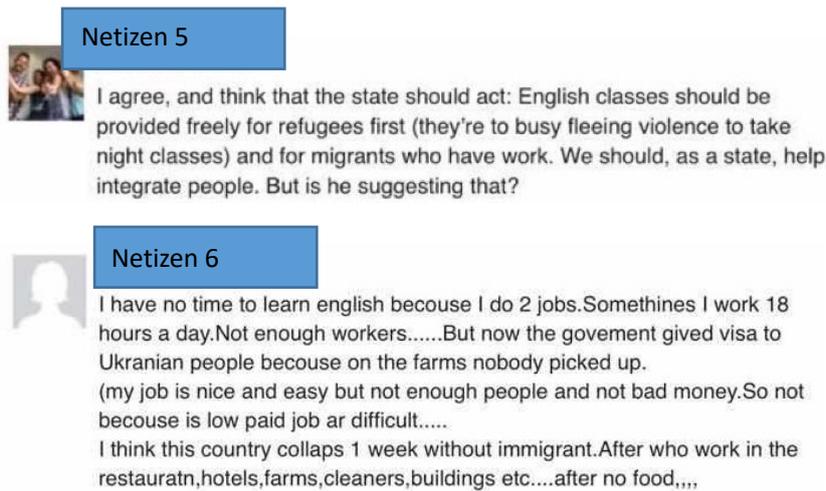


Figure 4

The third type comes from speakers of indigenous minority languages who worry that Johnson's proposal to replace their languages with English will lead to a loss of identities, as shown in figure 5.

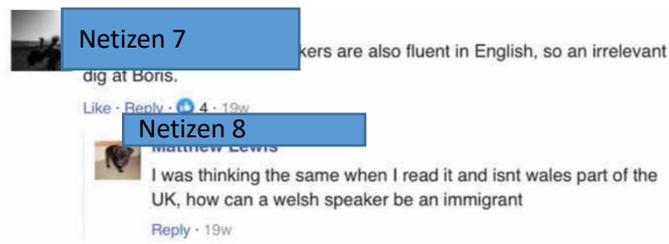


Figure 5

The fourth type disagrees with Johnson's proposal, saying that it displays English ethnocentrism and imperialism mindset, which is exemplified in figure 6.

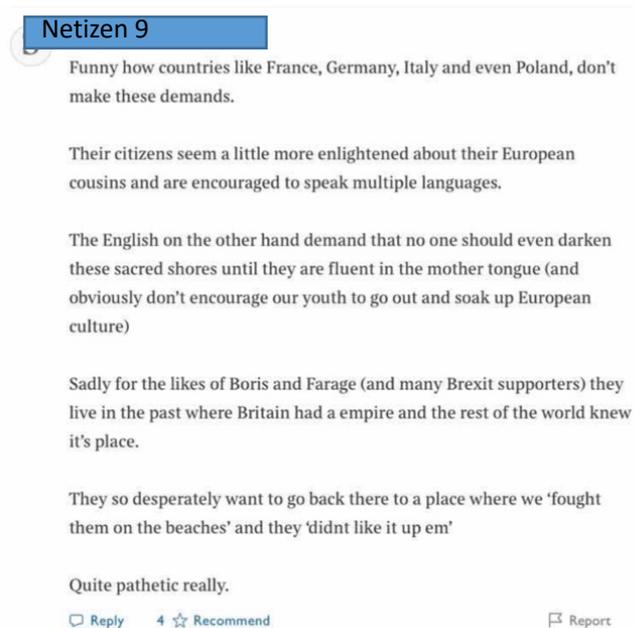


Figure 6

The fifth type mainly comes from netizens from immigrant backgrounds who suspect that the intent of English-only policy is to exclude immigrants. In figure 7, *Netizen 10* uses his own example to explain that English will always be his second language and says that English-only policy makes him feel unwelcomed.

W Netizen 10

"Too often there are parts of our country and parts of London still, and other cities as well, where English is not spoken by some people as their first language."

I have to say that I find this comment of Mr Johnson rather chilling.

I came to this country from Poland over 30 years ago, bringing with me my doctorate in technical sciences and the command of English sufficient to be accepted for a post-doctoral research position in one of Britain's leading universities. I am now a college principal and a senior lecturer at that university.

English is my second language. I also speak partly forgotten school Russian, some German, awful school-boy French and restaurant Italian. When I poke fun at my accent and at the lapses in my English, such as the suggestion to "paint a town red" I made on one memorable occasion, my students and colleagues tell me that my English is still better than that of some of the native speakers. They are probably just being polite, of course. Some say that my English is better than their Polish, which is clearly a blessing, as we would not be able to communicate otherwise. The problem is that English will remain my second language, this is not something I can change, so what is Mr. Johnson's suggestion? Do a Dalek thing and exterminate? Or just throw me out of this country?

Figure 7

Group B

In 2014 a report by Lucy Ward describes the views of Leszek Borysiewicz, Cambridge vice-chancellor, who supports multilingual policy. Using emotive language to discuss the negative effect the decline in language learning can have on Britain, describing the vice-chancellor as "passionate" and saying how he finds the situation "saddening" brings the importance of linguistic diversity to the forefront (Ward, 2014a). Borysiewicz warns that the tightening immigration laws not only "create a perception among students that [Britain] is not a welcoming country to study in," causing the falling applications of international students, but also bring Britain the risk of losing the strength of being a plural society (Ward, 2014a). He later goes on to describe how important bilingualism is and how immigrants speaking other languages are able to bring their language skills, opening up different avenues for young people in terms of career opportunities and life experience.

Perpetuating Borysiewicz's fears of the decline in language learning, the same year a report came out from the same author, criticizing British education system for not supporting community languages and advocating a higher recognition of community languages. The referenced poll reveals that around 40% of young people aged 14 to 24 years old did not see their community languages as an "advantage in life" (Ward, 2014b). Almost 40% also had never received a qualification in their community languages with the

primary reason being that their school did not offer tuition in it (Ward, 2014b). The report explains how damaging this is, saying that if a language does not have a qualification behind it then it automatically receives a “lower status” (Ward, 2014b). Using statistics and numerical values this report reveals a shortage of pride among the speakers of community languages, suggesting that corresponding practices like offering qualifications for language abilities and increasing funding should be taken to reverse multilingualism (Ward, 2014b).

A report from 2016 by Gov.uk provides a very different outlook on British multilingual education. It too describes how important multilingualism is, saying that having a multicultural background enables young people in UK to be more equipped to “compete on a global scale” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/community-languages-saved-to-ensure-diverse-curriculum-continues>). It does however, contradictory to the previous article, show statistics to demonstrate a rise in pupils learning a foreign language. Furthermore, it contradicts the claim of low funding saying that the government provided £1.8 million to train teachers to teach languages from 2014 to 2016(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/community-languages-saved-to-ensure-diverse-curriculum-continues>).

As these articles discuss circumstances dating back to 2014 it is important to look at more recent reports on this subject. Supporting the report of a lack of funding is another article from Bawden (2019). It explains how some language lessons are now being funded by foreign governments due to the lack of funding from the British government, highlighting a 91% decrease in education funding and emphasizing how teaching staffs are now doubling as cleaners as cuts are made (Bawden, 2019). Although the article does mention how the government has set a target of 90% of students taking a language in GCSE, Bawden (2019) furthers this with doubt stating progress has been slow and there has been a decline in language learning at A Level. Bawden proposes (2019) that more drastic actions like making language learning compulsory from the age of five should be taken, which further weights her feeling of urgency on the matter.

The reports mounting up to suggest there is not enough funding for language learning and the increasing number of articles indicating a move towards English monolingualism, does insinuate that British government is, perhaps underhandedly, moving to a more monolingual policy.

The Guardian’s coverage of Leszek Borysiewicz’s criticizing immigration curb and urging for a higher recognition of multilingual UK has sparked off an intense debate in the comment areas, which centres on whether immigration curb prevents intelligent people from coming to Britain. Some netizens agree with Borysiewicz, as exemplified in figure 8.

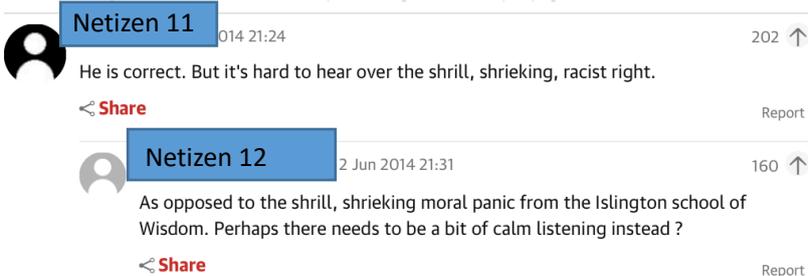


Figure 8

However, many netizens accuse Borysiewicz of making an oversimplified assumption that immigrants will provide benefits to UK based on the narrow perspective of a member of the elite class. Additionally, they think that it is Borysiewicz's immigrant background that motives such a conclusion with a self-serving bias and claim that he should step out of the elite bubble to appreciate the situation of the native working classes that feel the burden of mass immigration, as shown in figure 9.

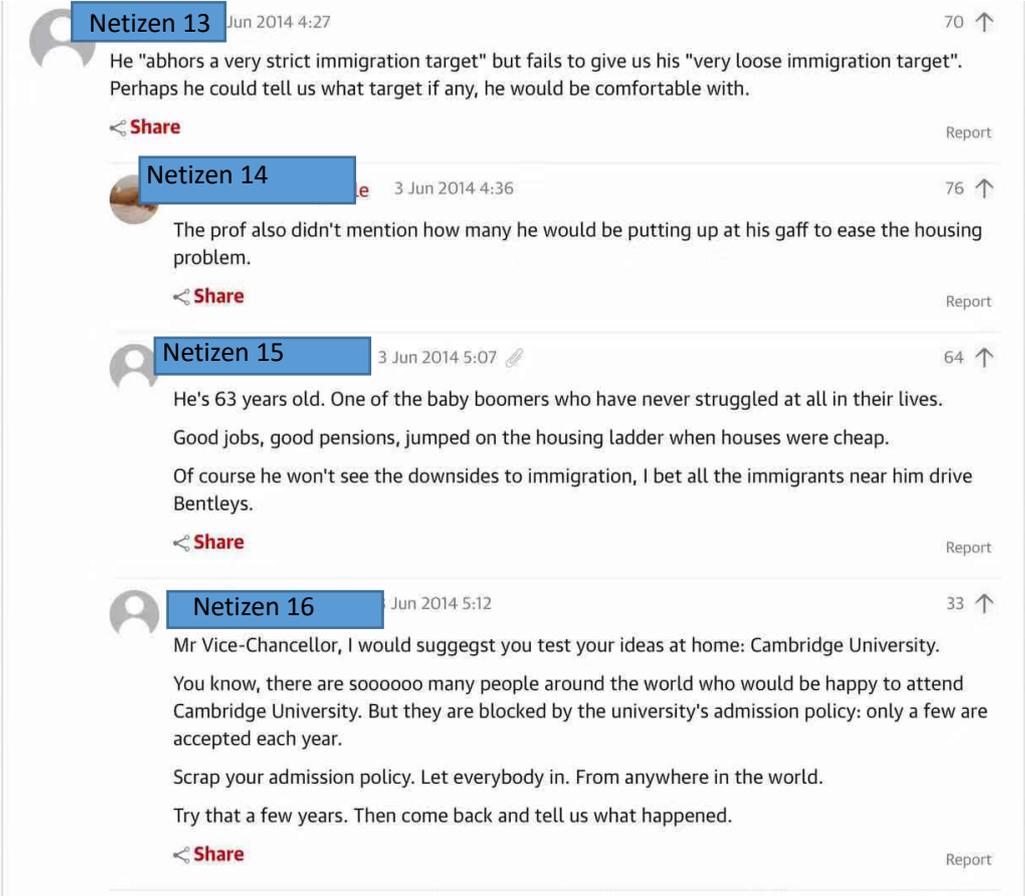


Figure 9

There are also reasonable netizens who point out that there are subtle differences between immigrants and refugees, commenting that immigration curb should be discussed based on its impacts on different groups such as students coming to study in UK and people coming to UK because of war. They think taking intelligent young people is beneficial to UK while absorbing too many refugees will be a burden. It is exemplified in figure 10.

Netizen 17 2 Jun 2014 21:33 83 ↑

No, they are two separate issues.

One is about students coming to study in the UK and the other about people coming to the UK for other reasons.

There is also the difference between refugees and immigration.

If all immigrants just came to the UK and succeeded, there wouldn't be any poor people in families who came to the UK.

The idea of taking the brightest young people from around the world is also about helping the UK and not about helping poorer countries.

It's no different to the taking the natural resources of poor countries by British companies.

Figure 10

The comments below the news covering that foreign language education turns to foreign government funding show that netizens are more likely to share the same opinions on this issue, (see figure 11).

Netizen 18 20 ↑

 Being able to communicate in a second language is a gift. Even if a person believes they will never leave Britannia's shores and use rudimentary language skills, even for a holiday, the option is always there. My grandmother once declared that she would never travel abroad until she had seen all there was to see in England, Scotland and Wales. Eventually, she went to France - dredged-up her primitive French, enjoyed every minute of it. And, admitted that she should have gone sooner. My uncle retired and went caravanning in France. A lady was involved. He never returned to Blighty. Brought an old farm in Normandie. He and his lady were married by the local maire. We lived in Quebec for a number of years. Both daughters are perfectly bilingual, and say that second and more languages can give a real appreciation for another country's culture. Having a second language really is a gift.

[Share](#) Report

Netizen 19 15 ↑

 Good God, this is embarrassing stuff. We are such a nation of idlers when it comes to learning other languages. I completely appreciate that advanced Polish will be of limited use in adult life, but even a basic standard of one western European language will make it easier to make oneself understood in any of the others. So why do so few of us keep at it after we've finished school?

[Share](#) Report

Netizen 20 9 Apr 2019 9:22 7 ↑

 So much more incentive to learn English since it gives most people access to mass popular modern media and cultural output of the Western world. German, French or Mandarin, for example, hardly tap into the beating pulse of Hollywood or most of the critically acclaimed plays, films and other popular mass media output from the 20th Century onwards.

[Share](#) Report

Figure 11

They think learning other languages to be helpful to one’s life and are glad to see that children concerned in the news have the opportunity to learn other languages. Additionally, they are upset by the fact that the UK has to rely on foreign funding for multilingual education, hoping that the UK government would contribute more. Besides, many netizens believe that learning a foreign language facilitates them to not only know other cultures but also appreciate their own languages better.

As for the last news, although it focuses on reporting that community languages are not supported in UK education system and advocating a higher recognition of language skills and the enhancement of the status of community languages, some netizens seeing speaking English as a privilege misinterpret it as a report concerning immigrant issues. They comment that immigrants “should learn English and abandon the culture that failed them and their parents. Sick and tired of all this ‘accommodation’ to immigrants who refuse to assimilate,” as shown in figure 12.



Figure 12

There are also netizens who clearly identify the focus of this news, which is exemplified in figure 13.

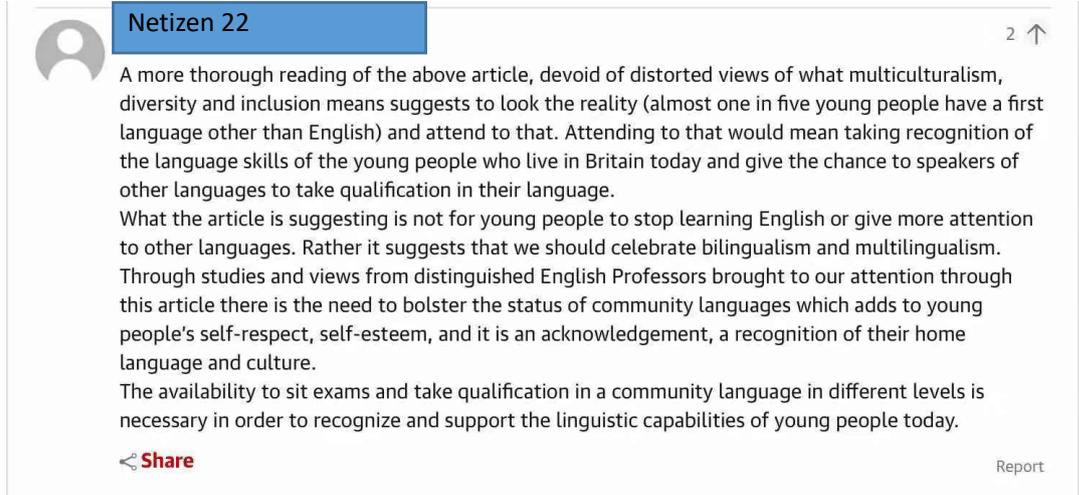


Figure 13

3 Discussion

From the comparative analysis we have made above, we find that different interpretations of Johnson's English-only policy and responses represented by the British press centre on two kinds of conflicts where the clash of ideologies has a role to play: the conflict between English and indigenous minority languages and that between English and immigrant languages. Speakers of indigenous minority languages, more concerned about the conflict between English and indigenous minority languages, tend to interpret English-only policy as a monolingual policy to prioritize English in areas where regional languages dominant. Therefore, their responses focus on justifying the use of their first languages in protection of the sense of identity. With a focus on the conflict between English and immigrant languages, English-only policy can be understood as assimilation policy to make immigrants learn English to integrate, which is represented by Ballinger's remark and the second type of comment, or domination policy to exclude immigrants, which is represented by Cranmer's (2019) response and the fifth type of comment (Zeffman, 2019).

Three types of ideologies of language planning in extant literature assumed by Ruiz (1984), which are "language-as-problem," "language-as-right," and "language-as-resource," are confirmed in journalists' representation of language policies and netizens' responses collected in the corpus. Johnson's claim that "too many parts of our country where English is not spoken as a first language" and "some communities are not doing enough to integrate into society" links multilingualism with negative representations, revealing the ideology of "language-as-problem" (Halliday & Brooks, 2019). The benefits of multilingualism brought by immigrants mentioned by Borysiewicz and Andrew Siddles' proposal (shown in figure 1) to make English the national business language in the comments represent the ideology of "language-as-resource" (Ward, 2014a). Welsh and Gaelic speakers' defence of their rights to speak their languages manifests the ideology of "language-as-right." However, the responses from people from immigrant background, whether shown in the comments or the reports, reflect that despite their dissatisfaction about Johnson's proposal, they seldom stand up for their rights of speaking their first languages, which proves Ager's (1996) theory of linguistic hegemony. When the dominant group has successfully institutionalized its ideology of English monolingualism, it has established linguistic hegemony realized through people's unthinking acceptance of English as the primary language for communication and spontaneous consent for learning and speaking English (Ager, 1996).

Social factors like cultural and ethnic backgrounds and social classes influence the ideologies of journalists and readers, thus indirectly informing different representation of language policies and responses. For example, when reporting Johnson's English-only Policy, Halliday and Brooks simply quote Johnson's speech while Mahmood represents Welsh and Gaelic speakers' criticism and Chi Onwurah's concern about immigrants' blocked opportunities to learn English. Different from Halliday and Brooks' identities as white reporters, Basit Mahmood is a reporter from immigrant background. The examination of the articles he has written gives us an insight into his ideology. In "I'm told I should be proud to be British, but then why keep asking me 'where am I really from,'" Mahmood (2017) castigates a false notion of "Britishness" that "defines British culture according to a sense of purity and superiority" and equates "Britishness" with being white. Additionally, he calls for a more embracing notion of "Britishness" so as to improve cohesion, arguing that people with complex identities should be viewed as bridges between different communities rather than a threat (Mahmood, 2017). This helps us understand how his immigrant background influences

his understanding of “Britishness” and why he reports Johnson’s language policy differently from Halliday and Brooks. Social classes also motivate different representations and responses to the same language policy. For example, netizens from the working class are more likely to face the problems brought by the immigrants, thus inevitably associating the use of immigrant languages with negative characteristics including “the lack of patriotism, divided loyalties, and an unwillingness to ‘assimilate’” (Ricento, 2013). Therefore, rather than looking at the benefits of multiculturalism and multilingualism immigrants may bring to Britain, they are more concerned about the negative influence brought by massive immigrants, as shown in figure 14.

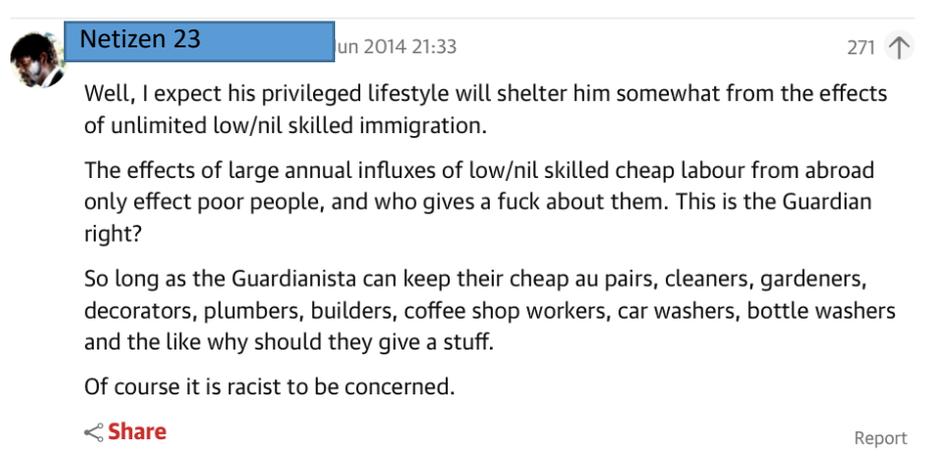


Figure 14

4 Conclusion

In this study, we make a comparative analysis of how ideologies inform the representation of language policies in the British Press. We find that different interpretations of language policies and responses represented by the British press centre on two kinds of ideological conflicts: the conflict between English and indigenous minority languages and that between English and immigrant languages. Besides, our analysis of journalists’ representation of language policies and netizens’ responses collected in the corpus confirms three types of ideologies of language planning in extant literature, which are “language-as-problem,” “language-as-right,” and “language-as-resource.” Additionally, we find that social factors like cultural and ethnic backgrounds and social classes influence the ideologies of journalists and readers, thus indirectly informing different representations of language policies and responses. The findings in this study can facilitate research about the interplay between language policies and ideologies represented in the British press. And future studies on this topic can increase the number of news articles examined to make sure that the findings are reliable.

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METRO *political orientation: non-partisan, neutral*

Boris Johnson demands immigrants learn English to integrate

Basit Mahmood Saturday 6 Jul 2019 9:56 am

immigrant background



Boris Johnson is the front runner to replace Theresa May as prime minister (Picture: Getty)

Boris Johnson has demanded immigrants to the UK learn English because 'there are too many parts of the country where it is not the first language.'

*point 1: { immigrant languages
indigenous minority languages*

The Tory front runner made the comments while at a Conservative leadership hustings in Darlington on Friday.

He said it was important for people to speaking primarily English so they can 'take part in the economy and in society in the way that that shared experience would allow'.

point 2:

speaking English and British prosperity

He stressed that the story of immigration in the UK is 'amazing', and praised the 'extraordinary economic success and dynamism' of

assimilation

people who have moved to Britain from overseas.

Highlighting Bangladeshis, Jewish refugees from Tsarist Russia, and Huguenots from France, Johnson said immigrants have 'adapted and they have made their lives and they have helped to make our national culture and they have bought into it'.

the selection of example *link "britishness" with "speaking English"*
He added: 'That's what I want for our country, I want everybody who comes here and makes their lives here to be and to feel British.'



Boris Johnson stressed that the story of immigration in the UK is 'amazing' (Picture: Getty Images)

'That's the most important thing.'

'And to learn English.'

'And too often, there are parts of our country and parts of London still and other cities as well, where English is not spoken by some people as their first language, and that needs to be changed and people need to be allowed to take part in the economy and in society in the way that that shared experience would allow.'



Man threatened to burn down nightclub because it didn't sell Red Bull

community!

Gaelic and Welsh Speakers

multilingualism

Counterargument

His comments were criticised by some however, with the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats Jane Dodds saying: 'Here in Wales, we know that not speaking English as your first language is no barrier to having a thriving

The SNP's Angus MacNeil, who speaks Gaelic and represents Na h-Eileanan an Iar, said: 'The utter arrogance of Boris Johnson is yet again apparent.'

'I am delighted that there are places in the current UK where English is not spoken, some of my constituents friends and neighbours would think I was weird if I spoke to them in English rather than Gaelic.'



Boris' comments were criticised by the Welsh Liberal Democrats and SNP (Picture: AFP)

Ethnocentrism imperialism

'I'm furious with Boris, displaying the imperialist mindset that

deliberately tried to erase the native Celtic languages of these islands in favour of the Germanic import of English.

Corresponding to the picture: UK border

interpretation: 'This barb is aimed of course at others who have arrived more recently than the English language to these shores, but we should celebrate multilingualism and foster the speaking of many languages and ignore the racist dog whistles of Boris.'

interpretation: Labour shadow business minister Chi Onwurah said immigrants and refugees were being denied the chance to learn English due to government austerity cuts.



Meghan Markle left 'troubled' by Prince Andrew's 'car-crash' interview

The Newcastle Central MP tweeted: 'Many Newcastle charities provide vital ESOL courses, but devastating funding cuts mean they cannot meet demand.'

'Everyone who comes here should be able to learn English.'

'All refugees should have the opportunity to learn the language skills they need to live and work.'

'This Government's short term austerity cuts mean we all lose out.'

THE GUARDIAN POLITICS: centre-left

Johnson pledges to make all immigrants learn English

[Libby Brooks](#) Last modified on Wed 10 Jul 2019 10.35 BST

Josh Halliday and Libby Brooks (British white)

This article is more than **4 months old**

Tory leadership contender says English is not first language in 'too many parts of our country'

Boris Johnson made his pledge during a Tory leadership hustings in Darlington. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

[Boris Johnson](#) has said there are "too many parts of our country" where English is not spoken as a first language and that he would require all immigrants to Britain to learn English. *point 1*

At a hustings event for the Conservative leadership race [in Darlington](#) on Friday, the former mayor of London praised the capital's diversity but suggested some communities were not doing enough to integrate into society. *assimilation policy*

"Now I think that the story of communities that have come to London and made their lives in London is amazing ... waves have come to London and slowly they have changed, they have adapted, they have made their lives, and they've helped to make our national culture and they've bought into it. And that's what I want for our country," he said. *link "Britishness" with speaking English*

"I want everybody who comes here and makes their lives here to be, and to feel British – that's the most important thing – and to learn English. And too often there are parts of our country, parts of London and other cities as well, where English is not spoken by

Simply quoting. open to interpretation.

THE GUARDIAN POLITICS: centre-left

Johnson pledges to make all immigrants learn English

[Libby Brooks](#) Last modified on Wed 10 Jul 2019 10.35 BST

Josh Halliday and Libby Brooks (British white)

This article is more than **4 months old**

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Boris Johnson made his pledge during a Tory leadership hustings in Darlington. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

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Politics: centre-left

the title

If there is a 'native' language of Britain, Boris Johnson, it certainly isn't English

David Metcalfe and **Andrew Cranmer** respond to the report that the Tory leadership frontrunner has pledged to make immigrants learn English so that they 'feel British'

Letters

Mon 8 Jul 2019 17:36 BST

the selection of response



Boris Johnson before a hustings event with leadership rival Jeremy Hunt in Cardiff on 6 July 2019. David Metcalfe points out that Welsh was being spoken in these islands before English ever was. Photograph: Reuters

You reported Boris Johnson saying at a hustings event for the Conservative leadership race that he wanted “everybody who comes here and makes their lives here to be, and to feel, British - that’s the most important thing - and to learn English” (Johnson pledges to make immigrants learn English so that they ‘feel British’, 6 July).

To acknowledge the fact that being British is historically, culturally and linguistically

attack the link between "Britishness" and speaking English

more nuanced than simply being or speaking English, perhaps Mr Johnson may wish to consider expanding his pledge by encouraging the English (Anglo-Saxon) immigrants to the British Isles to learn the languages of those who preceded them to these shores, the Cymru (language Cymraeg) and the Gaels (languages Gàidhlig and Gaeilge), and to better respect the languages of their fellow immigrants who have arrived subsequently (from British empire territories, British Commonwealth countries and elsewhere).

Perhaps if he demonstrated a fuller appreciation of the depth, breadth and dynamics of the human backstory to multi-indigenous, multi-ethnic, multicultural, multilingual Britain, Mr Johnson might be able more convincingly to present himself to the peoples living in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland today as having prime ministerial potential.

Otherwise, he may well find himself presiding over the disintegration of a relatively short-lived (just over 300 years) constitutional consensus in the ongoing political journey of the British Isles.

David Metcalfe
Bath

the respect for multilingualism is the foundation of the constitutional consensus of the British Isles.

● Most press coverage suggests that Boris Johnson's recent comments on immigrants learning English were about them improving English as a foreign language. But, as you report, what he actually said was: "Too often there are parts of our country ... where English is not spoken by some people as their first language and that needs to be changed."

interpret it as an exclusion policy targeting out immigrants

There are many, many people who have lived in the UK for perhaps decades and who speak English as well, or better, than those born here. However, English will never be their first language. Which points to forced repatriation as being the only way to satisfy Mr Johnson. Straight out of the extreme right playbook.

Of course, Mr Johnson, the master of obfuscation, will say that's not what he meant, and all he wants is that people who move here learn to speak English. If that's really what he meant, he could have said it. But he didn't. And I strongly suspect that he didn't because what he actually said was what he actually meant.

Andrew Cranmer
Woking, Surrey

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needs to be changed and people need to be allowed to take part in the economy and in society in the way that shared experience would allow.”

Steve Ballinger, of the integration think tank British Future, welcomed Mr

different interpretation: learn English → decent English

Johnson's remarks but said that the reason that about a million people do not have “decent English” is “often down to a lack of strategy and funding for English classes that people can access — a barrier that a new prime minister could help to tackle.”

learn English to integrate

the other report's interpretation focuses on "first language" and the exclusion of immigrants



He told HuffPost: “Speaking English is the foundation for integration. Without good English it is hard to find decent work, know your neighbours or participate fully in our society.”

Most young people in Britain whose native language is not English believe speaking a second language is an advantage in life. However only just over a third take a qualification in their mother tongue, according to a Guardian/ICM poll.

Despite the fact that almost one in five pupils in primary schools in England now has a first language other than English, the findings suggest that the linguistic capabilities of the majority of those students will go unrecognised by the exam system. And while a majority view their home language as a plus, almost four in 10 do not.

The survey comes amid high-level pressure for wider recognition of the language skills of young Britons. In a Guardian interview earlier this year, Cambridge University vice chancellor, Professor Leszek Borysiewicz called for a greater focus on developing bilingualism in Britain, including increasing opportunities for children to take qualifications in their home language.

In its report Languages for the Future, the British Council highlighted the need for schools, educators and parents to utilise the language skills of the UK's diaspora and minority communities, warning that failing to do so was a waste of resources.

The Guardian's poll of 1,001 young people aged 14 to 24 across Great Britain included 279 who spoke a language other than English at home. Of those, just over 60% believed doing so gave them an advantage in life, compared with just over half of the sample as a whole.

Young people regarding their bilingualism as an advantage cited improved brain function - leading to better problem-solving and multi-tasking, and an improved ability to learn other foreign languages. Around half also felt their home language also allowed them to communicate with extended family outside the UK, and provided a better sense of their cultural heritage.



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However, of the bilingual respondents, only 38% had completed a qualification in their home language, though a further 36% had studied for a qualification or attended lessons in the language. The quarter who had never received any tuition in their home language said it was because their school didn't offer a qualification in the subject.

The findings are echoed in a recent film produced by Cambridge University's bilingualism network in which students argue for a wider range of qualifications to reflect their skills.

The limited number of students sitting exams in their home language, and the fact that - while many are positive - almost 40% do not believe speaking it gives them an advantage, reflects a national view that having a birth language other than English is a problem, according to academic experts.

Jocelyn Wyburd, director of the language centre at Cambridge University, said students with English as an additional language were labelled as a problem to be solved, even though many schools reported such pupils out-performing native speakers. Young people's sometimes negative sense of the value of their language skills was influenced by the prevailing national attitude, and sometimes even by family pressure to drop their home language and focus on English.

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the importance of multilingualism is underestimating

problem lack of offering a qualification in language subjects



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This article is more than **5 years old**

Cambridge vice-chancellor Leszek Borysiewicz attacks immigration curbs

Welsh-born son of Polish refugees says he abhors migration target, arguing 'crude limits hide potential benefit' of migrants

Lucy Ward
Mon 2 Jun 2014 21:18 BST

Britain's increasingly hostile tone on migration risks creating a perception among students that it is not a **welcoming country to study in**, the vice-chancellor of Cambridge University has said.

Making a passionate defence of the value of immigration, Professor Leszek Borysiewicz said he opposed **"crude" numerical limits on migrants**, and praised Britain's plural society as one of its greatest strengths.

In an interview with the Guardian, Borysiewicz said that Cambridge had not been affected by falling applications, but cautioned that there was an emerging perception, particularly in India, that Britain was not welcoming. He said: "When I think of how my parents were welcomed to this country, I find that **actually quite saddening**. I do feel we are an open, democratic country and we should be **setting the standards for the rest of the world**, not hindering them."

The numbers of students to all universities coming to the UK from India fell by 38% between 2011 and 2012, and those from Pakistan by 62%.

The Welsh-born son of Polish refugees who found sanctuary in Britain after the second world war, Borysiewicz said he "abhorred" the **idea of a strict net migration target**, set by ministers at 100,000 a year, saying numbers **"hide the true potential benefit that people coming to Britain can actually have"**.

His work at Cambridge - on Monday ranked as Britain's leading university in the 2015 Guardian University guide - **and previously at institutions including Imperial College London** had shown him that **"many of the most inspiring applicants come from children of immigrant parents" who often valued education highly**.

Borysiewicz also urged a greater recognition of the value of **bilingualism** among first- and

12 comments     

 **admin** 2 Dec
how they can help this country and the people in it

 **admin** 2 Dec
education taken for granted in the uk?

 **admin** 2 Dec
implies multilingualism opens more doors in the career sphere

 **admin** 2 Dec
Highlighted Text

 **admin** 2 Dec
Highlighted Text

 **admin** 2 Dec
if MFL are in decline that translates to community languages not even being mentioned



Comment                  Close

Community languages not supported in UK education system, survey suggests

Despite the fact almost one in five young people have a first language other than English, research reveals their skills go unsupported and unrecognised by exam system

Lucy Ward
Fri 28 Nov 2014 12:18 GMT

Most young people in Britain whose native language is not English believe speaking a second language is an advantage in life. However only just over a third take a qualification in their mother tongue, according to a Guardian/ICM poll.

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11 comments     

can help develop this country

 admin 2 Dec
 Highlighted Text

 admin 2 Dec

lack of funding?

 admin 2 Dec

discrimination has been internalised

 admin 2 Dec

prejudice

 admin 2 Dec

believe it is more beneficial as it is more widely spoken

 admin 2 Dec

taking away a part of their identity












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J Jan D 6 JULY | Tightrope
 It's an honest reply from someone who's seen both sides of the coin. The Brits abroad who live in ghettos - cloistered homes, cliques and minds. As compared with Brits abroad who flock together with anyone of open mind and door - prepared to accept differences as a point of interest, not for contempt or stigmatisation.

Stay neutral
 See both side of the comparison of Brits who lived in ghettos & Brits who have open mind & always prepared for new things. No contempt or stigmatisation.

VS (comparison between open mind)

Reply Recommend Report

T Tightrope 6 JULY | Jan D
 No different then from the immigrants who come to the UK.

Reply Recommend Report

V VCATH 6 JULY
 Like the English do when abroad?

Reply Recommend Report

V VCATH 6 JULY
 How about learning to talk sense? BJ needs some serious education!

Reply Recommend Report

G Goldman 6 JULY
 "An audience member asked him whether a "good prime minister needs to be a loyal husband and father"."

Much though I don't support Mr Johnson, I dislike this sentiment. He

下午 2:38 11月23日周六 thetimes.co.uk 56%

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W Włodzimierz Tych 11 JULY
 "Too often there are parts of our country and parts of London still, and other cities as well, where English is not spoken by some people as their first language."

As immigrants disagree:
 1. ma - first language is a
 too - often fact not in UK
 2. pm is chilling
 3. immigrants

I have to say that I find this comment of Mr Johnson rather chilling.

I came to this country from Poland over 30 years ago, bringing with me my doctorate in technical sciences and the command of English sufficient to be accepted for a post-doctoral research position in one of Britain's leading universities. I am now a college principal and a senior lecturer at that university. → Example of himself as immigrants

English is my second language. I also speak partly forgotten school Russian, some German, awful school-boy French and restaurant Italian. When I poke fun at my accent and at the lapses in my English, such as the suggestion to "paint a town red" I made on one memorable occasion, my students and colleagues tell me that my English is still better than that of some of the native speakers. They are probably just being polite, of course. Some say that my English is better than their Polish, which is clearly a blessing, as we would not be able to communicate otherwise. The problem is that English will remain my second language, this is not something I can change, so what is Mr Johnson's suggestion? Do a Dalek thing and exterminate? Or just throw me out of this country?

② About the fact that English will always be his second language.
 ④ Question not - must learn - must learn = first language (English?)
 ⑤ feel unwelcomed due to the fact.

Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson's comment means that now I feel unwelcome here. It brings up the memory of a UK border guard who was looking at my papers when I was returning to the UK from a holiday (before all the

thetimes.co.uk

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EU changes), asked what I was doing in the UK and when I explained he asked with a smirk "University? What can you teach us?". Needless to say, I left this question unanswered, shrugged, smiled and drove off when the barrier went up. Mr Johnson is, however, not a nameless border guard but quite likely the future Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. I remain deeply disturbed by this comment of his.

And before any haters ask who wrote this for me - I did write this comment myself.

Reply Recommend Report

M Mike Reys 9 JULY
 How can I make English my first language. It's only the third language that I've learnt therefore it will never be my first language.
 How does he wants us to change that?
 Reply Recommend Report

K K P Hull 7 JULY
 "All immigrants must learn English..." Too little too late Boris.
 Reply Recommend Report

Handwritten notes:
 It's agree.
 For multi language speaker
 1) speak well on English = First language on English?
 2) English for him is just meaning that mind language for him and it will not be his first language ever.
 disagree.
 Trend of immigrants: develop too little too late.

下午 2:39 11月23日周六 thetimes.co.uk 56%

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B Blue Laguna 7 JULY
 He makes a fair point and one that'll be a vote winner with taxpayers. How is it even possible to qualify for our unemployment and housing benefits if you're ineligible to work?
 Reply Recommend Report

F Furious in Tunbridge Wells 6 JULY
 "We have to wear all this protective clothing ops we've heard all about Boris"
 Reply Recommend Report

M Mark 6 JULY
 Obviously correct
 How can someone participate in society if they don't speak the language? Even more worrying are the communities which are now so insular that immigrants can live invisible all their lives.
 Reply 9 Recommend Report

P P Carlin 6 JULY | @ Mark
 ...except when they find themselves occupying a major space in our benefits' figures.
 Reply 5 Recommend Report

S Seaview 7 JULY | @ P Carlin
 (Old untrue myth) EU migrants pay more tax and take less in benefits than Brits on average. Look it up.

Handwritten notes:
 agree
 - fair point
 - speak proper English → be a proper citizen → right to vote & enjoy the UK benefits.
 agree.
 - learn language is the first step to involve in the community (UK land)
 - regard community language as insular & people live invisible.
 agree
 use the term 'they' & 'our benefits' to show the difference.
 be a citizen of UK first = learn English
 = can't speak English properly

L Lone Ranger 7 JULY

There are very good English Language courses on the BBC website.

Reply Recommend Report

A Andrew Miller 6 JULY

I wonder what "rapidly finishing a book on Shakespeare" means ?? Hasn't he enough colouring crayons ?? What IS the matter with you Tory members that you can't see this man for the buffoon and charlatan he is.

Reply 2 Recommend Report

S Spike 6 JULY

Just as well the Greeks don't demand the same from all the British expats knocking back the raki in the Greek islands! I know at least one Brit who's lived there for nearly 20 years and can barely manage half a dozen words of Greek. And before anyone says yeah but they all speak English.. that's not good enough. So go ahead, Boris, but don't be surprised if our European friends demand the same.

Reply 4 Recommend Report

K Keith Stewart 6 JULY | Spike

I think Greeks should, if going to live in a country (not a holiday) then speaking that language is important and will lead to many benefits

Reply Recommend Report

Disagree

- As EU member
- example on Brit lived in Greece but cannot speak Greek.
- If Boris do so, then other countries in European need require the same.

Other support →
 the idea about that is important & beneficial with attitudes leaning language

L Lone Ranger 7 JULY | Spike

But are they looking for work or claiming benefits?

Reply Recommend Report

S Seagull 6 JULY

Funny how countries like France, Germany, Italy and even Poland, don't make these demands.

Their citizens seem a little more enlightened about their European cousins and are encouraged to speak multiple languages.

The English on the other hand demand that no one should even darken these sacred shores until they are fluent in the mother tongue (and obviously don't encourage our youth to go out and soak up European culture)

Sadly for the likes of Boris and Farage (and many Brexit supporters) they live in the past where Britain had an empire and the rest of the world knew its place.

They so desperately want to go back there to a place where we 'fought them on the beaches' and they 'didn't like it up em'

Quite pathetic really.

Reply 4 Recommend Report

Disagree.

- EU member
- question on why France & Germany country do not demand this
- EU member encourage multi-language conditions
- while English - no one should darken these sacred shores until they are fluent.
- Johnson still think they live in a place where UK is an empire & the rest of world know its place

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E Elisabetta Geromet Lister 6 JULY | Seagull | Edited
 Where do you get your stats from? I have dual citizenship, born in Italy but resident and citizen in the UK for 20 years. I know both realities and Italians (in Italy) have a lot to say about immigrants who don't speak their language. It is not acceptable. Anywhere. And Brits abroad should have the same treatment too.

H herewegoagain 7 JULY | Seagull
 There is absolutely NO pandering to immigrants in France... If you can't speak French then you are not welcome and won't be understood!

N nsi025 6 JULY
 I don't really care what language my carer/nurse speaks

Steve Skeptic 6 JULY | nsi025

disagree
 dual citizenship
 - not acceptable
 - Brits should have the same treatment if Johnson do so.

neutral??
 NO pandering to immigrants

disagree
 - don't care about language people speak (carer, nurse)

metro.co.uk

Harry Briggs
 Sorry, Too sensible for the left, Angus MacNeil sounds like a lunatic.

Chester Ball
 Will he also introduce a 'Cameron' test, whereby they have put their cocks in dead pig's heads? 🤔

Iris Fisher
 I'm Totally Agreeing With Boris Johnson & Can Still Remember When Family / Friends took Holidays In Europe Buying Phrase Books/ Even Taking Language Classes At College In Anticipation/Preparation For that Trip. 😂😂
 Fortunately with Your Tour Guides Most of Them Spoke English Which Was A Real Bonus.
 Unfortunately they Didn't Provide Interpreters. 😂😂

Andrew Siddle
 Unfortunately a national, and international, language for high business transactions is always needed for international trade in the UK.

To not speak with a national business language for the entire country is to become a regional lost vicinity for which foreign companies refuse to give business to.

The international language, for business deals, is rapidly becoming American English although British English is still understandable, in America, despite its spelling differences in the year 2019.

Our only international language for business deals, in the UK, is British English. However Ame... See More

A
 Join as main language in EU.
 Doing trip.
 Tour guide speak other.

A
 - English is national business language & required by international trade.
 - speak = gain business

Muslim woman defends Jewish family after man shouts anti-Semitic abuse on Tube
 The woman steps in to say 'come on there's children here,' before he hurls abuse at her saying: 'You shouldn't be wearing trousers'.

EXCLUSIVE
Fake Tory manifesto websites launched in revenge for 'manipulative' tactics
 'Propaganda doesn't have to be believable to have an effect, it just has to plant a seed.'

Airliner's engine bursts into

MNewdick 26 Nov 2014 21:22 27 ↑

They should learn English ... and abandon the culture that failed them and their parents.

Sick and tired of all this "accommodation" to immigrants who refuse to assimilate.

< Share Negative and not detaching Report

speaking English as a privilege misinterpret it as a report concerning immigrant issues

Open-minded to other languages

However is it impacted by the originality of European languages and some political factors?

20 ↑



Einsteinmc2 9 Apr 2019 10:01

Being able to communicate in a second language is a gift.

Even if a person believes they will never leave Britannia's shores and use rudimentary language skills, even for a holiday, the option is always there.

My grandmother once declared that she would never travel abroad until she had seen all there was to see in England, Scotland and Wales. Eventually, she went to France - dredged-up her primitive French, enjoyed every minute of it. And, admitted that she should have gone sooner.

My uncle retired and went caravanning in France. A lady was involved. He never returned to Blighty. Brought an old farm in Normandie. He and his lady were married by the local maire.

We lived in Quebec for a number of years. Both daughters are perfectly bilingual, and say that second and more languages can give a real appreciation for another country's culture.

Having a second language really is a gift.

Overall avoiding the centralism of English language and cultural, positive to hetero.

A bit mannered in narration with too many anecdotes however

Share



Cameldancer 9 Apr 2019 9:10

15 ↑

Good God, this is embarrassing stuff. We are such a nation of idlers when it comes to learning other languages.

I completely appreciate that advanced Polish will be of limited use in adult life, but even a basic standard of one western European language will make it easier to make oneself understood in any of the others. So why do so few of us keep at it after we've finished school?

compared with other issues, for example business and education, culture of mass media is the key point attracting and influencing individual outsiders, with their spontaneity, to the most extent

Share

Report



FastFourier → **Cameldancer** 9 Apr 2019 9:22

7 ↑

So much more incentive to learn English since it gives most people access to mass popular modern media and cultural output of the Western world.

German, French or Mandarin, for example, hardly tap into the beating pulse of Hollywood or most of the critically acclaimed plays, films and other popular mass media output from the 20th Century onwards.

Share

Report

TRUE

English is the crucial key to the door of western world as it takes its importance all the time

The beginning of disagreement: whether

opposing immigrants is being racist

202 ↑



Galaxina 2 Jun 2014 21:24

He is correct. But it's hard to hear over the shrill, shrieking, racist right.

Share

The oversimplification of making judgment, too emotional

Report



davidiaian → **Galaxina** 2 Jun 2014 21:31

160 ↑

As opposed to the shrill, shrieking moral panic from the Islington school of Wisdom. Perhaps there needs to be a bit of calm listening instead ?

Share

Report

Attacking vice chancellor's point

Share

Report

Mostly agreeing with each other as follow:

 **Failymale** 3 Jun 2014 4:27 70 ↑
He "abhors a very strict immigration target" but fails to give us his "very loose immigration target". Perhaps he could tell us what target if any, he would be comfortable with.
Share Report

 **Parallax1** → Failymale 3 Jun 2014 4:36 76 ↑
The prof also didn't mention how many he would be putting up at his gaff to ease the housing problem.
Share Report

- Immigrants bring problems indeed
- The background of the vice chancellor and why he would make such points to condemn immigration curb

 **gilesjuk** → Parallax1 3 Jun 2014 5:07 64 ↑
He's 63 years old. One of the baby boomers who have never struggled at all in their lives. Good jobs, good pensions, jumped on the housing ladder when houses were cheap.
Of course he won't see the downsides to immigration, I bet all the immigrants near him drive Bentleys.
Share Report

 **tropic2** → Failymale 3 Jun 2014 5:12 33 ↑
Mr Vice-Chancellor, I would suggest you test your ideas at home: Cambridge University. You know, there are soooooo many people around the world who would be happy to attend Cambridge University. But they are blocked by the university's admission policy: only a few are accepted each year.
Scrap your admission policy. Let everybody in. From anywhere in the world. Try that a few years. Then come back and tell us what happened.
Share Report

Immigrant is not a easy topic and arouses heat debate
Some not very friendly and being sarcastic and really harsh

 **GJones** → Galaxina 2 Jun 2014 21:33 271 ↑
Well, I expect his privileged lifestyle will shelter him somewhat from the effects of unlimited low/nil skilled immigration.
The effects of large annual influxes of low/nil skilled cheap labour from abroad only effect poor people, and who gives a fuck about them. This is the Guardian right?
So long as the Guardianista can keep their cheap au pairs, cleaners, gardeners, decorators, plumbers, builders, coffee shop workers, car washers, bottle washers and the like why should they give a stuff.
Of course it is racist to be concerned.
Share Report

the benefits of multiculturalism and multilingualism immigrants may bring to Britain more concerned about the negative influence brought by massive immigrants



socialistnotnlabour → Galaxina 2 Jun 2014 21:33

83 ↑

No, they are two separate issues.

One is about students coming to study in the UK and the other about people coming to the UK for other reasons.

Try to sound more calm and wise

There is also the difference between refugees and immigration.

If all immigrants just came to the UK and succeeded, there wouldn't be any poor people in families who came to the UK.

The idea of taking the brightest young people from around the world is also about helping the UK and not about helping poorer countries.

It's no different to the taking the natural resources of poor countries by British companies.

reasonable netizens

there are subtle differences between immigrants and refugees

immigration curb should be discussed based on its impacts on different groups

such as students coming to study in UK (intelligent young people is beneficial) and people coming to UK because of war (absorbing too many refugees will be a burden)