The 'legitimation' of hostility towards immigrants' languages in press and social media: main fallacies and how to challenge them

Andreas Musolff, University of East Anglia

Abstract:

On the basis of internet forum and press media data, this article studies the expression of hostile attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism in the context of debates about immigration. The forum data are drawn from the BBC's *Have Your Say* website, which is a moderated forum that excludes polemical and abusive postings. Nevertheless, it still seems to provide its users ample opportunity for airing strongly anti-immigrant attitudes. The narratives in which these attitudes are being expressed are exemplary stories of the posters' supposed encounters with the use of foreign languages in the street, in the workplace or at school. This presence of foreign languages in the British public sphere is evaluated as being (at least) problematic and is 'explained' as a result of mass immigration, which serves to reinforce the scenario of a culture mix that will destroy British 'home' culture. Media coverage of immigration partly supports such vilification of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and the reports and comments often seem to be drawn from similar narrative-argumentative templates as those of the discussions on *Have Your Say*. In conclusion, we argue that counterspeech informed by Critical Discourse Analysis has to develop alternative narratives and figurative scenarios that question the bias against linguistic and cultural diversity.

Keywords:
Internet forums, language myth, monolingualism, multilingualism, super-diversity

1. Introduction

    (1)   One of the most annoying things […] is the non ability [*sic*] [of

immigrants] 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 [*sic*] in the schools. They should have to speak English, obey our laws no matter what […] (posting on BBC: *Have Your Say*, on 9 June 2010, by forum member "2squirrels")

The above-quoted passage is a post from the *Have Your Say* discussion forum, which is maintained by the BBC (BBC 2018). It is part of a corpus of three discussions, which were conducted from April until June 2010, i.e. in the run-up to and the immediate aftermath of the 2010 general election in response to the BBC's guiding questions: a) "Should politicians be talking about immigration?", b) "How should immigration be tackled?", c) "Are immigration rules fair?" (BBC 2010a-c).[1] Despite their datedness, these forum discussions are of socio-linguistic interest, as they articulate a theme that can often be found in anti-immigration debates, namely the notion that immigrants (and their children) cannot and even don't want to speak English and that this lack of linguistic assimilation creates a special strain on the British welfare, health and education systems, with negative knock-on effects for the indigenous population, such as the contention that their children 'being held back' by Brish schools having to cater for non-native speakers. The article focuses on the role that the 'language theme' plays in

the forum discussions and in the press, in order to establish what its main argumentative and narrative patterns are, how the two public-discourse genres (i.e., forums and press) influence each other and how such xenophobic linguistic hostility can be challenged and countered.

2. Public assumptions about language and language learning

Public conceptions about language are usually *not* based on factual information and/or scientific expertise but instead on entrenched "language myths", which assume monolingualism is the 'normal' state of linguistic competence and that multilingualism is an extraordinary burden on individuals and society in terms of learning effort, provision in the education system and effect on social cohesion (Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 157-159; Watts 2011: 114-137). The scenario painted in example (1), however, goes far beyond rehashing a few xeno-linguistic stereotypes: it links the dismissive denigration of immigrants using their languages among themselves ("gabble away in whatever language they speak") with the conclusion that they cannot speak English at all and that even their children are not learning it, thus damaging 'indigenous' children. But the post by "2squirrels" is by no means an outlier among the forum data of the *Have Your Say* discussion on 'whether immigration rules are fair': the theme of the disappearance of English from schools, for instance, runs through the whole discussion thread:

(2)   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")

(3)   Does my child suffer educational diadvantage [*sic*] because
        yours cannot speak the language of this country? Some schools
        in Yorkshire and Lancashire already have self segregated
        schools for this reason ("Brian Brown")

A second continuous thematic strand is formed by accounts of alleged
everyday encounters with immigrants who have lived in England for many
years without speaking any English:

(4)   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")

(5)   I have come across too many people during my job from EU
        who can't speak or understand single word of English [*sic*]
        ("TrueChange")

(6) […] there are those who have spent over twenty years in this country without making efforts to speak local tongue [*sic*] ("Enny2012")

The high frequency of such encounters which the postings allege is in fact *not* reflected in any reliable data on language use, such as those compiled in the 2011 census data by the Office of National Statistics (Office for National Statistics 2013). The census recorded that 92.3% of the population of England and Wales (self-)reported speaking English or Welsh as their main language; among the remaining 7.7%, just 1.3 per cent of the population stated that they could not speak English well and 0.3 per cent reported that they could not speak English at all (Office for National Statistics 2013: 8). The implausibility of large groups of immigrants living and working in the country for years or decades without speaking its main language is only surpassed by the absurdity of claims that British companies no longer give jobs to English speakers:

(7) [British] Companies become more populous with foreign workers to the point that they employ only speakers of foreign languages because "most staff speak polish" or whatever. ("Rob")

(8) British firms are still free to avoid advertising jobs in English, or insisting workers speak Polish for "health and safety" reasons. ("Shaunie Babes")

If British businesses are (supposedly) already excluding English speakers, it only fits that the public authorities pave the way to even more linguistic devastation:

> (9) […] you can get rid of all the non-job translator services being paid silly amounts of public money to explain the benefits system loopholes. ("Human Cash")
>
> (10) […] how many millions the country would have saved on translation services for the NHS and local government literature! […] one country, one language ("Kevr")

To commit public resources on translation and interpreting services is thus viewed as a waste of manpower and money, all of which could be saved if immigrants were forced to learn English before they came to the country. This criticism of course conveniently forgets the fact that language services would be needed for international businesses, tourism and the minorities who already live in the country, irrespective of any new migration. More funadamentally, however, it implies a rejection of any substantial form of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Britain. The consensus among the such posters is that the presence of children with languages other than English as their mother tongues in British schools, of adult people living and working in Britain using other languages than English represent a violation of an assumed ideal of congruence between residence rights and language, i.e. that only English should be used by all people living in England/Britain.

The ultimate fear of this hostile view of multilingualism and –culturalism is a grotesque vision of an England without the English language, which some HYS-commentators pretend to be living in already:

(11) I can sit on the local bus route and not hear an English conversation at times ("Geoff")

(12) Yes, hearing someone talking in English is almost becoming a novelty in many parts of the UK, and in London particularly ("Wu Shu")

Such extreme scenarios of English fighting for its survival against invading immigrant languages and aggressive promotion of multilingualism account for almost one fifth (19%) of all language-related comments on the *Have Your Say* discussion thread answering the question, "Are immigration rules fair?". The great majority (76%) of posters are content with demanding the acquisition of English prior to immigration (mostly without making any distinction between refugees who have come involuntarily and thus never had such a chance of doing so and other migrants). Critical postings that challenge the consensus constitute a small minority of about 5%, and they mainly argue in abstract categories of either immigrants' positively valued contributions to British economy and society or their human rights (e.g. of bringing in spouses and family with first languages other than English). Even these critical postings generally do not, however, attack the 'one nation-one language' demand or the assumption of monolingualism as a

viable or even ideal condition of linguistic competence. The only sustained

argumentative thread that at least partly undermines the assumption of

linguistic superiority for speakers of English is an ironical discussion about

the foreign language competence of British people moving or living abroad;

it accounts for 15% of language-comments:[2]

> (13) How many tax dodgers who flocked to the Spanish costas […]
> bothered to learn the local language? It would appear not many,
> judging by the British ghettos that now exist over there. ("Small
> acts of defiance")
>
> (14) It sickens me to see these British ghettos in Spain that are full of
> Rose & Crown pubs and full english breakfasts and where
> people speak barely a word of Spanish. Most of these people
> pay no or little Spanish taxes but expect full access to healthcare
> etc. ("Dean Maisey")

This counter-stance, which is defensive-apologetic rather than challenging

English language supremacism, is 'refuted' by its defenders with assertions

like the one that "mostly brit ex-pats are retired, have money set aside and

require virtually no services from their host country […], they will be

paying for their own accomadation [*sic*], and will not be starting a family to

over populate the country" ("doug"). The implication is that for British

"expats" learning the language of the foreign country they move to is not in

fact necessary, but more of a 'luxury' option that they can avail themselves of or not. There are even some highly confident comments that the British public in general and British expats in particular would be willing and able "to learn the local lingo" ("mike Ivybridge") whenever they choose to do so. Some posters indeed claim that they "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!)" ("Megan"). This minimal effort to learn a few foreign language phrases to get by as a tourist is being compared (seriously and favourably!) to the allegedly lacking language acquisition on the part of migrants who move to Britain for good, in order to escape poverty, prosecution or war.

Such complacency about their own achievement of learning "enough of the [foreign] language to be polite" is only surpassed by a conviction of other posters that "English is an international language, non english [*sic*] speakers should take advantage and opportunity to learn the English language in the mother land, not American English or European English" ("alilou89"). English language competence is construed here as the 'original' property of one particular nation in contra-distinction to others, but at the same time, paradoxically, as an "international language". The contradiction between the emphatic 'national' appropriation of English and its "international status" apparently escaped the poster who seems mainly obsessed with asserting his high regard for the language at all cost. The assumption that English is an "international language" also features in a number of further postings, which

use it to conclude that this exacerbates the immigrants' fault of (allegedly) not learning it: "English is so important to learn in this day and age. I personally would throw back those who do not learn [it] to their own countries" ("Gillian").

Overall, the forum debate on *Have Your Say* is characterised by a strong consensus (over 90%) that it is the immigrants' duty (as well as in their own interest) to learn English, with almost one fifth of the comments expressing massive suspicions and prejudices about the immigrants' willingness and/or ability to learn English and the supposed damage that any presence of 'their' languages in education, work and everyday life does to the cohesion of English language and culture. The respective postings, of which the above-quoted examples give a flavour, stand out due to their high degree of emotiveness, hyperbole and verbal aggression, and they include narrative-figurative scenarios of immigration as effecting a 'culture-mix' and enabling immigrants to 'scrounge from' British culture and society (Musolff 2015: 46-53).

Within this context, English is figuratively-metaphorically construed as a national PROPERTY that must be guarded against theft or damage, or as a LIVING BEING or PERSON that is being attacked by other languages and has to defend itself (or has to be defended) against them in order to save its LIFE. This type of metaphorical 'biologisation' and personification of the abstract concept "language" is well-known from the prescriptive, often purist, traditions of language ideology, which since the second half of the 20th

century have gradually been excluded from scientific linguistics (Curzan 2014; Morpurgo Davies 1987: 83-97; Thomas 1991: 19-34; Stein 2005; Walsh 2016). Given that these scholarly traditions cannot be assumed to be well-known in the general public, why have these figurative stereotypes still survived in popular language concepts, and where do they come from?

3. Immigration, language and the press

One 'usual suspect' for spreading xenophobia is the mass media, which has of course been reporting and commenting for a long time on immigration as a social and political "crisis" phenomenon of modern society. In a corpus of British press texts on immigration at the University of East Anglia, spanning the period 2003-2018 and amounting to 138.533 word tokens (172 texts),[3] the tabloid newspapers *Daily Mail, Daily Express* and *The Sun* stand out as the most vociferous and vituperative anti-immigration voices, and they regularly include the 'language theme' in their negative reporting about immigration.[4] In July 2016, for instance, the *Daily Express* ran an article under the headline "311 languages spoken in our schools", splashed in huge letters across half the front page, followed by a sub-headline: "Special investigation: Classrooms where English is starting to die out", and the article itself alleged that, thanks to the "decades-long open door policy on immigration", English was "hardly heard at all" in many schools and that "foreign languages [had] overtaken English." (*Daily Express* 2015a). The

fact that inner-city schools in Britain have a large intake of immigrant children with diverse language backgrounds was thus construed as sensational 'evidence' that English was disappearing as a language of conversation and instruction and was giving way to other languages. After an alert and complaint by Jonathan Portes, a Professor of Economics and Public Policy at King's College London, the Independent Press Standards Organisation obliged the newspaper to issue an apology and correction. The *Daily Express* admitted (in a small inset on page 2) that the above-cited article had "inaccurately suggested that in some schools, lessons [were] not taught in English" whilst "the data referred to by the newspaper only recorded a pupils' first language" (*Daily Express* 2015b, Huffington Post 2015).

Despite the reprimand, the *Daily Express* made similar allegations again two years later but this time the tabloid avoided committing to falsifiable factual statements. Instead, its editors linked supposedly "new data" suggesting that "more than one MILLION schoolchildren do not speak English as first language" to warnings by the vice chairman of the anti-immigration campaigning organisation "Migration Watch UK" about immigrants' supposed detrimental effects on "population growth, including a greater demand for school places and additional classroom facilities like interpreters" (*Daily Express* 2017). The quoted suggestion that schools in Britain routinely use translators and interpreters to cater for immigrant pupils insinuates that English is no longer used for direct communication

with them, i.e. that these children are monolingual in their respective foreign language. This conclusion of course does *not* follow from the fact that their mother tongue is other than English but, as in the July 2015 article, the *non sequitur* was glossed over by way of hyperbole and the trick of only "citing" quotations from a supposed expert.

It would be tempting to conclude that a deeply engrained xenophobia in the more right-wing leaning parts of the British press is to blame for the beliefs about immigrants' linguistic behaviour articulated in internet forums such as the above-quoted ones on *Have Your Say* (though, in terms of time frame, the forum debates of course preceded the 2015-17 *Daily Express* articles). However, the 'language theme' may in fact reach deeper than the anti-immigrant bias as such and reveal a more specific *linguistic xenophobia,* or aversion to foreign languages.

In January 2016, for example, it was not only the *Daily Express* but the whole range of British media who reported more or less approvingly on the introduction of compulsory language tuition for Muslim women who had joined spouses in Britain recently, as announced by the then Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron.[5] The *Daily Mail,* however, which had initially presented the initiative as a measure "to help beat fanatics" (*Daily Mail* 2016a), subsequently gave their then columnist Katie Hopkins a chance to vent her anger at the government's decision to spend "£20million of the money you [= *Daily Mail* readers] helped earn" on "teaching Muslim women how to speak English". She felt like "another idiot British taxpayer

paying tax at the top rate in order to fund the endless list of things migrants need […] to make their segregated lives easier" and concluded that she was "totally behind asking Muslim women to learn English but asking me to pay for it [was] a liberty in any language" (*Daily Mail* 2016b). Hopkins here articulated a similar hostile sentiment to the public's paying for language mediation and training services as that of the *Have Your Say* commentators in examples (9) - (10) who assumed that language and literacy provision was a private concern of immigrants and should not at all be paid out of public funds.

At the same time, she reserved for the state the right to set up compulsory language examinations for minorities and migrants, with the transparent aim to reduce immigrant numbers at all cost. The results of such default mistrust against foreigners' language competence could be observed in the following year when it was reported that the British Nursing and Midwifery Council urgently recommended reviewing the introduced language tests for immigrants because even "Australians and other native English-speaking nurses" did not pass them (*The Observer,* 24 September 2017). The imposition of tests that were too hard even for non-British native speakers of English clearly helped little to mediate genuine communication problems of (would-be) immigrants and instead seems to have been designed mainly to uphold a symbolic national English language identity as a 'boundary' maintaining mechanism (Douglas 1966). In terms of solving the real-life

problem of alleviating an acute shortage of nurses in the British *National Health Service* it was evidently dysfunctional to put up such obstacles. However, the adverse consequences of xeno-linguistic hostility as an obstacle to the recruitment of foreign nurses (or other urgent social issues such as the smooth functioning of emergency, security, justice or health services for minorities or even for the profit-making purposes of tourism) seems to be no valid concern for the self-appointed defenders of English. The purpose of protecting the distinctness, purity and superiority of British English seems to trump them all. Any presence of non-English language use in public is seen as an irritation, even as a pollution of English culture. Commenting on the tabloids' reactions to the publication of census data on multilingualism in Britain, which revealed a high amount of bi- and multi-lingualism,[6] the *Guardian's* Hugh Muir observed that "what's really raising hackles is not the number of people who cannot communicate or be communicated with [in English], [...] the real bugbear is the increasing use and overhearing of other languages in the public realm. On the street, in shops, on the buses." (*The Guardian* 2013).

Such irritation with other languages and multilingualism is aired even on occasions where their functionality for immigrants' successful integration is highlighted and discussed within contexts that could be assumed to be sympathetic, such as a roundtable debate organised by the *Guardian* on the topic "How will 'super diversity' affect the future of British politics?" (*The Guardian* 2014). When one of the panel members, the chair of the

University Council of Modern Languages, Jocelyn Wyburd, highlighted the multilingualism of immigrant minorities in Britain as a chance for the British education system as a whole, i.e. "not just say to immigrants you have to learn English because you're in this country, but actually we have to learn other languages as well", which could be "massively beneficial in schools and [in] cross-cultural communication," she was met with utter incomprehension by another panel member, David Goodheart, Chair of the Advisory Group "DEMOS", who pointed out that "the idea that you have to learn a foreign language to make yourself understood in your own country will strike most people as quite bizarre" (*The Guardian* 2014). In terms of representing the *vox populi,* Goodheart was probably correct but Wyburd's main point, i.e. that multilingualism in immigrant communities was a social asset that could be harnessed for the benefit of the whole nation seems to have escaped him completely. 'Making yourself understood in your own country' may indeed not be the first reason for most people to learn other languages, but to construe this as the only and "bizarre" reason for aspiring to multilingualism shows a lack of understanding that Britain *is* in fact already a multilingual nation, which has several 'traditional' languages other than English (e.g. Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Cornish and Yiddish) as well as many newer ones. Communicating in these languages is not a luxury but a necessity for social ane economic agencies. The further desirability of being able to communicate with people and businesses in other nations and the "increased cognitive benefits of bilingualism" as documented in academic

achievements, which Wyburn had also highlighted (*The Guardian* 2014),

did not feature at all in Goodheart's response.

4. Super-diversity vs. resurgent mono-culturalism?

The concept of "super-diversity" was introduced at the *Guardian* roundtable

as referring to the new, vastly increased scale and variety of immigration

that Britain has been exposed to since the 1990s (*The Guardian* 2014). It

was coined by the social anthropologist Steven Vertovec in a 2007 article to

highlight the huge diversification of migration channels, legal statuses and

conditions of immigration, as well as the gender and age ratios and forms of

human capital over the past three decades (Vertovec 2007). In Britain, for

instance, the migrant landscape that had traditionally consisted of relatively

stable communities of citizens originating from Commonwealth countries

has given way to a much more differentiated, rapidly changing picture of

interdependent variables such as country of origin, migration channels, legal

status, human capital, access to employment, locality, transnationalism and

local responses (Vertovec 2007: 1049).

Since the publication of Vertovec's article, 'super-diversity' has become a

key concept for the analysis of global migration patterns (Arnaut et al 2015,

2016; Beck 2011; Meissner 2015; Vertovec 2015), including their (socio-)

linguistic dimension. It highlights the pressure for (im)migrants to cope with

having to integrate on the one hand "in the many niches that compose their

actual social environment", which "are of course not just those of their 'host societies,' but also those of émigré communities in a diaspora, of their 'home' cultures, of gender, age, social class, profession, workplace, religion, consumption, hobby, media, and so forth niches", whilst on the other hand being required by the state agencies responsible for their integration "to acquire the standard varieties of the national languages of their host societies," which are "suggested to be universally deployable in all and any social environment" (Blommaert 2013a: 194-195). This latter expectation, seen as characteristic of traditional integrationist language policy, is the object of strong criticism as "inadequate" and "ludicrous" (Blommaert 2013a: 195).[7]

Blommaert exemplifies linguistic superdiversity through an advert in a shop window in the Belgian city of Antwerp, scripted in two Chinese writing conventions displayed in a Flemish-speaking context, thus mixing several linguistic environments beyond traditional "multilingualism" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 2; Blommaert 2013b: 3). The example 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, 2013b: 8). For Blommaert, superdiversity therefore requires a paradigm shift in the fields of socio- and ethno-linguistics that includes epistemological and methodological changes in the conceptualisation of 'home' vis-à-vis 'foreign' languages, with consequent ramifications for the

theories of multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing, and language acquisition (Blommaert 2015).

It seems plausible to describe the multiple language-mixing contexts, in which both the immigrants and the citizens and agencies communicating with them have to operate today, as "superdiverse" in comparison with traditional descriptions of "multilingual" behaviour in the sense of acquiring and/or using the standard varieties of two or more national languages. Surely, the task for immigrants of negotiating new identities in multiple social environments and language registers cannot be adequately described as a one-dimensional transition from a homogeneous 'origin' background to a completely assimilated 'target', even if some of them – and some of their mediators in the host society – may erroneously conceive of it in such a way. What seems to have been backgrounded, however, by the (legitimate) acknowledgment of superdiversity, is that this impressive achievement is of little significance other than a negative one in the eyes of large sections of the popular press and of the public, as represented by forum posters on *Have Your Say.* They view any linguistic and cultural (super-)diversity as a threat, i.e. as the danger of their imagined (Anderson 2006) home community being destroyed or subsumed in a "culture-mix" that obliterates its identity. From the viewpoint of scientific anthropology, socioliogy and sociolinguistics, the notion of nationally defined cultural identities is fundamentally flawed as it relies on "essentialising" stereotypes (Holliday 1999) and projections of mythological "origins", which are, of course, by no means naturally given

but the sedimented constructs of biased ideologies. Still, even as perceived or imagined identities these national home cultures are still believed, and so is, as we have seen in the examples cited above, the notion that they have a linguistic manifestation, namely that of a monolingual national community. The equation, 'one nation – one language', is of course a "language myth" but one that is alive and articulate, as example (10) shows. And based on this myth, folk-sociolinguistic expectations are formulated regarding the expected linguistic behaviour of immigrants: that they should learn the 'correct' (i.e. standard) variety of the national language (as well as being able to cope with the local variety that is believed by its speakers to conform to that standard), to do it quickly, efficiently and at their own cost without disturbing the home society. They are expected to hide their 'previous' or alternative linguistic identity as much as possible (by not using their native languages in public). As for language mediation, translation and interpreting services and foreign language teaching and learning: these are perceived as marginal, specialised professional and educational interests that have little or nothing to do with British home identity.

This hostility to the presence of foreign languages in everyday life is not informed by but stands in stark opposition to (super-)diversity research in social anthropology and sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, it manifests a kind of backlash against the 'felt' diversification of social and cultural identities as diagniosed by superdiversity theory, i.e. a profound dissatisfaction in some parts of the public with a perceived dissolution of their 'home' society's

identity. Taken at face value, allegations that English is disappearing from school education, public life and businesses, or that the UK is bankrupted by the expenses for language mediation and translation services are grotesque exaggerations of the increase in visibility of foreign languages in British society as a consequence of new immigration. As such, they are falsifiable, and indeed, less xenophobic parts of the forum community and of the press make an effort to counter such exaggerations, e.g. through comparisons of immigrants' language needs with the equally stereotypical British expats' lack of willingness to learn the languages of the countries they are living in. But are this tit-for-tat denigration of language acquisition practises and the provision of 'facts and figures' that contradict the exaggerations sufficient to counter xenolinguistic hostility?

The aversion to foreign languages in parts of the British public is not only a question of misinformation or racist bias but also the effect of frames of conceptualisation and expectations about what is (or at least should be) the 'normal' condition of cultural and linguistic identity. As long as such frames continue to assume that a monolingual (standard) linguistic behaviour is the benchmark of successful integration into the 'home culture', any encounter with foreign languages 'in the street', 'on the buses', at work or school will be understood as confirming scenarios and narratives of cultural decline, culture-mix and the dissolution of British/English identity. And analyses of Britain moving in the direction of superdiversity may well further reinforce such a hostility, unless they can show that such superdiversity is, contrary to

expectations, not a threat to cultural identity. The task will therefore have to

be to develop counter-narratives that destroy the bias against the possibility

of a multicultural society.

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[1] The three discussion threads generated altogether 2473 postings (566, 881, and 1026 respectively), which amount to 333.518 tokens. The forum is actively monitored by the BBC, which means that aggressively polemical and/or inflammatory postings are removed and that such exclusions are explicitly indicated: in our case 81 postings were removed from the discussions. The main topical forum questions on *Have Your Say* were followed up by explanations that referenced topical policy issues, as in the case of the third question, "Are immigration rules fair?", which explicitly flagged up the language issue: "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? Prompted by the language-focused elaboration of *Have Your Say's* guiding question, 809 postings, i.e. 81% of the altogether 1026 comments in the third thread included explicit arguments about immigrants' perceived lack of language skills, whereas in the two other threads only 10-15% touched on this subject. The examples for this discussion are all drawn from this third strand; percentages of different types of language-related postings are calculated out of the 809 relevant comments. For discussion of data from the other threads see Musolff 2015.

[2] A smaller subversive sub-strand of provocative counter-argumentation consists of references to the status of Welsh in Wales (and of other Celtic languages in the UK) as the historically 'prior' language in comparison with English. This line of argument includes sarcastic suggestions that immigrants should learn Welsh rather than English, and that English speakers "must learn Welsh before moving to Wales" because that "would be of great help in both saving our language and also in keeping house prices down" ("Jeff Lewis"). This stance is however countered by English-language defenders insisting, without any sense of irony, that their language is the more important one: "Yes, there are communities that are Welsh-only speaking. I agree it would benefit them to learn English as well. But I know of some real draconian people who feel that the Welsh language should just die" ("Sue Denim").

[3] The corpus covers the whole British mainstream press and includes *Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Financial Times, New Statesman, The Daily Telegraph, The Economist, The Guardian/Observer, The Independent, The Spectator, The Sun, The Times/ Sunday Times.*

[4] For the anti-immigrant bias in the British tabloid press (which occasionally reaches well into the 'quality papers') see Baker et al. 2008; Baker et al. 2013; Balch and Balabanova 2014; Charteris-Black 2006; Fielder and Catalano 2017; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; Gerard 2016; Hart 2011; KhosraviNik et al. 2012; Paprota 2017.

[5] See *Daily Mail* 2016*, Daily Express* 2016a*, The Guardian* 2016*, The Independent* 2016*, The Telegraph* 2016.

[6] Office for National Statistics 2013: 3. The most (self-reported!) spoken languages after English in the 2011 census were (in descending order) Polish, Panjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese languages other than Mandarin and Cantonese, Portuguese and Spanish.

[7] For the (ongoing) discussions about the methodological and theoretical significance of the super-diversity concept in sociolinguistics see Arnaut et al. 2015 and 2016; Blommaert 2015; De Fina et al. 2017; Meissner and Vertovec 2015; Pavlenko 2014; Rampton 2016; Silverstein 2015; Reyes 2014.