
ESOL, INTEGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

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This paper is about the ideologies that inform the provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) for adult migrants in England. In policy and in public discourse there is an insistence that migrants have an obligation to learn and use English, for social integration and to comply with immigration requirements. At the same time, policy support and funding for ESOL is lacking. The argument here is that the learning and use of English by migrants has become centrally implicated in debates about immigration and social integration associated with an ideology of monolingualism that informs language policy. With reference to political discourse and policy documents, I maintain that this over-attention on the learning of English in debates about migration distracts from the purpose of ESOL as a key dimension of adult education. An indication of this neglect is the lack of direction for the field at national government level.

Keywords: adult education, ESOL, immigration, integration, language policy, monolingualism

From a political perspective, a willingness by migrants to learn the dominant language of their new home is a marker of social inclusion: an insistence that migrants have an obligation to learn and use the language is a recurrent trope in political and public discourse. In the UK, language education for adult migrants in practice and in policy focuses on the teaching and learning of English (as the dominant language in most parts of the UK) and on the area of education known in the UK as ESOL, English for Speakers of Other Languages. Beyond the rhetoric, policy support and funding for migrants' learning of English across the UK is inconsistent. For example, while the devolved governments in Wales and Scotland have strategies to support the provision of, and access to, ESOL, there is neither a UK-wide nor an England-specific one. In this paper I ask why the field of ESOL—in England at least, if not in the other countries of the UK—suffers such policy neglect. I argue that the English language, and its learning and use by migrants, has become centrally implicated in debates about social integration. This, I maintain, is associated with a powerful ideology of monolingualism that informs political discourse, and policy itself, which impinges on the learning lives of adult migrants. I note that since the beginning of this century, migrants' and prospective migrants' competence in the English language has been a criterion for allowing an individual to travel to, remain and settle in the UK; likewise ESOL plays a role—sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit—as a mechanism for social integration. I conclude that over-attention on English, and the learning of English, in discourses about migration and social integration, distracts from its more productive purpose as a key dimension of adult education. An indication of this neglect is the lack of strategic direction for the field at national government level.

The paper progresses as follows. I first establish where ESOL lies in current political priorities by referring to the latest manifestos of the larger political parties. I associate this with how the English language is co-opted into debates about national identity and social integration, through a discussion of

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the ideology of monolingualism which dominates in political and media discourse. I then turn to the misuse of English language education in immigration policy. In the final section I trace the development of specific policy formation in ESOL, identifying how its continued association with social integration is accompanied by a growing abrogation of responsibility for its coordination at national scale.

ESOL in the Manifestos

The run-up to the British General Election in 2019 was dominated by arguments about the conditions of Brexit, that is, how—if at all—the UK would depart from the European Union (EU) following the referendum and the vote to leave in 2016. The General Election itself was held to break the deadlock over the terms of the UK's withdrawal: the sitting right-wing Conservative Government did not have an overall majority, prompting Prime Minister Boris Johnson to call the election. Reflecting a shift in the global policy landscape towards the normalisation of far-right tendencies and the mainstreaming of right-wing populist movements, the Conservatives duly won this by a landslide. How the English language, and its learning by migrants, appeared in the manifestos of the main political parties indicates their significance and prominence at the time.

Of the four largest parties, only the Conservatives located reference to the English language in immigration policy. Under the heading 'Our Australian-Style Points-Based System', the manifesto stated:

We will prioritise people who:

- Have a good grasp of English;
- Have been law-abiding citizens in their own countries; and
- Have good education and qualifications. (Conservative Party, 2019, p. 21)

The phrase *Australian-style points-based system* had already been used repeatedly by politicians on the leave side of the Brexit campaign, to refer to the future immigration system. It clearly resonated with the electorate. In a study of public perceptions about immigration post-Brexit, Heather Rolfe and colleagues (2018) found that 'leave' voters understood the term imprecisely but positively as relating to restricting inward migration to those with the skills needed for the country, who come to work, who learn English, and who do not commit crimes. Hence its reprised use in the 2019 manifesto: engaging, familiar and vague, it appears without further explanation, as a shorthand for a controlled migration system and a means of attracting migrants with 'skills'. Much is left unclear in the manifesto, and there is little nuance. In fact public perceptions of migration at the time suggested certain highly skilled migrants (e.g. doctors) should be prioritised, but not others (e.g. bankers); there was also support for migrants with supposedly 'low skills' who nonetheless do very important work in the health and social care sector (Curtice et al, 2020)—a sentiment that has grown since the COVID-19 virus struck in early 2020 (Carter, 2020).

Specifically foregrounding the use of English with the type of migrants who might be welcome has been a recurrent theme in British political discourse for many years, as has the association between migrants' language use and social integration (Cooke & Peutrell, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). In the next section of the Conservative manifesto, 'Integration and Openness', ESOL makes an appearance, though not by name: 'We will boost English language teaching to empower existing migrants and help promote integration into society' (Conservative Party, 2019, p. 23).

Vague language is also characteristic of this manifesto promise. *Boost* is a very positive word. Who would argue that boosting English language teaching for migrants could be anything other than a good thing? But there is no detail about who will do the boosting, or its hoped-for results, other than to *empower* existing migrants (new arrivals would presumably have competence in English in any case) and *help promote integration*.

It matters how the ruling political party presents English and ESOL, because manifesto promises can be enacted as actual policies, and thus have effects on people's lives. ESOL appeared as an aspect of adult education in the left-wing Labour Party manifesto, alongside a promise to restore funding. For the centrist

Liberal Democrats it was regarded as crucial for social integration. Neither ESOL nor reference to the English language featured in the manifesto of the Scottish National Party, the third largest party at Westminster, and the ruling party in the devolved parliament in Scotland. In the next section I explain how the positioning of the English language in the Conservative manifesto as an aspect of immigration policy is part of a *discourse* about migration and language, which has at its foundation a particular *ideology*.

Discourse and Ideology

Discourse is defined in many ways. For linguists, discourse is any unified text in context, that is, a stretch of language that is coherent, that enables its audience to achieve understanding (Cook, 1989). Linguists and social theorists also understand discourses (plural) as ways of talking and writing that promote a particular view of the world. The study of discourse in this more critical tradition enables links to be identified between language practices and wider social processes such as policy formation and political persuasion. Questions for those interested in the critical study of discourse might be: Why do people say and write what they do? What effect do they hope their speaking and writing might have on their listeners and readers?

The French philosopher Michel Foucault describes discourses as what is say-able or meaning-able at a given time and in a given place, institution or society in regard to a given topic or theme (Foucault, 1970; see also Wooffitt, 2005, on the analysis of discourses). In our case, the English language, its learning by migrants, and their language use more generally, have become part of what can be said and written about immigration—that is, language and linguistic diversity are linked in discourse (i.e. *discursively*) to immigration policy and to associated concerns about social integration and cohesion. To return to the example above, the authors of the manifesto, who represent the Conservative Party, attempt to position their readers—the electorate and potential voters—in a particular way vis-à-vis immigration. Their aim is to make readers build a picture of migrants as either desirable or undesirable, as worthy or not of being allowed to enter the country, according to the skills they might or might not possess. These skills include their competence in English.

Discourses are multiple, however. There are many possible ways of speaking, writing and thinking about linguistic diversity in a society, and about language and migration. So discourses compete with each other, they inform and interact with each other, they become more or less powerful as they travel across speakers and audiences, text types and media, and through time. The study of discourse in the critical tradition is concerned with how particular discourses work together to construct common-sense knowledge, that is, how they come to dominate (Van Dijk, 2000), and consequently how they are used to support or legitimise restrictive policies (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020). One way a discourse becomes dominant is by being used and drawn upon repeatedly over a period of time. The English language and its learners are consistently talked about as being a problematic part of the immigration regime, and its learners as having to learn it to socially integrate, in policy discourse, in social media and in print and broadcast journalism. Hence this has become a dominant discourse.

Language Ideologies and Migration

The study of discourses can illuminate the nature of the ideas, values, beliefs and attitudes that inform them. Collectively these are known as ideologies. Ideologies are regarded as fundamental by their proponents, and as such, they often remain unquestioned. This is why the study of discourse is important: as Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) point out, people's discourse—what they speak and write, how they strive to make meaning—is the most tangible manifestation of ideology (p. 26; see also Cooke & Simpson, 2012). So by analysing discourse we can uncover the nature of the ideologies that sit behind them, the assumptions upon which they are founded.

As with other ideologies, the clusters of beliefs and feelings about language are associated with power. Kroskrity (2010) explains that language ideologies 'index the political economic interests of individual

speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states' (p. 192): as such, they can be—and are—used in the service of the powerful, often against the powerless. Language does not exist outside its circumstances of use: it is socially situated, and is always about something. The same can be said for language ideologies. Thus an ideology that supposes that one particular language should dominate in a country may well point to (i.e. index) something other than language. A central ideological position is evident in dominant discourses about language and migration in the UK whereby in order for society to be cohesive and stable, it must be as homogeneous as possible, and its population must share and use one common language. This is known as a monolingualist or *one nation one language* ideology (Joseph, 2006; Piller, 2015). For someone who holds this position, monolingualism is both the ideal and the norm. Monolingualism appears in discourse through arguments that linguistic diversity and multilingualism are problems that need to be managed; that some members of ethnic minorities are unwilling to learn English; that they choose to live in enclaves; and that this is damaging to social integration and community cohesion. These arguments, ostensibly about language, are often really about matters such as immigration, race and ethnicity, things which are proscribed or less sayable, and for which language stands as a token or proxy. Let me offer a concrete example and analysis of discourse in an ideological debate that appears to be about language learning, but on examination is also about much more.

Boris Johnson's Speech

The debate concerns the British politician Boris Johnson, and a speech he gave on 5 July 2019, shortly before becoming Prime Minister. The speech is one of many that he and other senior politicians have made in the past two decades, where migrants' English language has been highlighted as a supposed cause of societal problems. This extract is from the report of the speech in *The Guardian* under the headline 'Johnson pledges to make all immigrants learn 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 some people as their first language and that needs to be changed.

People need to be allowed to take part in the economy and in society in the way that that shared experience would allow. (Halliday & Brooks, 2019)

Many features of this article are informed by ingrained language ideologies. Examining the speech carefully, and considering when, where and why it was made, and by whom, might shine a light on what these are. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a tradition that links linguistic analysis with sociocultural analysis, provides the tools for this. In his influential *Language and Power* (2015), Norman Fairclough outlines stages of *description*, *interpretation* and *explanation* in the critical analysis of a text: we can analyse it by looking first at the textual features themselves, describing them in linguistic terms, and then relating them to the speakers or writers and the audience, and to the broader sociocultural and political conditions of their production. I follow these steps in examining Johnson's speech.

Description. Sentence 1 refers to *everybody who comes here* and *who makes their lives here*, establishing euphemistically that the concern is with immigrants who are in the UK to stay, rather than those who are outside the immigration system or are in the UK only temporarily, or indeed are local-born people. Johnson continues that *the most important thing* is for these people to *feel British*. To *learn English* is offered as an additional (and the only explicit) component of the state of feeling British. The function of the link is important: the conjunction *and* supports the association of the English language, through textual cohesion, with 'feeling British'.

In Sentence 2, Johnson maintains that *English is not spoken by some people as their first language*. This is indeed the case: anyone with another language as their first language will be in this position, whoever they are, migrant or otherwise. This aspect of the speech received much critical comment at the time from

parts of the UK with speakers of indigenous languages such as Welsh or Scots Gaelic. The response of Scottish National Party MP Angus McNeil was that 'Boris is moronic and clueless' (O'Grady, 2019). Johnson's next point—*that needs to be changed*—uses an imperative (*needs*) in a passive construction, a familiar strategy for avoiding reference to the agent. An intended effect here might be to present the notion as a commonly-held or common-sense belief. The suggestion is, though, that people need to change their language histories, which would be the only way to become a first language speaker of English if one was not before. More rationally, Johnson appears to mean that many people do not use English as their main language, and that this is a problem. This is explained in Sentence 3, where the passive voice is again used at the outset (*people need to be allowed*). This sentence has two possible readings. First, only through the *shared experience* of being able to communicate in English can people *take part in the economy* (i.e. be economically productive) or *in society* (i.e. be socially integrated). Alternatively, someone—the Government, perhaps—should not *allow* people to be economically productive or socially integrated if they do not have competence in English.

Interpretation. Johnson, as a prospective Prime Minister, is calling for a change in an existing situation and needs approval for his argument. He gains this through discursive practices or strategies of *legitimation* (Martín Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997), appealing primarily to a monolingualist or one nation one language ideology. In van Leeuwen and Wodak's (1999) terms, Johnson is seeking legitimation by authorization, depending on the popularity and acceptability of the positions he holds as a role model or opinion leader. This is in contrast to, for example, expert authority. The arguments in the speech, though, are fallacious in that the logic is flawed (one cannot change one's first language or any aspect of one's language history); and in that 'feeling British' is an ill-defined and meaningless term.

Despite everyday language experience for many in the UK being obviously multilingual, Johnson appeals to monolingualism in the interests of national unity, social integration and economic well-being. Monolingualist discourses tend to invoke an authoritative voice: this might imbue legitimacy on the link between economic disadvantage, a lack of social cohesion, multilingualism as a problem that must be managed, and the desirable position that a nation's inhabitants should only use the dominant language. Such discourses would lack force if they were not able to make reference to the linguistic 'Other'. *Othering* is the creation in discourse of in-groups and out-groups (*we* and *they*). It is a negative stereotyping that can be directed at any group of people but is most often associated with race, ethnicity, foreigners or minority groups (Holliday, 2005, Ch. 2). Othering is strongly evident in monolingualist discourse, where a language-based deficiency is identified in the Other. Johnson uses *our/some people (there are parts of our country [. . .] where English is not spoken by some people)* to refer collectively to a monolingual in-group from which *some people* are excluded. This group's efforts to promote the social and economic integration of the Other are thwarted if they persist in not learning the language (*that must change/people need to be allowed to take part*).

Explanation. Understanding the immediate situation shapes interpretation, as does a knowledge of the wider context (O'Halloran, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). The speech was made less than a month before the Conservative Party's internal leadership race which brought Johnson to power, in a campaign which was mainly fought over the issue of Brexit. It matters too that the setting was a hustings meeting in the market town of Darlington, in the industrial North of England, whose voters switched from Labour to Johnson's ruling Conservatives in the General Election in autumn 2019, a victory largely associated with his unequivocal stance on Brexit and his insistence that the UK must leave the EU at the end of that year. At a broader timescale, the position of English in the construction of national identity had for some time become a central language ideological debate. The out-group or Other (non-English speakers) had consistently been, and indeed remain, the object of concerns over social cohesion, integration and security, and the non-use of English has been repeatedly linked to social disorder. Events in the early years of this century both in the UK (street disturbances involving Asian and White youths and the police in northern cities such as Bradford and Oldham) and on the world stage ('9/11'), were followed by sustained

political rhetoric insisting that migrants had an obligation, rather than a right, to learn English. Politicians connected the use of languages other than English, and of non-standard vernaculars, with a breakdown of social cohesion and the threat of extremism, establishing this as a theme for years to come. The view of David Cameron (Prime Minister 2010–2016) was that immigrants who don't speak English cause 'discomfort and disjointedness in their own neighbourhoods' (Watt & Mulholland, 2011, n.p.). This echoed a comment by an earlier Prime Minister, Tony Blair (1997–2007), who in the aftermath of terrorist bombings in London in 2005 said: 'There are people who are isolated in their own communities who have been here for 20 years and still do not speak English. That worries me because there is a separateness that may be unhealthy' (Wintour, 2005). In this and other such pronouncements, the non-use of English is associated with threats to national security (see Khan 2016, 2020, on the securitisation of ESOL); while people's competence in English is talked about as a feature of difference in terms that could not usually be used to discuss issues such as race or ethnicity.

Immigration Control: A Hostile Environment

An insistence that migrants have an obligation, rather than a right, to learn English is also an explicit tool for immigration control. Governments of all stripes have long been concerned with controlling immigration to the UK, and immigration policy has likewise long been recognised as racialised (Carter et al, 1987). By the second decade of the 21st century, English language use had become fully entwined with immigration in political discourse. In one of many examples, Nick Clegg, then Deputy Prime Minister, said in 2010: 'If they want to play by the rules, pay their taxes, speak English, that is a smart, fair, effective way of dealing with immigration' (BBC, 2010). In positioning potential migrants as the linguistic Other, Clegg draws a discursive link between social cohesion (*play by the rules*), compliance with social norms (*pay their taxes*), English language use (*speak English*) and the supposed fairness of the immigration regime.

The stance towards migration hardened with the election to power of the Conservative-led coalition Government in 2010. A commitment to reduce net migration was first featured in the Conservative Party manifesto of that year. In 2013, Theresa May, as UK Home Secretary, introduced a new Immigration and Naturalisation Bill, highlighting that policy creates categories of migrant, who can then be treated in law in certain ways according to the category that they happen to fall into. Among other things, the purpose of the new Bill was 'To make provision about immigration law; to limit, or otherwise make provision about, access to services, facilities and employment by reference to immigration status' (United Kingdom Government, 2014). May's aim for the bill was to create—in her words—'a really hostile environment for illegal migrants' (Travis, 2013, n.p.). The discourse and legislation about 'illegal' people was reinforced by a government publicity campaign which sent vans into areas of high immigration, on the side of which was prominently displayed the message: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest'. Such blunt practices both ignore the complexity of migration and its motivations, and make people more subject to regulation. With Theresa May as Prime Minister, her party's manifesto for the election of 2017 still positioned immigration as being in need of control. Certain categories of migrant were valued, others not, and—in an echo of the 2010 manifesto—the aspiration to cut net inward migration to the 'tens of thousands' per year remained government policy.

Similar discourses were evident in the media, where a campaign of misinformation about migration was fought by sections of the national press, particularly in the run-up to the June 2016 Brexit referendum. Front page headlines such as 'Britain is a Migrant Magnet', 'We Must Stop the Migrant Invasion' and 'Britain Must Ban Migrants' (all from the right-wing anti-EU newspaper the *Daily Express*) underline how unpleasant the debate was at the time. Media rhetoric, and the pandering to it by politicians, doubtless played a role in the outcome of the Brexit vote. By the time of the referendum, the idea of leaving the EU had become associated with discontent, fear and anxiety about immigration. Anti-immigrant prejudice (and in turn increased support for the campaign to leave the EU) was in part associated with 'negative intergroup contact experience' (Meleady et al, 2017). It had also been stirred up

by the media and had been exploited by right-wing populist but increasingly mainstream politicians over many years (see also Wodak et al, 2013).

Language Proficiency and Immigration Policy

The UK has formal language proficiency requirements for meeting the demands of citizenship, naturalisation and right to remain, and even to enter the country. These have become steadily more embedded into UK immigration policy and law. This is not a UK-specific phenomenon: by 2016, 28 of the 36 Council of Europe (CoE) member countries (78%) had some kind of language requirement for migration purposes, up from 58% in 2007 (Association of Language Testers in Europe [ALTE], 2016, p. 9). Two types of evidence are required for the right to remain and for naturalisation in the UK, provided by (a) language and (b) Knowledge of Society tests.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Simpson, 2015, 2019), there was no condition to show evidence of suitability for naturalisation by means of such assessments prior to 2002. The government policy paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* (Home Office, 2001) set out the case for a requirement for knowledge of English in terms of its common-sense association with social cohesion: 'We need to develop a sense of civic identity and shared values, and knowledge of the English language [. . .] can undoubtedly support this objective' (p. 32). The raising of the requirements of language competence in UK immigration policy has followed a steep trajectory since then. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 required UK residents seeking British citizenship to show, through a test, 'a sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic and about life in the UK' and to take a citizenship oath at a civic ceremony. The test is a computer-based multiple-choice test, with questions drawn from the publication *Life in the UK: A Journey to Citizenship*, known as the *Life in the UK* handbook. Originally, those who had not reached the level of English necessary to take the test were entitled to enrol on an approved course of ESOL in a citizenship context; they were deemed to have achieved a satisfactory knowledge of 'Life in the UK' if they progressed one level according to a standardised English language test benchmarked to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages.

In 2007, the citizenship rules were extended to those applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain. That is, passing the *Life in the UK* test was no longer only associated with the right to apply for citizenship; it became a requirement for those wishing to remain in the country. In 2009, a tiered system of 'managed migration' into the UK was first introduced, involving selection of migrants according to the qualities they possess which are deemed desirable by the state. For most visas under this system, a certain level of English language proficiency was an eligibility requirement. In 2010, an English language requirement was introduced for spouse or partner visas prior to their entry into the UK, thus effectively extending the nation's political borders beyond its geographical ones. A slew of fresh legislation and requirements was introduced in 2013. First, people applying for settlement were now required to pass an English language examination at level B1 on the CEFR in addition to the *Life in the UK* test. B1 on the CEFR is at the level of 'independent user': at that level, language users are expected to be able to 'understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc' (CoE, 2021). The entitlement to take an ESOL and Citizenship class in lieu of the *Life in the UK* test (for lower level learners) was scrapped; moreover, the 3rd (and current) edition of the *Life in the UK* handbook was released (Home Office, 2013). This is a very different publication from the earlier editions, and has received trenchant critique on the basis of its inaccuracy (Brooks, 2013) and its misrepresentation of slavery and the British Empire, described in an open letter by members of the Historical Association (2020) as 'fundamentally misleading and in places demonstrably false'. Nonetheless, because of its central place in migration policy, a good deal of ESOL practice in the UK involves supporting students in preparing for the *Life in the UK* test and the associated language exam.

ESOL in National Policy Since 2010

I have established that adult migrant language education is positioned in national policy as problematic, through a dominant monolingualist discourse which sees the learning of the English language as a prerequisite for social cohesion, and its use as a gatekeeper for immigration. Conversely, the failure of a migrant to learn English indexes—for politicians and sectors of the media—an unwillingness to integrate, a corresponding failure to pay the proper ‘debt of hospitality’ (Vigouroux, 2017) owed by migrants. In this final section I turn to specific policy about ESOL as a field of education, rather than a tool of immigration or social policy. Education in the UK is devolved, and as noted earlier, the governments of both Wales and Scotland have developed explicit ESOL strategies to underpin their approaches to ESOL, for example to bring together ESOL providers from across the sector, and to address funding and qualifications at home-nation (rather than UK) scale. The ESOL Strategy for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019) emphasises the role of Welsh in public life in Wales, and promotes a bilingual approach to ESOL provision. Scotland’s ESOL Strategy (Education Scotland, 2015) was notable for being collaboratively written, including consultation with learners. Though widely lauded (not least for its learner-centredness), at the time of this writing there are plans to subsume it into a more general Adult Education Strategy.

Here I sketch out the recent shaping of ESOL policy in England with reference to five documents published since 2014 which have been prominent in policy debates around ESOL in that nation. Later documents refer to earlier ones, and they culminate in a Green Paper, a preliminary report of government proposals which is a statement of intent rather than a commitment to action. All the documents call for coordination of ESOL through some kind of policy strategy, and all note the role of the field in supporting social integration for migrants.

- The think-tank Demos published a report in 2014, *On Speaking Terms*, calling for a national ESOL strategy in which integration and social cohesion are foregrounded: ‘A coherent ESOL policy promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society’ (Paget & Stevenson, 2014, pp. 9–10). This position is elaborated in the conclusions of the document, which makes prominent the relationship between English language education and integration: indeed for the authors the need for migrant integration provides the rationale for ESOL. As they further state, ‘it is not just individuals who stand to gain; unlocking migrants’ potential will result in widespread and long-term benefits to society as a whole’ (p. 81).
- The *Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration* (2016), commissioned by the Conservative Government, links social and economic exclusion to lack of access to the English language, termed the ‘common denominator’ (p. 94). Insufficient competence in English is positioned firmly as a social problem connected discursively to crime: ‘Central and local government should develop a list of indicators of a potential breakdown in integration. These might include incidences of hate crime or deficiencies in English language’ (p. 167). Prominent in the *Casey Review* are Pakistani and/or Bangladeshi Muslim women, seen as being uniquely challenged and problematic because of cultural, religious and social barriers to integration, including their failure to learn English. The report was criticised for adopting an *othering* stance (see e.g. Bassel, 2016).
- *Towards an ESOL Strategy for England* was developed by the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA, 2016) in response to the incoherence of ESOL provision in national policy in England. It argues that an ESOL strategy will enable local authorities to provide a comprehensive service, and that anomalies in provision can be ironed out. Timing and integration are issues too: that is, immigration is a major concern in public perception; there are uncertainties about the implications of the Brexit vote; and social integration remains a key plank of government rhetoric if not planning. The document strengthens the case for a strategy by summarising earlier calls for effective coordination of the field in the Demos report and from practitioners and activists (e.g. Action for ESOL, 2012).

- A well-trodden route towards national policy formation is the work of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which collects evidence on a focal topic. The APPG on Social Integration report *Integration not Demonisation* (2017) adopts an orientation towards ESOL which links it to human rights and aspiration, framing the need to support the field according to the notion that ‘the ability to speak English is required in order to enjoy the basic freedoms which British society is built upon and is crucial to social mobility’ (p. 5). Its call for a strategy—drawing upon earlier calls from Demos (2014) and NATECLA (2016)—invokes integration as well, which for the APPG equates with assimilation into an economically productive workforce.
- The main policy development, informed directly by all the above, remains the *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, 2018). The Green Paper continues the focus on ‘segregated communities’ and the concern for shared ‘British values’ emphasised in the *Casey Review*. It states a commitment to developing good practice in ESOL, and is accompanied by an *Integrated Communities Action Plan* (MHCLG, 2019), which includes guidance on effective practice in coordinating ESOL provision, ‘to support greater join-up of different providers and types of provision’ (p. 13).

As yet, however, a national strategy for ESOL in England shows no sign of materialising, and nor does adequate funding that might support such a strategy. Since the publication of the MHCLG Green Paper, planning for ESOL nationally has been led by an independent policy, research and development organisation, the Learning & Work Institute (L&WI). Presaged by the conclusions in the Green Paper, the L&WI has a firm focus on local and regional partnership working. Commissioned by the Department of Education, its *Framework for ESOL Local Coordination* (2020) includes a local ESOL Partnership guide, comprising ‘Effective practice guidance on how to best support the development of an ESOL partnership in your local area’ and ‘Case studies to provide practical insight into the development and benefits of different types of local ESOL partnerships and networks’. As noted above, however, if national direction no longer exists, funding for ESOL provision is also scant. The larger part of national government funding for ESOL comes from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) adult skills budget. This is channeled towards Further Education (FE) college provision, and does not support practice outside the FE sector. This funding fell from £203 million (2009–10) to £90 million in 2015–16 (Martin, 2017; see also Migration Yorkshire, 2021), and the demand for accessible, freely available classes even within FE consistently far outstrips supply.

Much ESOL provision therefore sits outside central government education policy, in the hands of non-governmental and non-profit-making organizations, including charities, voluntary and community groups. Any government funding that does reach this third-sector ESOL typically comes via the MHCLG or the Home Office, rather than the Department for Education, in the form of piecemeal local project funding, much of it to support volunteers. This is consistent with both the contemporary attention on social integration and the prevailing orientation towards local coordination. The picture I have painted in earlier work (Simpson, 2012, 2015) persists: of ESOL centres—especially those in the third sector—being poorly resourced, and provision itself lacking cohesion within and beyond local areas.

Conclusion: A Political Football in the Long Grass

In the short term, an explanation for why ESOL has been ‘kicked into the long grass’ in policy is straightforward. Political efforts to put an ESOL strategy for England in place were overtaken by two events, the COVID-19 pandemic which struck at the beginning of 2020, and the implementation of the UK’s departure from the European Union at the end of the same year. Deeper causes lie in a political history that regards people’s multilingualism to be a problem, and their belonging as contingent on their competence in the dominant language. Alternative ways are needed for thinking about language

education for adult migrants in policy, ones which do not position it as purely a matter for immigration and a model of social integration that only works one way.

The shift of attention towards grassroots responses to ESOL policy formation, involving the development of local partnerships (as proposed in the Green Paper and as exemplified in the work of the L&WI) might represent a way forward. Were such partnerships allowed to flourish, they could respond to local needs without the divisive language of *us* and *them* that dominates in national-level political and public discourse, and the toxic ideology of monolingualism that sits behind it. For successful local coordination and appropriate high-quality provision, support at a national scale is still required, though, in the shape of strategic direction and of course funding. In Scotland and in Wales, as noted above, the devolved governments have put in place strategies for ESOL, which has a presence in policy consciousness. England however does not have a devolved government. Currently, at the UK-wide level, and by default in England, responsibility for ESOL appears to rest nowhere. Students are currently poorly served by the fragmentation of—and lack of support for—the field, and an important aspect of adult education remains neglected.

Glossary of Abbreviations

ALTE—Association of Language Testers in Europe	ESOL—English for Speakers of Other Languages
APPG—All Party Parliamentary Group	FE—Further Education
CEFR—Common European Framework of Reference	L&WI—Learning and Work Institute
CoE—Council of Europe	MHCLG—Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
ESFA—Education and Skills Funding Agency	
NATECLA—National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults	

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