

English Language Testing for Citizenship: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

The proposed changes to citizenship requirements in Australia have an increased focus on English language competency and on 'Australian' values. The dominance of the English language on the global stage can reinforce the hegemonic nature of the English language, which is becoming increasingly embedded in the image of an Australian citizen. This raises questions on what is motivating the centrality of English language testing for citizenship, and how these shape conceptions of Australian identity. This research is a thematic content analysis of media releases from newspapers, government statements and other grey materials on the recent changes to Australia's citizenship requirements, particularly English language testing. The research found that English language testing can be seen as a form of cultural hegemony, which is shaped by a discourse of social integration and border security. Implications for understanding diversity and working with diverse language groups are explored in light of the English language testing and citizenship discourses in Australia.

Keywords

Citizenship; English Language Testing; Hegemony; Social Policy

Introduction

On May 17, 2016, Peter Dutton MP (then Immigration Minister) made the following comment during a Sky News interview on the topic of Australia's intake of refugees:

They won't be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English. These people would be taking Australian jobs, there's no question about that. For many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues and on Medicare and the rest of it so there would be huge cost and there's no sense in sugar-coating that, that's the scenario. (McMahon, 2016, online)

The comment was widely reported in the media and condemned as being ignorant and nasty (Karp, 2016; McMahon, 2016). Yet, this comment was not simply an off-the-cuff inflammatory statement by a senior politician about refugees entering Australian shores. It is indicative of a wider debate and political discourse about the literacy, education and values held by immigrants and refugees in the Australian English-speaking context.

The positioning of the English language as synonymous with education—and one that is also tied to citizenship—is a common political strategy taken within Western Anglophone countries, and this strategy can be deployed as tool for exclusion (Slade, 2010). In fact, Dutton's comment marked the beginning of a campaign to create a stricter English Language Testing [ELT] regime in Australia that would be explicitly tied to notions of citizenship and values. Close to a year later on April 20, 2017, the Turnbull government announced that they were proposing changes to the requirements for Australian citizenship (Parlinfo, 2017). The stated purpose of these changes was to strengthen the integrity of Australian citizenship by placing a heavier focus on Australian values, English language skills, and to increase the expectations of social integration for immigrants into Australian communities. Given Dutton's indicative statement above, the study sought to critically examine the political rationalities lying behind the English language and citizenship test.

The intersections between notions of citizenship, nationalistic values, and English language proficiency are not especially new. Immigration, citizenship and issues of race have been a focal point for Australian governments and successive waves of largely racist policy innovation since the formation of Australia as a nation state, particularly what this has meant in the long and contested formation of an 'Australian identity' (Elder, 2007). The legislative establishment of Australian citizenship in 1949 enshrined a distinctive British pedigree, which was largely unaltered over time (Stratton, 2011). In effect, this means that Australian citizenship "is able to function as an empty signifier, a symbolic entity that can carry the prejudices of the dominant group, in short, white Australians" (Stratton, 2011, p. 84). Under neoliberalism, policy drivers around migration are fuelled by the perceived need for economic growth and sustainability, and a perceived need to define and shore up a particular construction of national identity in the wake of globalisation (Slade, 2010). Until the Whitlam government ratified the *International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* in 1975, Australia's immigration policies had *explicitly* discriminated on racial and ethnic grounds (Tavan, 2005). The 1970s saw the official end of what has been dubbed the White Australia Policy, and the ideological shift from assimilation to integration was formalised (Poynting & Mason, 2008;

Tavan, 2005; Warhurst, 2007). The subsequent introduction of multicultural policies coincided with the influx of non-European and non-Christian peoples immigrating to Australia. However, as noted by Poynting and Mason (2008), integrationist policy has arisen alongside the proliferation of Australian anti-terrorism laws, and we now see more stricter and coercive requirement for immigrants to integrate into Australian communities.

One such instrument, which is the focus of this paper, is the proposed changes to the Australian Citizenship Test, which includes an assessment of English language proficiency as part of the conditions for granting Australian citizenship. A separate test, used for permanent residency and other work and student visas, is known as the International English Language Testing System [IELTS]. The IELTS costs over 300 Australian dollars per attempt and can be done via computer or during paper-based test dates, which are conducted in each state. IELTS has listening, speaking, reading and writing components, and two expert markers follow detailed marking criteria to grade the tests. The IELTS has been used within discussions of the proposed test as a framework for judging English language proficiency and within the recommended changes to the citizenship test, achievement of IELTS Band 6 language proficiency was expected (Burke et al., 2018).

Around the world, nations have been developing stricter immigration and integration policies utilising language testing requirements and testing. Ponchon-Berger and Lenz (2014) discuss that there has become such a large variation of language requirements from different countries as they are being introduced and led by political leaders rather than language experts. The changes to English language tests including the citizenship test—and the political rhetoric that surround it—raise questions as to the extent that these can be seen as instruments in a wider imperialist and nationalistic project. On one hand this seems odd given we live in a globalised, multicultural, multi-national world. But on the other hand, as Loomba (1998) argues, the imperial mission has two major components that clearly intersect with globalisation. The first is an economic drive and a need for progress, and the second component is the attempt to ‘civilise’, ‘educate’ and ‘enlighten’ those considered primitive (Ashcroft et al., 2009; Loomba 1998). As Hage (2000) has argued, both multiculturalism and overt forms of white nationalism entail contests over identity and politics, but each position is underpinned by different expressions of white privilege.

While English language testing has existed in policy programs for some time, there was a sharp increase in the focus of this in the context of the debates over changes to the citizenship test that were announced in 2017 by the then Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton (Burke et al., 2018). The focus of this paper is the political rhetoric that surrounds the intersections between citizenship, and English language proficiency and testing. The argument of this paper is that determining the forms of imperialism that are present in discourses of English language testing is a worthwhile exercise, and key to understanding how conceptions of Australian citizenship are being shaped and reshaped by these discourses. While this research does not focus on English testing specifically, it does aim to take a broader look so as to determine what forms of imperialism might be found in the political discourses of testing regimes for English language competency and its relationship to values and citizenship. It does this by examining the debates and conceptualisations of English language testing in

Australia through a post-colonial conceptual framework. The study reported here examined grey literature about English language testing and citizenship (such as media releases and policy transcripts) in order to get a closer perspective of the dominant public perspectives on these questions. A thematic content analysis and post-colonial conceptual framework was adopted to interpret how language and power are intersecting with imperialist structures of thoughts, ideas and beliefs around culture and race. The findings of this study show that within the political discourse of English language testing and citizenship, discourses of cultural hegemony are enacting further social divisions and exclusion of minority groups in Australia. The paper draws together greater clarity around how this testing regime can be seen as another building block in social and institutional forms of racism and othering.

Theoretical framework

Language can be understood not merely as a system of communication, but as a fully-fledged political tool (Burke et al., 2018). The English language has been one of Australia's richest inheritances from England, essentialised and celebrated throughout John Howard's decade as Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 - 2007 (Ahluwalia & McCarthy, 1998; Ang & Stratton, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Meaney, 2001). This hegemonic push has been marked as a defensive project in response to new discourses such as multiculturalism, which superseded the era of the White Australian Policy and its assimilation policies. This Anglo-centric view had hitherto been a marker of Australian understandings of race and culture. The following review will discuss these presuppositions in-depth, by examining how the English language has played a significant role in Australian citizenship and immigration policymaking.

Language and English linguistic imperialism

The renowned cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky has argued that language is centred within a social context, and that speech and language are formative of mental concepts, ideas and inner reflection (Carlucci, 2014; Costantino, 2008). This suggests that language is steeped in the culture that develops and constructs it, making language diverse and subject to variations (Ashcroft et al., 2009). Dendrinos, Karavanta and Mitsikopoulou (2008) contend that language "cannot do anything or become something by itself; it can become neither 'pure' nor 'hybrid' on its own" (p. 1). Thus, language and language testing are things or objects, and through representations and practices of them, they become political. These arguments problematise the concept of using English language proficiency as a marker for citizenship.

The politics of language concerns what language enables, and what it produces as a political and discursive strategy because "language does not simply represent disciplinary knowledge – it is actively engaged in bringing such knowledge into being" (Halliday & Martin, 2003, cited in Airey, 2011, p. 5). This is consistent with Foucauldian understandings of discursive practices as containers for power and claims to truth and legitimacy (Loomba, 1998). This notion can be applied to the historical global expansion of the English language, which has led many scholars to claim English as a global language or 'lingua franca' (Lin & Martin 2005; Phillipson, 1992). There are many legitimate arguments for why lingua francas are useful. However, the English language test in question is not just focused on functional communication because the test itself is used for many other wider purposes.

These purposes go well beyond functional communication and they combine together to situate English language as part of a wider project of linguistic imperialism. Phillipson (1992) has defined this expansion along these lines, claiming that English language is consistently “asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (p. 47). Phillipson (1992) argues that whenever ELT is conceptualised as non-political, it divorces ELT from its social and political context and thus allows for easier exportation and popular endorsement. This reinforces Phillipson’s (1992) argument of linguistic imperialism, as the teaching, the learning and the justifications for both have been marketed and packaged as value-free, objective and non-political. There has been a counter push to acknowledge that these TESOL classrooms *do* reflect socio-political contexts and should be viewed as “neither value-free nor apolitical” (Rich & Troudi, 2006, p. 616). A further example of the way that language has been used in Australian history as a tool to maintain a form of cultural control is the loss of many Indigenous Australian languages, which were subordinated through two hundred years of colonial violence (Hobson, 2010; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

In the 1970s, after several decades of debate, the Whitlam Government decisively renounced the White Australia Policy (Tavan, 2005). This allowed non-European immigration to occur less restricted and marked the beginning of a period of ideological and legislative change in Australia that marked the official end of the period of the White Australia Policy, and the beginning of minority groups gaining some recognition of their cultures through multiculturalism and integration (Poynting & Mason, 2008).

Citizenship, hegemony and the Australian national identity

Australian citizenship is deeply intertwined with conceptions of national identity. Ang and Stratton (1998) contend that multiculturalism was placed as a centrepiece for the ‘new Australia’ in an attempt to move away from the racist White Australia Policy. There has been strong opposition to the ideas within this policy transformation, and multiculturalism has continuously been debated and argued for its conceptual validity. Ang and Stratton (1998) argue that this push towards policies for cultural diversity produced significant backlash from One Nation’s Pauline Hanson and the Liberal Party’s John Howard. Furthermore, they make the case that it was in this backlash that former Prime Minister John Howard first began a campaign to cement values and English language with conceptualisations of what an Australian person *is* and what it means to live in Australia (Johnson, 2007; Stratton, 2016).

Howard utilised ideas of Australian national identity and national values to secure an image of strong unflinching leadership (Johnson, 2007). Both Howard and Hanson pushed a nostalgic image of an old uncomplicated Australia, one that has been built through Australian writers and singers, of a predominantly Anglo Celtic, Christian identity (Stratton, 2016). Howard embraced Australia’s history of being British, and celebrated the Western Enlightenment for its “unproblematic, uncontestable truths” (Johnson, 2007, p. 198). Howard leveraged popular support through a discourse of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony is defined by Antonio Gramsci as “the spontaneous consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Lears, 1985, p. 568). Stratton (1998) maintains that these hegemonic ideas of national

identity were reinforced through mediums of filmography and television, and these ideas became fused with ideas of citizenship.

One of the problems with this theory of hegemony is that it underplays the capability for citizens' autonomy. Meaney (2001) asserts that these theories "arrogantly...assume to know what the people if they were allowed to be true to themselves would have believed...bases its argument on a social psychology which sees people as the mindless products of cultural manipulation or security imperatives" (p. 84). However, the key consideration in Gramsci's understanding is that the masses give their consent. Johnson (Johnson, 2007) explains that the political climate at the time of Howard's rise to power was circling around issues of political correctness, shame over colonial history and struggles over land rights. Howard offered a decisive alternative, which reinforced that it was natural for nations to have a dominant culture, that the dominant culture should be proud of its history, and that the opposition was distorting the truth of British colonisation in Australia (Johnson, 2007; Meaney, 2001; Warhurst, 2007).

However, despite the cultural hegemonic push towards establishing a national consensus about what it means to be Australian, in practice, citizenship and allegiance to a national identity is hardly ever uniform or homogenous. Miller (2007) distinguishes the differences between political, economic and cultural citizenship. Citizens gain different rights from the different forms of citizenship, such as legal and residential rights, employment rights, and the right to speak. Using a definition of culture as the social behaviour and shared norms of a society, it suggests culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) immigrants' rights to participate could be hampered by the necessity of mirroring the dominant culture. Therefore, there is a reflexive interplay between notions of self and wider discourse and cultural expectations and conceptions of citizenship. Expanding on these three forms of citizenship, Rubenstein and Field (2017) discuss the case of Mr Amos Ame, who was born an Australian citizen but was deprived of his citizenship, on the argument that his citizenship was not valid. Although Papua New Guinea citizens were provided by the Australian Government a form of citizenship that allowed them to reside in Australia for work, this law did not allow them permanent residency. Mr Amos Ame's lawyer argued that although he was born from Papua New Guinean parents—whom under the Migration Act were denied permanent residency—he was born on Australian soil and had grown up in Australia and should therefore be considered Australian with full citizenry rights. Here, Rubenstein and Field make the unnerving case that citizenship can be placed at risk by "territorial transformations and the vestiges of colonialism" (2017, p. 100). In other words, state and juridical power can be deployed to revoke or block legally recognised citizenship, thus overriding any formed relationship between citizenship and identity. The 1948 Australian Nationality and Citizenship Act defined 'Alien' to mean anyone who is not British, Irish or a 'protected' person. These broad shifts to multicultural policies ushered in a new way of thinking about 'other' cultures that was not informed by Western Enlightenment (Ashcroft, Griffiths et al., 2009; Meaney, 2001), and it is within this contested space that attempts to strongly (re)link citizenship with English Language Testing and proficiency have been recently asserted and politicised. Hence, the aim of this study is to determine what forms of imperialism are found in discourses of English language testing, and how these might be shaping conceptions of citizenship and what it means to be Australian.

The study

Sampling timeframe

This research utilised a sample of public domain documents focused on the English language test in Australia. An 18-month (01/01/2017 – 01/06/2018) sampling window was chosen to sample text documents on English language testing published six months before and 12 months after the announcement by the Turnbull Government to change citizenship legislation (Parlinfo, 2017). This 18-month sampling window was also designed to determine whether this legislative proposal was a response to a specific incident; however, no critical incident was found to prompt the government to make this proposal, suggesting this has been a long-term plan of the Turnbull government. The purpose of this sampling window was to search for documents in the lead up to, and immediately following, the change to citizenship legislation so as to examine how questions of English language testing were being represented in the public domain. This research was not a subset of a wider study; however, the study still received institutional ethics approval in the form of an ethics declaration. As the sample relied only on public domain documents, no specific ethical issues were encountered.

Data sources and data sampling

The key sources or outlets selected for the data were: (1) print media, news; (2) audio media, news; (3) government grey literature, and; (4) alternative voices such as from the shadow ministry. Given the methodological difficulties searching for audio media, data sources were restricted to print media news and government grey literature, as these were more amenable to using consistent search terms. The Factiva database—a media and news database—was searched using four key terms: ‘English language’, ‘Australian Citizenship’, ‘National Identity’, and, ‘Multiculturalism’. An ABC news article written by Andrew Catsaras (2015) listed the top Australian newspapers that were shown to influence Australian public opinion, and this was used as a guide to determine the authenticity and representativeness of print media selected. In addition, Jupp’s (2006) four key criterion for sampling documents for research (authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning) determined eligibility. That is, documents were included in the sample if they were assessed as being authentic and credible statements about ELT, had a wide reach or impact, and were conceptually relevant to the aims of the study.

The article sources included official transcripts of interviews with MP Peter Dutton and MP Tony Burke. These transcripts are provided on their official websites as public media and are available for free. The articles used in the sample came from The Courier Mail, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Daily Telegraph, and The Australian. These news sources were all listed under Andrew Catsaras’ top influential Australian newspapers list as discussed above.

Transcripts were selected using the same criterion used to select print media through the Factiva database. To balance the sample with potentially wider perspectives and contesting voices, relevant articles from the shadow ministry were accessed using the same criterion (for example, at the time of the debate, Tony Burke MP was responding directly to this proposal and providing an alternative governmental voice from the opposition). Accuracy and meaning of sampled documents were determined through closer screenings. Some documents were

identified through key terms, but on closer inspection said very little about the topic. These documents were excluded from the sample. Ninety-nine documents were reduced down to sixty-one after screening for authenticity and representativeness. A further twenty documents were excluded based on criteria such as duplication or lack of relevancy. Following this process, 41 documents were selected as data for this study. Figure 1 depicts the sampling process.

Identification	<p>Potentially relevant media releases and transcripts pulled from Minister of Home Affairs media release webpage, Tony Burke’s webpage and the following Australian newspapers that were considered to have the most influence on public opinion.</p> <p>The Australian or The Australian Financial Review or The Sydney Morning Herald or The Age or Herald-Sun or Courier Mail or Daily Telegraph</p> <p><i>(n=300)</i></p>	<p>Keyword search through Factiva using the time frame of 01/01/2017 – 01/06/2018.</p> <p>The key terms are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘English Language’ • ‘Australian Citizenship’ • ‘National Identity’ • ‘Multiculturalism’ 	
Screening	<p>↓</p> <p>Screening was based on authenticity, credibility, representativeness and its meaning.</p> <p><i>(n=99)</i></p>	<p>Exclusion based on not meeting the parameters.</p> <p><i>(n=38)</i></p>	
Eligibility	<p>↓</p> <p>Full Text assessed eligibility.</p> <p><i>(n=61)</i></p>	<p>Full Text excluded with reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • duplicate • relevancy <p><i>(n=20)</i></p>	
Included	<p>↓</p> <p>41 media releases and transcripts reviewed and included in the analysis.</p>		
Included	<p>↓</p> <p>Newspapers (FACTIVA)</p> <p><i>(n=27)</i></p>	<p>↓</p> <p>Peter Dutton Transcripts</p> <p><i>(n=11)</i></p>	<p>↓</p> <p>Tony Burke Transcripts</p> <p><i>(n=3)</i></p>

Figure 1: Data sampling

Data analysis

A thematic content analysis of the 41 sampled documents drew from Altheide and Schneider's (2013) document analysis framework, whereby documents were analysed for their format, frame, theme and overall discourse. A format is the manner in which a particular communication is presented. In the case of this study, the formats were text media, interview transcripts and political statements (Altheide, 1996). A frame is a broad thematic and schematic way of representing an issue overall, such as the way that English Language testing is framed as a matter of citizenship and identity. A frame gives text a particular conceptual coherence, and delimits the boundaries of what is said and thought (Altheide, 1996). The data was examined for repeated concepts and rhetorical patterns that structured or framed the discussion on English Language Testing. For example, it was found that a keyway that national identity was framed involved regular referencing back to shared membership and values. A theme is like a mini-frame, more like an angle or recurring storyline that advances a particular definition or point of view. The data was examined for instances of the way authors of texts performed an interpretation of complex phenomena, so as to present their argument or story in a way that allows for simple meaning to emerge (for example, in the data there was constant thematic discussion around social integration and national security, and these were linked together in ways that signal simplified messages).

Although contested and involving multiplicity of sometimes competing theoretical pedigrees, discourse here refers to the overarching expression of social and political power that shapes what is included and excluded in ways in which truth and knowledge is established (Altheide, 1996); for example, how it is that English Language Testing develops and constitutes its own form of truth—what is sayable and thinkable about this matter, and how this shapes social and political practice. The main analytical approach taken in this study was to search the data for frames and themes, and then use this understanding to query and pose questions about the political rationality of English Language Testing and its link to citizenship and national identity. Each article in the sample was systematically examined for representations of cultural groups and statements about English language. Justifications of sentiments that were expressed repeatedly by different spokespersons were noted down. Organising the data into frames and themes provided clarity around what the current discourse are and how they are being used. This method of data analysis was appropriate to the aims of the study, which was to conduct a critical analysis of a public issue to identify the way that political power is infused in media. As explained by Altheide:

These are the most powerful features of public information, and the study of their origins, how they change over time, and their taken-for-granted use in everyday life is essential to understanding the relevance of communication media for our lives. (1996, p. 31)

Results: Mono-culturalism and national identity

The findings of this study revealed that there was constant discussion around social integration, and that this was almost always framed around immigrants who are Asian or Middle Eastern. A political discourse that negatively problematises migrants and refugees was set against

appeals to nation, social integration, national security and arguments for restricted citizenship. Of particular note were attacks on policies of multiculturalism, and *ad hominem* attacks deployed as a tactic to undermine opposition to the changes in the English Language Testing policy.

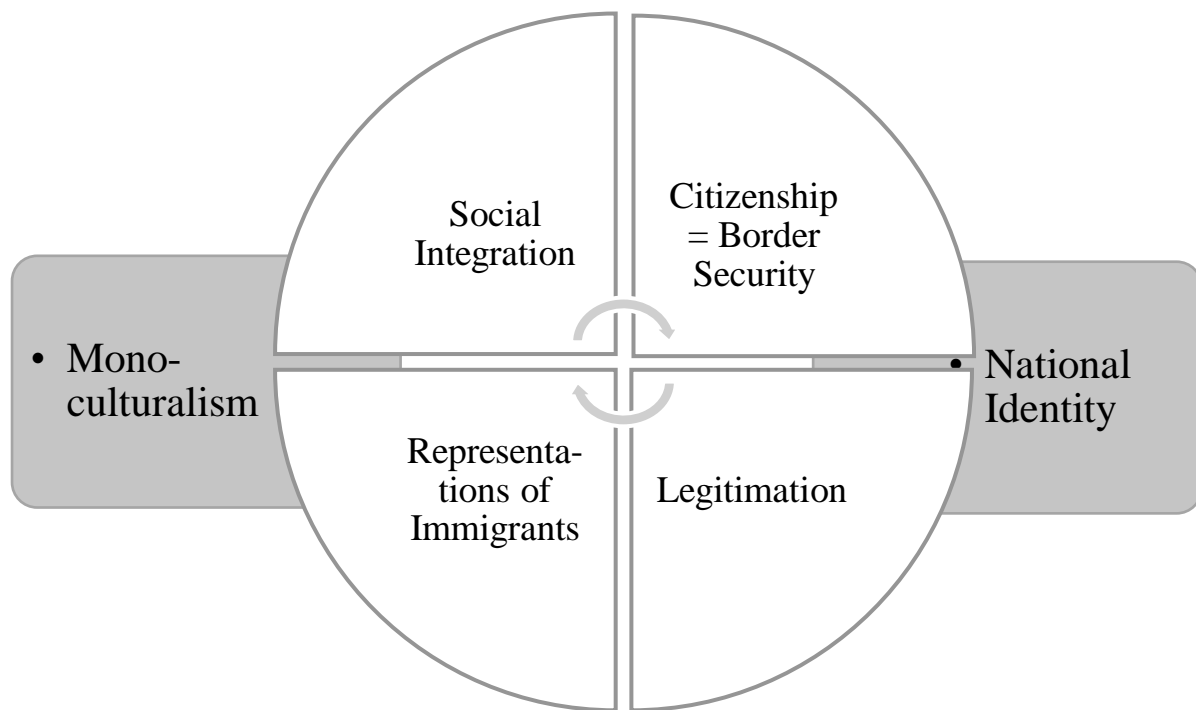


Figure 2: Themes and frames of the discourse of English Language Testing in Australia: Citizenship, National Identity and Mono-culturalism.

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that the legitimization of English Language Testing is framed by arguments about social integration, a particular representation of migrants as problematic and, the pairing of citizenship as central to national security. A quote from the Sydney Morning Herald is indicative of these themes:

Evoking John Howard, the Turnbull government's multicultural statement enshrines the current and future centrality of the English language. It cites the nation's Anglo-Celtic heritage, calls equality of opportunity a "fair go" and defines social harmony as the foundation of national security. (Rick Morton, Document #4)

These themes are framed by a central idea that shared national identity is, at heart, one that is distinctly mono-cultural. Accordingly, it is apparent that various discursive and hegemonic

mechanisms are in play to give such a view a veneer of logical common sense. The most striking of these is social integration.

Social integration

Integration describes a process of many peoples coming together and working through dialogue and actions to develop peaceful relations (Poynting & Mason, 2008; Moran, 2011). However, social integration was developed through the concept of assimilation, which described one cultural group's absorption into another (Alba & Nee, 1997).

Social integration is one of the main themes found within the data and is a key political justification used for the proposed changes to English Language Testing. The placement of the English language as central to successful integration is shown through Citizenship Minister Alan Tudge's caution:

[T]hat the nation's success on multiculturalism would not continue without strengthening English language proficiency to *aid integration* (*English the answer: Migrant groups, The Australian, Document #1*)

This caution is repeated throughout the data. Sitting alongside this is the argument that it is solely the immigrant's responsibility to integrate, and in doing so, representation of problem groups emerge.

Representations of immigrants

Throughout the data, migrants were represented as Asian or Middle Eastern, purportedly unable to speak English, and are therefore unable to participate in Australian communities. A central presupposition here is that the ability to speak English is the determining factor for immigrants' successful integration into Australian society. Furthermore, this argument makes a case that without the English lingua franca, immigrants will struggle to live amongst Australian communities:

Without English as a common tongue, people from different backgrounds will struggle to get along and inevitably retreat into ethnic enclaves where they feel more comfortable. (Learn English to have a voice in Australia, Herald Sun, Document #13)

The above statement implicates immigrants as a problem and ensures the visibility of Asian or Middle Eastern groups in the public discourse. The suggestion that ethnic enclaves are only formed by outsiders (i.e., non-Australian citizens) entrenches views that ethnic enclaves are synonymous with communities that have some form of visible marked difference from the dominant culture—racial, cultural, or linguistic difference. In doing so, risky groups are marked out and problematised as national security threats.

Citizenship is paired with national security

Consistent reference was made to threats to Australia's national security that need to be guarded against, and that any opposition to the ELT changes goes against Australia's national interest. This acts as a mechanism of synonymising immigration policies with national security:

Tony Burke's completely over the top reaction today [Tony Burke made comparisons between the policy proposal and former White Australia policies] really shows that he and Mr Shorten are acting not in the national interest. (Transcript of Peter Dutton's Doorstop Interview, Parliament House, Document #29)

Any opposition to changes to ELT are charged as acting outside of Australia's national interest. This counter argument neatly undermines the motives of anyone suggesting an alternative perspective about the suggested changes to citizenship. Instead, a heightened sense of imminent threat is elevated:

[W]e should be looking at the backgrounds of some people where once they become an Australian citizen it's then very hard to deport that person...but I think we should have a closer look at some people and their backgrounds before we accept their application to become an Australian citizen. (Transcript of Peter Dutton's interview with Tom Tilley, Document #35)

The data revealed statements that show that the government was looking harder and closer at immigrants for evidence of wrongdoing. While this critical gaze reinforces ideas that outsiders (non-Australian citizens) pose an existential threat to safety and security, it also lays the groundwork for a policy that citizenship can be rescinded. This places immigrants in a precarious social position, one where the immigrant is considered lesser than an Australian whose citizenship was gained by birth.

Legitimation

Using a process of legitimation, the government tactically acted to reduce the opposition that their proposal faces. Terms such as 'sensible' and 'contemporary' help to legitimate the proposed changes by situating these terms and phrases as global norms. There are three main arguments for legitimation. First and foremost, these changes are framed as sensible. For example:

[T]he government has put forward some sensible changes around tightening up the citizenship requirements (Transcript of Peter Dutton's interview with Ray Hadley, Document #30)

Second, these changes are framed as contemporary and in keeping with the times. The third method of legitimation is to make reference to similar processes that are found in Europe and in England. This overall legitimation process is effective as people are unlikely to question processes, ideas and changes that are already nested within their social and cultural norms and values.

Monoculturalism

Social integration and representations of migrants are themes that support a frame of monoculturalism, which describes how these policies are expressing or supporting a notion that the 'white' dominant culture is superior. The proposal places a set of undefined values as the foundation of Australian culture, which says that to be Australian, the immigrant must put aside their culture and mimic the dominant group. For example:

[W]hen you want to become an Australian citizen, that you will adopt Australian values (Transcript of Joint Press Conference with the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull 20/04/2017, Document #28)

Increasing qualifiers for citizenship further develops barriers between citizenship by birth and citizenship granted through the state. The painting of CALD immigrants as people who do not want to participate is a dog whistle to birthright citizens that immigrants will be the cause of societal unrest. This pushes the idea that immigrants must show that:

They've lived here as a permanent resident for four years, they speak English, share our values, be integrated (Transcript of Joint Press Conference with the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull 20/04/2017, Document #28)

These shifting expectations in immigration also point to the reduced infrastructure for encouraging social integration, such as a reduction in support for English language proficiency generally.

National identity

Australia's national identity has been one of the core frames surrounding the discourse on English language testing for citizenship. Australia's identity has been built, shaped, described and debated through core social policies and Australian values:

[T]he guiding principle from the Government seems to be framing these changes in terms of patriotism (Transcript of Tony Burke's interview with Fran Kelly: Citizenship legislation; foreign donations, Document #39)

This argument is representative of the ideological divide between birthright citizenship and citizenship rights received through immigration, or 'alien' citizenship. Ngai (2006) argues this further, from an American context, that this 'alien' citizenship also pertains to birthright citizens whose citizenship is perceived suspicious "on account of the racialized identity of her immigrant ancestry" (p. 2521). The dominant image of Australian birthright citizens and the representational image of 'alien' citizens can reflect the contrast between the Australian national identity and other nations, countries and cultures. For example:

Australian citizenship, it's not overcooking it to say this is about who we are as a country (Transcript of Tony Burke's Doorstop Interview, Parliament House, Document #40)

This becomes difficult in multicultural society where everyone has different experiences of the same place, different physical features and often different languages. It raises questions for people about how to develop and own a collective sense of being when difference rises to the forefront of social interaction between various social and cultural groups within Australia. The amalgamation of citizenship, collective identity and border security has been a long-term project in Australia surrounding multiculturalism, which includes the idea of many cultures and ethnicities. The next data quote illustrates the use of discourses in Australia surrounding multicultural policies. These policies have little to do with incoming citizens, or Australians who have membership in non-white non-Christian cultural groups. Instead:

Multiculturalism is less about reason and reasonableness than it is about the control of public debate regarding immigration and national identity. (Cultural Values Worth Testing, The Australian, Document #27)

Multiculturalism and its supposed failure are one of the concepts that were excessively used to garner public support on national security matters (i.e., citizenship and asylum seeker/refugee), and this has now spilt over into debates about ELT.

Discussion

Cultural hegemony in English Language Testing in Australia

The political and media discourse that frames the national conversation about English Language testing for citizenship is divisive. The role of the English language as a political tool, which is also endowed with market value, has stretched well beyond its primary application in specific contexts, such as granting access to university education or employment in emergency services. Although arguments could be made for the necessity of a baseline of English for migrants, testing English for citizenship as a proxy measure for morality and as an instrument in promoting a hegemonic vision of Australian identity is problematic. This study finds the legitimacy of the proposed test for citizenship weak on the grounds that it is represented as a solution to social division, which it is not. The findings of this study have shown that the very use of testing for citizenship is enacting processes of gatekeeping that are racially and culturally exclusionary.

The discourses discussed in this paper circle around a binary of insiders and outsiders and they consistently reinforce fear of marginalised cultures, which are deemed inferior to the dominant culture representative of the insiders of Australian citizenry. This binary actively develops social divisions within Australian communities as it communicates that cultural and ethnic minorities are not welcome if they cannot hide their cultural differences.

The combining of conceptions of citizenship and national security cleverly presents a rationale for broader social and political consent to a constrictive and discriminatory legislation. By further isolating people who look or sound like they represent a faceless enemy from outside the borders, the discourses used to propose this new legislation cement dislike of immigrants as they are represented as people who are divisive and ungrateful. The danger that lurks inside such policies and their political and discursive representation is that individuals and groups who cannot hide their membership to certain cultural and ethnic minority groups are exposed to racial discrimination and acts of hate and social exclusion.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the emphasis has been on the divisive effect that explicitly tying ELT to narrow conceptions of citizenship has on Australian communities. This study is an exercise on the necessity of paying close attention to policies and legislation that legitimise forms of surveillance and restriction, regardless of the Australian communities and demographic groups they target. The policy analysed in this study is duplicitous in its description as a step towards closer integrated communities, and a safer Australia. The political rationality for the citizenship

test combine to convey an argument that Australia only accepts 'educated' immigrants and that they should clearly be showcasing what the government has classified as 'Australian values', which will be determined through values testing and English language testing (Burke, et al., 2018). Its promotion of negative representations of Asian and Middle Eastern people connects neatly with wider political discourses that intersect with the politics of fear, hate and misinformation. It begs the question: what 'problem' is being solved (or rather, problematised) via a policy to accelerate a political rationality that synthesises together ELT, a narrow conception of Australia values, and grounds for citizenship? According to Burke et al., (2018), language proficiency is being deployed as a "proxy measure of the morality of prospective citizens and their willingness to 'integrate' or 'assimilate' into resettlement contexts" (p. 84). By extension, language proficiency is used as a gate; a tool to marginalise and exclude people and groups who "do not possess the linguistic capital privileged by policy and media elites" (Burke et al., 2018, p. 84).

Across western nations we can witness the tightening up of immigration policies and an elevated focus on border security. The background is increasing ultranationalism and the rise of tribalism as a mainstream political force: the Brexit campaign in the UK and Donald Trump's presidency are two such examples. In Australia, some political figures are gaining increasing confidence in their deliverance of racist or xenophobic speeches and statements. Former Senator and founder of Fraser Anning's Conservative National Party, Fraser Anning, has at multiple points made racist remarks towards specific communities. On the surface, the ELT policy and its links to citizenship has been portrayed as largely a benign and sensible initiative, but on closer inspection, hidden dangers can be revealed. Again, this begs questions of what these policies will look like when they are no longer dressed up to appear benign, and therefore, critical analysis and vigilance is needed to examine how policies such as English Language Testing and their connections to notions of citizenship and nationhood may operate as broader tools in maintaining cultural hegemony.

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