

Multilingualism and citizenship education

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One of the things which might catch the attention of an outsider looking at the European Union is the fact that its inhabitants speak a number of different languages. If this outsider were a sociolinguist, then they would be aware of how far communities generally consider language to be a marker of their identity, so they might then wonder how the EU deals with this variation, and how different language groups experience the situation. As insiders we should be more than curious, concerned even, to identify the challenges inherent in this situation for how we are to conceive of citizenship, and for how we are to educate people towards citizenship and living together. This paper does not intend to do more than try to identify some of the issues, and raise questions for discussion. To do this, we start by looking at some of the beliefs which surround language use, and then at some of the findings about this use, and about multilingualism. These will provide a basis for considering the implications for citizenship education. Before you read on, however, you might like to think about how you would fill in the gaps in these statements:

In my country, everybody speaks

In my country, when there is an international football match, everybody supports

And about which of these statements you most agree with:

In my country, the problem of immigration is that it reduces the purity of the language.

In my country, one contribution of immigration is that it enriches our linguistic resources.

1 Beliefs - many languages or one

In some countries such as England (not the United Kingdom), large sections of the population believe that the nation is monolingual, and that you can complete the first statement with “English”:

In my country, everybody speaks English.

It is a way of being united, of living together, it means that if you do not speak English, then you are not one of us. This belief is found in a number of nations, and underlying it is an attitude which considers multilingualism to be undesirable, a curse. This notion is exemplified in the story of Babel in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where divine retribution for human transgression is to “confound tongues”. The concept is extended to cover ideas of purity, that there are correct and incorrect ways to use the language, so, for example, if you speak English differently, have a foreign accent, then you are not one of us either, you are not “everybody”. The ideals of linguistic purity and of monolingualism appear in other cultures, in Islam for example, so we are dealing with widespread notions which predate the foundation of nation-states, when, as we will mention later, both concepts reappear.

There is a related belief, with an underlying attitude towards the national, official language of England:

In my country, everybody should speak

At the time of writing, in 2003, the British Home Secretary believes strongly that it is legitimate to complete this statement with “English”, and that to enforce the notion and his policy, immigrants (and asylum seekers accepted into the country) should be tested on their knowledge of English. That would mean assessing about 120000 people each year, and there is no indication as yet whether they would be assessed on their knowledge of the standard, so-called Queen’s English, or of the regional variety where they are going to live. There is a deal of support for the idea that “if they are to live here, then they ought to speak our language”. The equation of language with nation is an idea which Herder advanced in the late 18th

century, and the concept was then developed in 19th century theories of nationalism, as encapsulated in the Irish nationalist slogan from that time, *Tir gan teanga, tir gan anem* - the nation without a language is a nation without a soul. The view of the Home Secretary is also reminiscent of the belief expressed a few years ago, by one of Mrs Thatcher's most right-wing supporters, Norman Tebbit. He was angered by seeing immigrants and – worse! – their children support their country of origin in a cricket match, and said that they should support the English team (he made no mention, I believe, of Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland). So here is another test of people's citizenship:

In my country, when there is an international football match, everybody supports
In Potsdam in 1992, during the televised European cup final between Denmark and Germany, I watched former East Germans cheer the Danish victory. It is not only in England that you can express a range of loyalties through which sports team you support. Along with multilingualism goes multiculturalism, and this was a concept alien to Tebbit's political credo. The idea that you might have more than one loyalty to choose from is not part of a world which chooses myths to defend it from change; you have to select and prescribe those icons and stories which will reinforce purity and unity.

Let us go back to the notion of language purity, and look at this statement:

In my country, the problem of immigration is that it reduces the purity of the language.
In England this is an unstated view, but is implicit in the way official documents usually ignore multilingualism and assert the dominance of one language and its standard form. It is part and parcel of the monolingual nation view and the behaviour that stems from it. This is a view which Jean Marie Le Pen put forward in the French presidential election in 1988, when, declaiming about racial and linguistic purity, he said, "nous perdons notre langue et même la capacité de penser" (we are losing our language and even the ability to think). Such threats are used to ensure that all speakers of the language, the "everybody" of "everybody speaks ..." will share the speaker's concern and rally to the defence of their identity, their country, their language. This argument reappears at another level, where the acceptance of dialect variation is seen as a failure to reinforce the standard language. The chances that you have heard the converse view expressed, by a politician or in the media, are slim, if not zero:

In my country, one contribution of immigration is that it enriches our linguistic resources.
This is not a view which informs policy in England.

I have started by talking about beliefs because they obscure facts, and can make it difficult to discuss the reality of multilingualism and approaches to dealing with it and the associated phenomena in citizenship education. I want now to sketch in some of the facts.

2 What is multilingualism?

In the United Kingdom it is not possible to state that everybody speaks one language, English, it is not true either as a statement about individuals' first language, or as a claim in general, though it can be said that the great majority have some knowledge of English. The statement has to be qualified because there are native speakers of more than 200 other languages resident in the country, with the rights of subjects, and a proportion of whom do not speak English. Listen out during any journey in London today, and you will hear people who are obviously residents, not tourists, speaking languages other than English; I often hear three or four other languages in the course of the day. The level of multilingualism today is a relatively recent phenomenon, but historically natives of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have used other languages before adopting English two or three centuries ago, and many of their inhabitants continue to be bilingual, which is why earlier reference was made to England only.

We need a set of terms to allow us to describe a situation like this. Minimally these include the following. A national language is one recognised by law, say in the constitution, as the language of the nation; in the United Kingdom there is no constitution, but the National Curriculum implicitly sets English up as the national language. Countries like Belgium and Canada recognise two national languages. Next we may find an official language one which is officially recognised for specific uses in the nation as English is in India. The next two categories are identified through who, with what social and political position, uses a particular language, for what purpose and when. Briefly put, a majority language is one used by the powerful, by decision-makers in the nation, while a minority language is one used by a marginalised group in the nation; there may be more than one such group. Of course, when applied, these two terms may happen to correspond to the numerical size of the groups, but the majority language group may well be smaller than the other, minority groups in the nation. This is the case in Bolivia, where recent political protests are partly to do with the minority position of linguistic and cultural groups which make up most of the population. When we talk about language contact we refer to situations where users of two or more languages meet in shared contexts. A possible product of such contact, is language shift where a social group moves from using one language to using another under a variety of possible influences in a specific situation. It may be a wholesale change as in the shift in the 19th century from the use of Irish to English by the numerical majority of the population of Ireland. Finally, we may refer to the standard language, by which we mean the prestigious, socially received dialect of a language, the form most particularly used in writing. The other dialects of the language are usually considered to be minority dialects, which may be regarded in ways comparable to attitudes to minority languages. The status of a language may change with context, so that a majority language in one country may be a minority language in another.

In most countries in the world, most of their citizens speak more than one language in their daily life. The situations where they use one language rather than another vary from place to place, but there are patterns to the variation. We can schematise these, over-simply, but usefully, in terms of Groups A and B, where A, the dominant, majority group holds power, political and/or economic; its members may be a social or ethnic group and their language, A, is the majority language. Then Group B (and, as appropriate, Group C, Group D), forms the minority group, usually in number, certainly in terms of power; its members may be more recent arrivals in the territory, and the visibility of some of those who have arrived in the last half-century in the United Kingdom has led to the creation of the tag “ethnic minorities”; new arrivals are unwelcome because they dilute the ethnic mix. In some cases certain minorities may have been resident for longer than the majority groups they now share the territory with, for example Celts in the British Isles and France, Native Australians and Native Americans.

We find situations where B do not usually know A's language, as is particularly the case with women in some minority groups in Europe. Elsewhere, we find that B are bilingual in B and A, the case of many language groups in the United Kingdom and of Catalan speakers in Spain. Ultimately this may lead to language shift, under various pressures such as market forces - a major force in making the world bilingual in English. Louis-Jean Calvet has literally studied bilingualism and language shift in the market places of Latin America, West Africa and China, revealing how prestige forms are adopted by traders, such as a shift from Quechua to Spanish in Peru. Why would traders in the European market place behave differently? There are situations where B usually speak A and no longer use B, although their

dialect may vary from Standard A, and group identity survives such language shift. This is the case of Irish migrants in the United Kingdom. Finally, there are situations where B and A speak a lingua franca, such as the use of Pidgin in Papua New Guinea, or Swahili in parts of East Africa. There are no obvious cases of this pattern in Europe, although A1 and A2 may also use a lingua franca, such as some of the uses of English in the European Union. Most social contexts in the world are multilingual, following one or a variation of one or more of the situations sketched out here; such communities are more complex than this scheme suggests, and while we may find interethnic, and/or nationalist conflicts within them, it is a moot question how far language is a topic of such division, rather than a symbol of difference.

Conflict is a social reality, and it seems unwise to pretend that it does not exist or that we can aim to create conflict-free societies in the future (thanks to citizenship education). Conflict will always be there, and feeds creation, change and development, as well as aggression, confrontation and alienation. Conflict does not necessarily mean open hostility, it can be there in the awareness that individuals and groups have of difference: different culture, different opportunity, different power, different vernacular, different language. The awareness may be reflected in attitudes of tolerance, respect and admiration, but is more likely to be reflected in conflictual attitudes of fear, dislike and resentment. Attitudes which symbolise the conflict stand for a conflict over power elsewhere in social life, and which help keep the conflict alive. Difference from others tells you who you are, sameness tells you who you belong with; enforcing difference ensures maintenance of sameness. There is plentiful empirical evidence of such behaviour and actions with regard to language. Attitudes ensure conformity to in-group norms of behaviour, non-conformity is commented on, and the comments are powerful. There are numerous reports of physical violence upon an individual for breaking linguistic ranks, a blow from a fist accompanied by, "that's for talking posh". Some offenders are simply be pulled into line, and admonished "you don't say [il], you say [lo]" (overheard on the London Underground). It is as well to remember, though, that sociolinguistic differences also include age, gender, geographical region, as well as social class, and conflict may as easily be about these as about speaking another language.

Metaphors are used to describe what happens in the conflicts that arise in language contact and the process of language shift: "languages enter into conflict; they live and die; they become corrupt; they become bankrupt; languages come into contact; they gain and lose influence; there are language wars". Yet a language is made of ephemeral breaths of air, or of inky marks on paper, not capable of such actions. When we talk like this we take the part for the whole, use it as a metonym, where language stands for its users, and can be taken to do so because it is considered to be such a distinguishing mark of identity. In emotional terms, then, these ideas record observable facts that languages everywhere are in a constant process of change, some of which is influenced by language contact and which sometimes results in language shift. The emotional content reminds us how strongly language is considered to be a badge, an emblem of identity not to be lost, and how powerful it is, so an important possession. The users of a language, whether minority or majority language, continuously have to prove the value of the language to themselves, and maintain its value and usefulness. For users of a minority language, its value as a mark of identity alone will not be enough. They have to be confident that using their language will not cut them off from access to services, opportunity and rights within the larger society, and that the group can organise and operate effectively on its own account. Those of us who think we live in monolingual societies tend to consider identity as bound up with one language, while a multilingual

speaker will associate their different languages with different parts of their lives and identities.

Multilingualism is not a new phenomenon. However, the scale of multilingualism, the size of minority groups, and the awareness of multilingualism seem to be greater in the United Kingdom today. Local councils issue information leaflets about their services in a number of languages and employ interpreters and translators, something they did not do a generation ago. But in general multilingualism is having little impact on our society. Many migrants set out to acquire some proficiency in the majority language, or even reject their own; the second and third generations in these groups may not be proficient in language B, although many communities organise classes to teach the language to their children. In the past, small groups and ethnically similar groups could be assimilated or accommodated in the majority group; today migrant groups appear to be or are larger, and are marginalised or alienated by those already in the community so that their identity as different is reinforced, and consequently they may be keener to preserve their identity than earlier groups. Such groups appear less easy to assimilate, and they may then find it easier and more necessary to preserve use of their language. Alongside this we can see a greater local and regional sense of identity in the majority community, so that, again, it is less easy for minorities to assimilate, even if they want to, and at the same time easier to assert one's identity as different and deserving of respect. The cultural value a majority group puts on monolingualism may be openly hostile to minority groups; the new governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, supports US English, an anti-bilingual education lobby which many people believe is linked to anti-immigration groups in the USA. Mr Schwarzenegger is a bilingual immigrant.

So far I have deliberately looked at multilingualism from a national perspective, but we need to consider the implications of recognising that if Europe exists as a community, then it is a multilingual community. What is specific here is that there are a number of powerful languages, established in their communities of origin, rather than the one language, one community of the sociolinguistic models. This is not unlike India, so it is not a unique situation. Nor is the existence of numerically minority languages, such as Basque, Breton, Faroese, as well as newcomers such as Arabic, Punjabi, Turkish (majority languages elsewhere). The picture is complex and this is only a blurred sketch of what is here.

3 Curriculum perspectives on multilingualism

Once more, the picture here is a very narrow one, as it is not possible to attempt a comparative view of the official position on multilingualism in our different societies, readers will have to add to the view and develop it. I want to look here at what the National Curriculum for England and Wales has to say on or that is relevant for, a consideration of multilingualism and citizenship.

The National Curriculum document "Citizenship – Key Stages 3 & 4", for the 11 to 16 age group, the period of compulsory teaching of citizenship, says that:

Pupils should be taught about:

- a the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society and how they relate to citizens, including the role and operation of the criminal and civil justice systems
 - b the origin and implications of the diverse national, regional and religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding
- (1999:15)

Identity is, then, a key element of the considerations, but nowhere does the linguistic aspect of this diversity of identity get mentioned, nor are the implications of linguistic diversity considered. People fight and die over linguistic identity, struggle to maintain it, and use force to eliminate it (Stalin in the USSR, Franco in Spain, French revolutionaries in France). By not talking about linguistic diversity, the fact of being a multilingual nation is denied and the idea of creating and ensuring national unity through one language and linguistic unity is maintained as the received concept, not to be challenged. The National Curriculum for English (as a subject) considers variation, but this is about dialect variation in English, deviation from Standard English, and not about language variation in Britain. It should be noted that this topic was missing from the first version of the English curriculum, and it took a considerable fight to get the topic included in later versions.

Throughout the National Curriculum and in supporting documents such as the Crick report, difference is constructed as deficit, or seen as a problem. Here, as elsewhere, citizenship education is seen as a means to reduce conflict, rather than a means to examine the tensions in society and see in what ways they can be harnessed to development; the intention is to eliminate conflict because it threatens an imagined homogeneity which has never in fact existed. This view has scarcely moved on from the 19th century conception of the school as a hermetic space where the quarrels of the society around it did not enter, where the task of the school was to turn pupils into good citizens of the realm, do away with regional language forms and inculcate the doctrine of the national church (if their parents had good sense: in some towns they could opt to send their children to non-conformist or Catholic schools). In general the aim is conformity to one, rather than consensus about working with diversity in a pluralistic society.

The other point where the National Curriculum has to deal with language is in the documents on Modern Foreign Languages. These can be interpreted as offering the possibility of teaching, say, Urdu alongside the languages exemplified (French, German and Spanish) or other European languages mentioned in passing:

Note on eligible languages

Schools must offer, in key stages 3 and 4, one or more of the official working languages of the European Union (Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Modern Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish). Schools may, in addition, offer any other modern foreign language. NonEU languages count as a foundation subject only when offered to pupils alongside the possibility of studying an official working language of the EU. A pupil may, therefore, study any modern foreign language that the school offers, but the offer must include an EU language. <www.nc.uk.net/mfl>

At least this recognises that there should be a European dimension to what is done in school, but it ignores the full range of languages found in Europe, within the Union, and still makes no mention of the community languages found in the United Kingdom. Again, if you don't mention them, they may go away. This means as well that nowhere in the curriculum is there any recognition of the research findings which suggest that pupils tend to learn the national language and the subject disciplines better, if they are taught their first language and their use of this language is recognised and respected in schools. Such tuition might be a right of the citizens of a multilingual society, but it is a complex, expensive provision and obviously not appropriate or necessary in a society which believes itself to be monolingual.

On a positive note, there is some suggestion that pupils should acquire knowledge of an official language of the European Union, although there is the option of taking a non-EU language, and there is no reference to the idea that European citizens might learn at least one other European language. Can we argue that citizens of a multilingual community cannot

afford to be monolingual? We might at least encourage pupils to see the value of being bi- or plurilingual in such a community.

4 Challenges for citizenship education

In Britain and elsewhere, citizenship education is seen as the medicine to cure society's ills, that somehow attention in school to what it means to belong to a modern society and nation such as the United Kingdom will reduce or get rid of disaffection with institutions – whether with voting or attending and getting down to studying and learning in school, of petty crime, of alienation from community life and turn pupils into “informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens” who take an active, positive role in their communities. The National Curriculum “Citizenship” document includes a number of quotations either about or relevant to citizenship education; one is from Doreen Lawrence whose teenage son was murdered a decade ago by racists. She said,

We need to be aware of the racial diversity that exists in our society and value each individual.

In this paper I have presented a sketch of one facet of this diversity in Britain, and suggested ways to explore how far this may be found in other societies; there are grounds to think that this experience is not unique in kind, although it may vary in degree in other countries in Europe. Examination of official documents suggests that Doreen Lawrence's aspiration is not there in the programmes of study outlined in the National Curriculum. If we are to achieve the kind of education for active citizenship which lies behind her claim, then, I suggest, citizenship education has to face up to the following challenges. It will have to:

- conceive of diversity in society as a resource and creative spur rather than as deficit.
- explore ways to understand diversity in all its manifestations (cultural and linguistic).
- bring conflicts linked to diversity into the open and endeavour to understand them.
- consider the rights of citizens as members of a multilingual society.
- identify ways in which diverse societies can share citizenship and make their institutions effective.
- examine how to deal with these challenges within the context of a multilingual Europe.

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