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“The men say ‘They don’t need it.’” Gender and the extension of language testing for British citizenship

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Abstract

On November 7th 2002 the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act received Royal Assent, and passed into British law, extending the language requirement for naturalisation candidates to those applying on the basis of marriage. That is, language testing requirements extend to the spouses of applicants who are married to British citizens. In the chain of discourses which emerged in the wake of ‘race riots’ in northern England in the summer of 2001, understanding English is linked with social cohesion, even at the highest level of Government. This paper suggests that the extension of the State’s powers to award or deny citizenship on the basis of language testing legitimates an argument which associates Asian languages in Britain with social segregation and isolation. In this debate there are several references to language proficiency and use in relation to ‘husbands and wives’, ‘wives and husbands’, ‘people’ and ‘spouses’. Rarely is there specific reference to ‘men’ or ‘women’. This chain of discourses almost refuses to say what it means: that Asian immigrant women should be required to learn English as soon as possible, because their failure to do so brings about community segregation and lack of social cohesion which threatens society.

Keywords: *language testing; citizenship; gender; minorities.*

Introduction

In the summer of 2001 there were violent disturbances on the streets of towns and cities in the north of England. These disturbances, popularly described in the British media as ‘race riots’, principally involved young British Asian men, young White British men, and the police. Subsequently, in November 2002 the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act* was granted Royal Assent, and passed into British law. Included in this legislation was a change to the existing law which went almost unremarked: whereas previously spouses of British citizens had not been required to demonstrate their proficiency in English (or Welsh or Scottish Gaelic) when applying for British citizenship, now the legislation was extended to include this group. In addition, the Home Secretary’s powers to test the English (or Welsh or Scottish Gaelic) proficiency of all applicants for citizenship were extended. I have presented a

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detailed analysis of the political and media discourse surrounding these events elsewhere (Blackledge 2005, 2006a, b). In this paper, however, I focus on a single aspect of the debate, which has not been hitherto discussed at length: the question of gender in relation to the extension of language testing for British citizenship.

Recontextualisation

The analysis presented in this paper is dependent on the notion of *recontextualisation*, which can be applied to chart shifts of meanings across semiotic dimensions (Wodak 2000). Caldas-Coulthard (2003:276) points out that “as soon as one writes or speaks about any social practice, one is already recontextualising. The moment we are recontextualising, we are transforming and creating other practices”. The recontextualisation of discourse does not refer merely to the repetition of the same argument in a new context. Rather, recontextualisation involves the transformation of discourse. The repetition, verbatim, of the same argument in a new context involves a transformation, as discourse almost always attracts new meanings in new settings. But argument is rarely repeated verbatim. Instead it is often summarised, with new parts added, and others deleted, so that while it bears many features of the original, it is transformed in ways which comment on, legitimate or otherwise evaluate it. Fairclough (2003) suggests that in the process of recontextualisation events may be represented in ways which foreground or background particular elements, events may be rearranged, so that new elements become salient features, events may be abstracted or generalised, and events may be explained, criticised or legitimated. Recontextualisation is particularly manifest in the discourse of newspapers, as social events are inevitably represented accurately or otherwise, and is a powerful feature of the discourse of politicians, as parts of arguments are emphasised at the expense of others, new arguments are introduced, and other parts of arguments are deleted altogether.

Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999:96) suggest that transformations characteristic of recontextualisation of political discourse include: (i) deletion (ii) rearrangement (iii) substitution and (iv) addition. They describe these categories as follows:

Deletion. Social practice is rarely represented exactly as in other contexts. One of the questions here is: what has been deleted from the original or previous account?

Rearrangement. Represented social practices may not be recontextualised in the order in which they occurred or were previously represented. Emphasis may be altered if a particular aspect of social practice is located in the salient initial or final position as a headline or closing point, although it was previously backgrounded.

Substitution. In represented discourse, social actors will often be accorded new nominations. Even where there are close similarities between discourse represented in the first and second text, the context itself transforms the potential meanings and interpretation of the discourse practice. Often, though, there will be a clear substitution of one thing for another, through linguistic means such as nominalisation, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and personalisation.

Addition. Recontextualisation not only involves the representation of social practices through alterations to existing discourses. It also involves adding new elements to that representation. Additions may include reactions, purposes and legitimations. 'Reactions' represent the inner feelings of social actors. Also, 'legitimation' of social practices accounts for why they must be as they are. The legitimation of texts can be gained through reference to authority, rationalisation, or moral evaluation. Authority may be established through reference to the law, or to the discourse of some person or institution in a highly respected position. Legitimation through rationalisation refers to the introduction of the logic of common or academic sense, definitions or explanations. A third form of legitimation occurs through the addition in recontextualised discourse of moral evaluation. Such an addition may not refer to a narrowly-defined notion of morality, but to a discourse of presupposed values, including health, hygiene, economics and leadership.

Public discourses of common-sense

In the analysis presented here, discriminatory discourse is not only transformed, but also naturalised as 'common sense', and as 'common knowledge'.

Misrecognition

For Bourdieu, the social order is produced and reproduced in "an abundance of tangible self-evidences" (2000:181), which give the illusion of common-sense reality, and "the social order itself produces its own sociodicy" (2000:181). In this context 'self-evidences' are those apparently common-sense misrecognitions which constantly construct and reinforce hegemonic ideologies. This process of *symbolic violence*, of production and reproduction of common-sense consensus, occurs in discourses in the media, education, politics, the economy, and the law, to mention only institutional contexts. This process can only succeed when, in the "institutionalised circle of collective misrecognition" (Bourdieu 1991:153), dominant and dominated groups alike accept the greater value of certain languages and varieties. As Bourdieu puts it, "the established order is so well defended because one only has to be stupid in order to defend it" (2000:182). This misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the legitimacy of the dominant culture "contributes towards reproducing existing power

relations” (Bourdieu 1977:30). Bourdieu suggests that we have to be able to identify relations of power in familiar discourses, because symbolic power is “that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (1991:164). The circle of collective misrecognition comes into being through ideological discourse in contexts which include (*inter alia*) education, law, politics, economics, media and the academy. In an increasingly globalised environment, the State is not necessarily involved in this process at all levels. However, “the State makes a decisive contribution towards the production and reproduction of the instruments of construction of social reality” (Bourdieu 2000:175). In the following section I argue that it is through a process of euphemisation that the illiberal often masquerades as the liberal in political discourse.

Euphemism and ‘common knowledge’

Van Dijk (1997) argues that politicians influence public opinion, rather than the reverse. Represented by the media, their views enter into the public domain, often coming to be understood as common-sense arguments. The views and opinions of politicians are perhaps most influential when they reproduce negative representations of minority groups in “subtle and indirect ways” (van Dijk 1997:36). For example, while there may be little enthusiasm in Britain for explicitly discriminatory expressions of racial hatred, racist discourse which at the same time constructs itself as liberal and egalitarian goes almost unchallenged: “It may well be that more subtle and indirect expression of seemingly reasonable, humane, or tolerant beliefs or arguments are much more insidious and influential in persuasion” (van Dijk 1997:41). Thus the analysis of discriminatory discourse should look for such discourse in the places where it is least expected.

Bourdieu makes a similar point as follows, arguing that powerful discourses are powerful because they are accepted as such by both the powerful and the powerless:

The economy of symbolic exchanges rests not only on *common knowledge* which leads one to think of the most characteristic actions of this economy as contradictory or impossible, but rather on *shared misrecognition*. The collective work of repression is only possible if agents are endowed with the same categories of perception and appreciation (Bourdieu 1998:121).

The power of the powerful relies on the shared understandings of the oppressor and oppressed, understandings which have been inculcated by constant, everyday, hardly-noticeable misrecognitions. This ‘common knowledge’ amounts to a kind of self-deception,

which enables social actors to believe that some groups/cultures/languages are necessarily more powerful than others. For Bourdieu information itself is "*common knowledge* (or *self-deception*) when one can say that everyone knows that everyone knows that everyone possesses certain information or, as is often said, when it is an open secret" (Bourdieu 1998:97).

The 'open secret' is necessary in the discursive construction of inequality because explicit messages of discrimination are uncomfortable, or even unacceptable, in many democratic societies. Thus, the only way in which relations of domination can be set up, maintained or restored, is through strategies which "must be disguised and transfigured lest they destroy themselves by revealing their true nature; in a word, they must be *euphemized*" (Bourdieu 1977:191). That is, in order to say that which should not be said, in order to name the unnameable (Bourdieu 1998:98), a euphemistic language is used. The true nature of euphemism can only be revealed through the common understanding, or misunderstanding, of 'common knowledge' which precedes it. Bourdieu coins the term "*common miscognition*" to designate this game in which "everyone knows – and does not want to know – that everyone knows – and does not want to know – the true nature of the exchange" (Bourdieu 2000:192).

In the analysis that follows, the notions of *recontextualisation* and *euphemisation* are important features of politicians' arguments (which they make without explicitly stating them) that British Muslim Asian women, and British Muslim Asian men, are in different ways responsible for social segregation and its attendant social problems in society.

Political discourse of representation

'The main cause is the lack of a good level of English'

On July 17th, 2001, in the aftermath of a period of social unrest in the towns of Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley, Ann Cryer, Labour M.P. for Keighley (the constituency of Keighley is a neighbour of Bradford in Yorkshire, and close to Oldham and Burnley – Ann Cryer is therefore speaking as a local representative), made a speech in the House of Commons during the Westminster Hall debate on Urban Community Relations. In her speech Ann Cryer addressed what she saw as the causes of the social unrest in the areas neighbouring her constituency:

The main cause is the lack of a good level of English, which stems directly from the established tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent who have often had no education and have no English. As a result, the vast majority of Keighley

households have only one parent with any English and children go to school speaking only Punjabi or Bangla. That frequently gets children off to a slow start, which can damage their progress and mean that they leave school with few, if any, qualifications. Many cannot get paid work or find only poorly paid jobs.

Here Ann Cryer identifies eight causes of the rioting. Continuing the link between violence and under-achievement, she lists the following as reasons for young Asian men to join in 'criminal activity':

- (i) the lack of a good level of English
- (ii) the tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent
- (iii) only one parent with any English
- (iv) children go to school speaking only Punjabi or Bangla
- (v) children off to a slow start
- (vi) which can damage their progress
- (vii) few, if any, qualifications
- (viii) cannot get paid work or find only poorly paid jobs

Each of these apparent causes of criminal activity is linked to language ideological debates about the role of minority languages in Britain. Fairclough (1989:188) suggests that "Where one has lists, one has things placed in connection, but without any indication of the precise nature of the connection". The first of these arguments proposes that if people continue to live in Britain while being unable to speak and understand 'a good level of English', there will be a danger of underachievement in schools, resulting in violence on the streets, and steps should be taken to prevent this situation. Ann Cryer indicates how this problem arises, as the 'lack of a good level of English':

stems directly from the established tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent who have often had no education and have no English.

While Ann Cryer suggests a 'common-sense' logic to support her argument that the violence of young Asian men is caused by their (or their parents' or their wives') inability to speak English, this is little more than a list of apparently connected factors. The speaker suggests a logical progression in her argument with logical connectors, which "cue ideological assumptions" (Fairclough 1989:131). The logical connectors here ('which stems directly', 'As a result', 'That frequently gets', 'which can', 'and mean that') assume causal or

commonsensical relationships between the lack of a good level of English, the tradition of marrying a spouse from Pakistan or Bangladesh, children going to school speaking only their home language, children suffering 'damage' to their education, and young people leaving school with few qualifications. This persuasive generational narrative is sustained by the ideological power of logical connectors which almost imperceptibly validate assumptions about the link between minority languages, educational failure, and violence.

In the next section of her speech Ann Cryer proposes some 'remedies' to the present situation:

I should like to suggest some remedies, which I know will be regarded as controversial by many of the self-styled Asian leaders in Bradford. Asian parents should consider arranging marriages for their children with Asian Muslims brought up and educated in the United Kingdom. That would avoid the present importation of poverty into their families and the problems that I mentioned for the next generation when the children go to school, and would also stop the increasing number of cases of young men and women having extremely unhappy and difficult marriages with spouses from the sub-continent with whom they have nothing in common.

In the first proposed 'remedy' Ann Cryer refers back to what she sees as the major cause of under-achievement, and therefore rioting, which is 'bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent'. Although the 'causes' of the riots had been identified in linguistic terms, this first 'remedy' for these perceived linguistic difficulties seems to pay little attention to language. Instead, Ann Cryer's focus is on inter-continental arranged marriages.

Another 'remedy' is advanced as follows:

My most controversial point is one that I have made previously. It has not gone down terribly well, although I have had support from hon. Members. I will repeat what I said, so that I place on record precisely what I mean. If, after possibly five years, we are no nearer to achieving the solutions and ambitions, and the deprivation with all that flows from it continues, the Government should consider having an element of English as an entry clearance requirement for husbands and wives who seek permanent settlement. There should be a further requirement for them to take a full-time English course to reach a reasonable level. The conditions should apply to all applicants outside the European Union. My proposals are in line with immigration requirements in many countries, including the United States of America, Canada and the Netherlands.

The proposed demand for 'a reasonable level' of English echoes the existing requirement in law for general applicants for naturalisation to have 'sufficient knowledge' of English. Here, though, Ann Cryer exhorts the government to introduce English language tests 'as an entry clearance requirement'. She appears to be calling for language tests at the port of entry, so that only those who can already speak 'an element of English' should be allowed into Britain, with a requirement then for them 'to reach a reasonable level' if they are granted leave to remain in Britain. Such a requirement could only be invoked after entry to the country if a test of some sort were introduced, for example a test for British citizenship applicants. It appears that the M.P. is making two proposals here: (i) that the Government should introduce new language tests at the port of entry (or perhaps in the country of origin), to reject any new immigrants who do not have 'an element of English', and (ii) a further test at some later date for those granted entry, to ensure that they have reached 'a reasonable level of English'. It is not clear who decides what constitutes a 'reasonable level' of English, or according to what criteria such a judgement is made, but the implication must be that it is a greater level of proficiency (however defined) than 'an element of English', as it involves a requirement 'to take a full-time English course'.

In her speech to Parliament, Ann Cryer spoke of 'the established tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent who have often had no education and have no English' as one of the main causes of school under-achievement in the 'Asian community', and consequently as a cause of the civil disorder in northern England. Elsewhere in her speech she referred in similar terms to 'husbands and wives', and to 'spouses'. In each case this group is represented as an actual or potential problem for social cohesion. Although Ann Cryer does not explicitly refer to women here, later in her speech she offers an example of what she calls a 'silver lining' in the race relations debate, when she speaks of 'young, capable Asian women who were completing their A-level courses'. That is, in the logic of the argument presented in her speech, although some spouses are unable to participate in society because they do not speak English, there is a contrary example in which Asian women are participating successfully. The emphasis on women in offering a 'silver lining' for Ann Cryer strongly suggests that (in her references to husbands, wives and spouses) it is women who suffer social exclusion through their lack of English.

'Common knowledge' in the discourse of representation

Ann Cryer's Westminster Hall speech on 17th July 2001 was widely reported in the national print media, and two days later, the Minister of State for the Home Office, Lord Rooker, supported her in the House of Lords (*Hansard* 19th July 2001). Lord Rooker also made a statement relating to Ann Cryer's speech during an interview for the political website

ePolitix.com on 17th August 2001, in response to the question: 'Do you agree with Ann Cryer that new citizens should learn to speak English?'. After indicating his support for his back-bench colleague, Lord Rooker added:

There are situations...where sometimes people are not encouraged or persuaded to learn English by their family

Here we see the first of four instances of the word 'people' in Lord Rooker's short interview response. In this first example 'people' appear to be non-English-speaking, while 'their family' appear to be English-speaking. It is worth comparing Ann Cryer's recommendation with Lord Rooker's recontextualised version:

English should be used and encouraged in the home (Ann Cryer)

People are not encouraged or persuaded to learn English by their family (Lord Rooker)

Ann Cryer's 'remedy' is more assertive than Lord Rooker's statement, marked as it is by the modal verb 'should'. In Ann Cryer's example the responsibility to encourage English in the home is ambiguous, while in Lord Rooker's recontextualised form responsibility lies squarely with 'the family'. The substitution of the main verb relating to 'English' is another element of transformation between Ann Cryer's recommendation and Lord Rooker's statement, as 'used' becomes 'learn'. This is not an insignificant recontextualisation: no doubt briefed by Home Office staff, Lord Rooker is aware that it is very difficult to conduct a test which measures whether English is being *used* in people's homes. A more straightforward matter for the State is to test whether people have been able to *learn* English.

The following two sentences of Lord Rooker's response are intensely dialogic:

The men say 'they don't need it'. I don't accept that because it's people being denied their civil rights.

Here 'The men' are oppositional to 'people' in the subsequent sentence and, by cohesive reference, in the previous sentence. It therefore becomes clear that the 'people' who are not encouraged or persuaded to learn English by their family are women, and 'their family' are likely to be men. The definite pronoun ('*The* men') does ideological work here, presupposing that all men, or all Asian men (or even all Muslim Asian men in the north of England) are a homogeneous group who are responsible for the discourse which appears in speech marks: 'they don't need it'. Here 'they' must be assumed to be women, by implication in opposition to men. This recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's speech transforms it by explicitly adding that

which was otherwise only implicit: those who should be encouraged to use English in the home are women, and those who should be encouraging them to do so are men. Here Lord Rooker engages intertextually with a discourse which appears not to be specific (he does not mention the source of the quotation in speech marks), but is an assumed common ground. Lord Rooker's point here appears to rely on the common knowledge which resides in a presupposition along the lines of: 'Asian men don't allow their women to learn English, because they want to keep them at home to be good, submissive wives'¹. The invocation of 'civil rights' accords the argument an unimpeachable quality – civil rights are a good thing, which should be defended at all costs, and any practice which denies them should be stopped or changed. This argumentation strategy is an addition to those invoked by Ann Cryer, and appears to strengthen the argument by appealing to the sense of right and justice in the audience.

In the following sentence is a third reference to 'people', as Lord Rooker begins to discuss policy:

The question arises do we require people to learn English as a consequence of applying for nationality, which you've got to do in English anyway

The passive construction here implies that the 'question' has agency of its own, and is therefore both inevitable and right. This rhetorical question arises from the assumed values which follow from the apparent denial of Asian women's civil rights by Asian men. If this is a problem (as, in this argument, it surely is), the question that arises is likely to be one that has the potential to solve that problem. However, here the question is one that relates to language testing as an aspect of application for British citizenship. In the logic pursued here, women are denied their civil rights because men prevent them from learning English, so there should be language tests as part of the application for British citizenship. In this sentence 'people' probably again refers to women, in a cohesive repetition of its previous usage. The construction 'as a consequence' seems misplaced here, and perhaps Lord Rooker meant to say something like 'as a condition of'. The final clause of this sentence appears to be something of an afterthought – the argument concludes that since that is the way things already are, they might as well be that way. However, the background to this sentence is a little more complex: there is, and has been for many years, a language testing requirement as part of the criteria for successful application for British citizenship. An exception to that rule applied to spouses of British citizens, who at the time of the speeches by Lord Rooker and Ann Cryer were not required to satisfy this criterion. In this context, Lord Rooker's rhetorical question seems to be either redundant, or to refer only to applicants for

citizenship who are spouses (and, in the context of his remarks about 'The men', probably only wives) of existing British citizens. As such, Lord Rooker's remarks are more plainly a recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's speech, which identified as a major problem 'The established tradition of bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent', and recommended an end to inter-continental marriage. Whereas Ann Cryer uses the phrase 'wives and husbands', and then twice 'husbands and wives', Lord Rooker recontextualises by substitution, transforming Ann Cryer's phrase to the nomination 'people', but 'people' who are oppositional to 'The men'. In Ann Cryer's version the phrase 'husbands and wives' refers to the language testing of spouses of British citizens. In Lord Rooker's version the term 'people' is more ambiguous, but in the light of his criticism of 'The men' his reference appears to be to language testing for wives of British citizens. Both of these discourses use unwieldy and even spurious logic to suggest that English language testing for spouses of British citizens is desirable and necessary for a just and socially cohesive society.

The issue of citizenship

In the final section of Lord Rooker's response to the question 'Do you agree with Ann Cryer that new citizens should learn to speak English?', the word 'people' makes a fourth appearance:

We're looking at this. We're looking at the issue of citizenship. People must maintain their culture, maintain their religion and live in peace and tranquillity but they must not be denied their opportunity to participate properly particularly in the employment market.

The repetition of 'People' here probably still refers to people who are not 'The men', but the word is ambiguous, perhaps also referring to all Asian people (in my view the former is the predominant sense, although both are present). In this discourse what people (probably Asian women) *must* do is to maintain their culture and religion and live in peace and tranquillity. This is a recontextualisation by substitution of Ann Cryer's exhortation to all sides to 'live together in peace and understanding'. The interview appears to conclude with the point that Asian men must not deny Asian women their civil rights, their opportunity to participate, and their job opportunities. The logical conclusion here is that Asian men would do this by preventing Asian women from learning English. In Lord Rooker's brief recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's speech, a liberal framework is established, in which he argues for equality, justice and civil rights for all. The euphemistic and ambiguous use of 'people' on four occasions creates an oppositional discourse, in which women are oppressed by 'The men', who are discriminatory in their practices and discourses. These oppressive

social practices are presupposed to be true, and part of the consensual common-ground. Within this apparently liberal framework, and even an integral part of the framework, sits the illiberal proposal to extend language testing for citizenship to spouses of British citizens. In this sense Lord Rooker's discourse here is 'double-voiced' (Bakhtin 1994), as liberal and illiberal consciousnesses co-exist in a single utterance. Another way to view this is that in Lord Rooker's interview response, illiberal discourse *masquerades* as liberal discourse, transforming an existing discourse in its new context so that it is sanitised for consumption by the liberal elite. Lord Rooker's recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's arguments extends their authority not merely through discursive strategies and linguistic means and realisations. They also gain authority through their re-statement by a member of the House of Lords and, more importantly, a Minister of State for the Home Office. Recontextualisation involves transformation through discursive means, but here also involves the restatement of argument in a more authoritative context and voice.

Substitution: people, spouses, and husbands and wives

A crucial aspect of the recontextualisation of political discourse is its representation in the national print media. One of the many liberal broadsheet newspapers collected in investigating the recontextualisation of political discourse in examining the language debate was *The Independent* of Saturday August 18th 2001:

All immigrants could be asked to learn English as a condition of taking on UK citizenship, Lord Rooker, the Home Office minister has suggested. The Home Office was considering imposing such a rule as a means of ensuring that the wives of new citizens had proper access to mainstream society and the labour market, he said yesterday.

Whereas the Home Office minister adopted the euphemistic 'people' to refer to the immigrant wives of British citizens, the voice of the newspaper is not so coy (although 'wives of new citizens' is not accurate: the change in the law refers to spouses of existing British citizens, but not necessarily of *new* citizens). Lord Rooker sharply senses the potential criticism of his detractors, whereas *The Independent* has no such concern. That is, the voice of the newspaper expands and explains, saying for Lord Rooker that which he may have said himself if he were less constrained by the rules of the political game.

The sense of the key phrase in the explanation and rationalisation of the proposed legislative change ('a means of ensuring' becomes 'one way of ensuring') is repeated later in the article:

Moves to force immigrants to learn English would be highly controversial among some refugee groups. New citizens currently have to prove they have a "grasp of English", but when their spouses join them later they often arrive with virtually no working knowledge of the language.

Making English mandatory for those seeking citizenship would be one way of ensuring that ethnic minority women were not denied their civil rights by their own menfolk, said Lord Rooker.

Lord Rooker did not mention 'ethnic minority women', but *The Independent* explains that this is what he meant. Here the newspaper article makes manifest the 'common ground' in which Lord Rooker's euphemistic discourse is understood.

The Cantle Report

The Government's response to the disturbances in towns and cities in northern England in 2001 was to establish a Review Team, led by Ted Cantle, "to seek the views of local residents and community leaders in the affected towns and in other parts of England on the issues which need to be addressed to bring about social cohesion" (*The Cantle Report* 2001:i). The Report, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team Chaired by Ted Cantle* was completed in December 2001.

The report recommends that the Government introduce national debate which includes:

more visible support for anti-discrimination measures, support for women's rights, a universal acceptance of the English language (seen as particularly important in some areas) and respect for both religious difference and secular views (page 19).

Here several points are introduced to exemplify the topics to be engaged with in the debate ahead. When several points are listed together, they are placed in connection, but without any indication of the precise nature of the connection (Fairclough 1989). Here several unimpeachable and certainly liberal proposals are made: that there should be more support for anti-discrimination measures, that women's rights should be supported, and that there should be respect for religious difference and secular views. These proposals are unarguably laudable and acceptable to most. Any other proposal linked with them is likely to be viewed as equally egalitarian. Thus, in this context 'a universal acceptance of the English language' has all the appearance of a liberal proposal. The argument here appears to suggest that if there is a universal acceptance of the English language, greater equality will ensue. What is most noticeable in these examples of issues for debate is that the general

'anti-discrimination measures', along with 'support for women's rights', 'respect for religious difference' and '(respect for) secular views' all refer to examples of discriminatory practices which should be put right. The odd case is that of the English language, which is very far from being discriminated against. In fact if the list were to be consistent, the third example should read: 'a universal acceptance of languages other than English'. Instead, the question of the English language proficiency of linguistic minority people in Britain is stealthily and euphemistically introduced in a context which implies that this is a straightforward question of social justice. A further point here is that the clause 'support for women's rights' is placed in connection with 'a universal acceptance of the English language'. In the chain of discourses emerging in the debate represented here, this may be a recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's and Lord Rooker's argument that Asian men deny Asian women their 'rights' by denying them the opportunity to learn English. Simply by being placed in connection with each other, the points about women's rights and the English language become closely linked.

Secure Borders, Safe Haven

The Government White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* was presented to Parliament by Home Secretary David Blunkett in February 2002. In the Executive Summary of the White Paper a rationale for legislative change is set out:

In an increasingly diverse world, it is vital that we strengthen both our sense of community belonging and the civic and political dimensions of British citizenship. In particular, we intend to offer language teaching and light touch education for citizenship for those making a home in the UK – with a view to a simple examination for citizenship applicants similar to that which exists in many other countries (page 11).

Here the diversity of the 'world' carries two senses: first, that of the diverse world beyond British shores, which would attempt to bring its diversity into Britain; and second, the sense of Britain itself becoming increasingly diverse (presumably ethnically/culturally diverse). The argument here implies that this increasing diversity requires some action (the most straightforward and literal sense of the clause is hardly correct: the world itself cannot be said to be 'increasingly diverse'). Here 'it is vital' works with 'we strengthen' to create a sense of urgency and necessity for action. Consensus is built as the irresistible argument gains force. Why is it necessary that we strengthen our sense of community and citizenship? Because it is threatened by increasing diversity. In the second half of the same paragraph, liberal and illiberal voices co-exist:

This will strengthen the ability of new citizens to participate in society and to engage actively in our democracy. This will help people understand both their rights and obligations as citizens of the UK, and strengthen the bonds of mutual understanding between people of diverse cultural backgrounds. It will also help to promote individuals' economic and social integration (page 11).

In the first sentence here, language testing is said to strengthen the 'ability of new citizens to participate in society'. This resonates with Lord Rooker's point that 'people...must not be denied their opportunity to participate properly', and with Cattle's statement that 'the full participation of all individuals in society can be achieved much more easily'. As it is repeated in increasingly authoritative and legitimate contexts, the term 'participation' accrues senses as it travels, becoming associated with a liberal voice which is stating an illiberal argument.

In the next sentence the benign, liberal authorial voice offers to 'help people understand both their rights and obligations as citizens of the UK'. In a recontextualisation of *The Cattle Report*, which called for debate about nationhood to revolve around language and law, and to determine the rights and responsibilities of each community, 'responsibilities' is now substituted with the intensified 'obligations'. The same argument is here not only repeated in a more legitimate and authoritative context, but is put in a way that demands more of 'people'. The final sentence here puts the apparently liberal argument that language tests are a good thing, because if 'people' take them, they will achieve greater economic and social integration.

The White Paper argues that there are certain 'cultural practices' that conflict with the Government's vision of citizenship and democracy:

The Human Rights Act 1998 can be viewed as a key source of values that British citizens should share. The laws, rules and practices which govern our democracy uphold our commitment to the equal worth and dignity of all our citizens. It will sometimes be necessary to confront some cultural practices which conflict with these basic values – such as those which deny women the right to participate as equal citizens (page 30).

It is not clear which cultural practices deny women the right to participate as citizens, or who is responsible for them. However, the recontextualisation of the word 'participate' here connects this argument to those in the *Cattle Report* and in Lord Rooker's interview, both of which stated either implicitly or explicitly that use of, or proficiency in, the English language, was the key to participation for women.

In the next section of the White Paper, the specific proposal for legislative change in relation to language and citizenship is articulated:

We envisage these requirements extending to the spouses of applicants who are married to British citizens and British Dependent or Overseas Territories citizens who are not at present subject to the language requirement. The Government is concerned that everyone should be able to take a full and active part in British society. We do not think it is sufficient simply to rely on a spouse's knowledge of the language (page 34).

In fact this is the *only* change to existing legislation in relation to language and citizenship proposed in the White Paper. While the previous paragraph stated that 'the Government intends to require applicants to demonstrate that they have achieved a certain standard', this requirement was already enshrined in the *British Nationality Act* (1981). In the proposal here, this requirement, previously waived for spouses of applicants who were married to British citizens, would be extended to include them. This constitutes a direct and apparently logical recontextualisation of Ann Cryer's argument in her speech to the House of Commons on 17th July 2001. This argument explicitly linked the violence in the streets of northern England to the tradition of 'bringing wives and husbands from the sub-continent who have often had no education and have no English'. The argument was recontextualised and reiterated as it moved along the chain of discourses in the period between Ann Cryer's speech in the summer of 2001 and the publication of the White Paper in February 2002.

The double language of political discourse

If social agents can appear as both deceiving and deceived, if they can appear to deceive others and deceive themselves about their (generous) 'intentions', this is because their deception (which can also be said, in a sense, to deceive no-one) is sure to encounter the complicity both of the direct addressees of their act and of third parties who observe it (Bourdieu 2000:192).

Bourdieu argues that in authoritative public discourse there is frequently a "structural duplicity, which leads to double-edged strategies...and a double language" (1998:118), which functions as an instrument of euphemisation. Bourdieu proposes that euphemistic discourse is less duplicity and hypocrisy than denial, a discourse which is able to assure the coexistence of opposites. When domination and discrimination can not be exercised directly (as they can not in political discourse in Britain), they "must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships" (Bourdieu 1977:191). That is, the exercise of symbolic domination must be hidden from view lest it reveals its true nature. In the discourse surrounding the

language ideological debate which argued that minority Asian languages are associated with violence and segregation, language is often ambiguous, two-sided, and even contradictory. The process of euphemism is effective where there are shared understandings of euphemistic terms. In the political and media discourse analysed here there are several references to language proficiency and use in relation to 'husbands and wives', 'wives and husbands', and 'spouses'. Rarely is there specific reference to 'men' or 'women'. However, these non-specific nominations are frequently euphemisms which carry implicit meanings understood as more specific references to language ideologies in relation to linguistic minority women. At other points in the same chain of discourses there are more specific references to 'Asian' women as the victims of social exclusion through lack of English use and proficiency. As we have seen, in his brief interview with *ePolitix.com*, Lord Rooker four times refers to 'people', saying that 'People are not encouraged or persuaded to learn English'. In perhaps the most explicit reference to women as the victims of social exclusion, Lord Rooker adds: 'The men say "they don't need it"'. Although in Lord Rooker's interview with *ePolitix.com* there is no specific reference to 'Asians', it seems clear that when he refers to 'people' he is referring to 'Asian' women. This is also the conclusion reached by *The Independent* newspaper on 18th August 2001, in which Lord Rooker's 'people' is recontextualised as 'wives' and 'women'.

Home Office statistics relating to the admission of spouses to Britain from the Indian sub-continent show that in 2001, the most recent year for which statistics are available, a large majority of spouses admitted were wives (7790) rather than husbands (4580) (Dudley, Turner and Woollacott 2003). We have seen that one of the cohesive links in the chain of discourses relating to citizenship and social exclusion is the word 'participate', which is particularly invoked with reference to the social exclusion of Asian women. In the Cattle Report 'the full participation of all individuals' is called for, following advocacy of 'support for women's rights'. Here the emphasis is on the perceived need for Asian women to learn English. In the White Paper the Government sets out its proposals to deal with cultural practices which may conflict with democratic values, 'such as those which deny women the right to participate as equal citizens'. While there is no specific reference to explain what kind of cultural practices deny women the right to participate as equal citizens, there is a strong implication that this is a recontextualisation of Lord Rooker's argument that in Asian communities 'the men' prevent women from learning English. The Government's suggestion that cultural practices embedded within Asian communities are the main reason that British Asian women may not 'participate as equal citizens' seems to entirely delete from the discourse any reference to inequalities based on racism, economic discrimination and broader gender relations in society.

The nature of the order of discourse in politics determines that the repertoire of political discourse is limited by rules and expectations. This is particularly the case in the Houses of Parliament. In Bourdieu's terms, euphemised discourse allows politicians to say "the last thing to be said" (1991:153), to speak the unspeakable, even within the constraints of the rules of the British Parliament, policy documents and political interviews. In the discourse represented here, it is not permitted for Ann Cryer, a Member of Parliament, Lord Rooker, a Home Office Minister, or Government policy-makers, to explicitly argue that social segregation is caused by newly-arrived Asian women failing to use English. Nor is it appropriate for them to argue that the oppressive husbands of these women are to blame for preventing them from learning the host language by keeping them at home. However, through the repeated, recontextualised use of particular arguments, both politicians are able to argue in exactly these terms without actually doing so. That the arguments are received as such relies on a common ground which has been established over time by similar arguments in other contexts.

Political speeches, like other texts, inevitably make assumptions about the 'common ground' between speaker and audience: "What is 'said' in a text is 'said' against a background of what is 'unsaid', but taken as given" (Fairclough 2003:40). Assumptions connect a text with other texts, or at least to the discourse of other texts which have become familiar through what Bourdieu calls "an abundance of tangible self-evidences" (2000:181). That is, assumptions connect texts with other texts which have said similar things in similar ways, and have contributed to the construction of an ideological world which is now reproduced in the first text. The difference between intertextuality and assumption is that while a text may be intertextually linked to a specific other text (or texts), it may be linked by assumption to a "world of texts" (Fairclough 2003:40) which is non-specific, but is nonetheless a source of the implicit understandings and common knowledge between author and reader. In analysing political discourse we should look both for intertextual links to specific other texts, and for assumptions which rely on a broader, non-specific knowledge gained from an abundance of familiar discourses.

Notes

1. Here I am concerned primarily with the homogenisation of 'Asian men', more than with the question of whether some 'Asian' men are oppressive in their relations with their wives and other female family members. If there is a commonly-held view that all or most 'Asian men' keep their wives and daughters under lock and key in oppressive conditions, this is by definition a discriminatory discourse, as it fails to differentiate between the social practices of individuals and even of groups of individuals. This is not to diminish for a moment the suffering that accrues from the oppressive practices of some men in relation to some women in any ethnic, cultural or racial group.

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