

Discourses on Language and Integration: Critical perspectives on language testing regimes in Europe.

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This book brings together perspectives on language testing regimes for citizenship in Europe in eight chapters. The editors contend in the introductory chapter “Testing regimes: Introducing cross-national perspectives on language, migration and citizenship” that the promotion of integration and social inclusion of migrants is one of the most urgent challenges faced by European societies today. This challenge results in debates which often pitch migrants against majority populations who, in turn, are discursively constructed as monolingual and homogeneous. These debates about integration are typically conducted at a national rather than a European level. Consequently, the book aims to provide a cross-national perspective. Overall, the authors argue that language testing for citizenship is an attempt to re-assert the monolingual nation state vis-à-vis multilingualism, which they claim is widely perceived as divisive.

In Chapter 2, “Fortress Europe? Language policy regimes for immigration and citizenship,” Piet Van Avermaet reports the result from a survey of language testing regimes for entry, permanent residence and naturalization in 19 European nations. In contrast to official discourses which

suggest that language testing for citizenship enhances integration, the author argues that such testing regimes are informed by hidden agendas of exclusion and migration control. The next chapter, “Language tests for immigrants: Why language? Why tests? Why citizenship?” by Elana Shohamy makes a similar argument, even if somewhat more radically. The author argues that language is not suitable as a criterion for social inclusion, and language testing for citizenship is based on misguided assumptions about adult language learning. While language is not a suitable criterion, tests are a bad means. Tests have enormous prestige and thus lend themselves to covert policy making, i.e. as means of exclusion. Such covert policy-making by means of language testing is obviously unethical and undemocratic. The author also questions the validity of the construct of (national) citizenship. Language, testing and citizenship thus lead to “illegitimacy, discrimination, marginality and violation of human rights” (p. 57).

In Chapter 4, Guus Extra and Massimiliano Spotti offer a case study of testing regimes in the Netherlands. The Netherlands introduced a knowledge-of-society test for entry in 2006, and the authors conducted a study with native-born Dutch people to show that they didn't know how illiberal the test was and found some questions impossible to answer. The Netherlands have implemented a particularly harsh testing regime; at considerable cost, one might add, as they've lost the image of a cosmopolitan and liberal society in the process.

The next chapter takes the reader to Britain, where Adrian Blackledge analyzes five pieces of political discourse published or broadcast at the turn of 2006 to 2007 for attitudes towards and beliefs about languages other than English. These speeches, radio interviews and committee reports were characterized by a framing of multilingualism and multiculturalism as expressions of social segregation, the breakdown of social cohesion, and threats to national security and identity. English monolingualism, on the other hand, was constructed as an expression of social

justice, inclusion and cohesion.

In Chapter 6, Kristine Horner, explores the “discourses of integration” that can be observed in the tiny principality of Luxembourg. With a population of 476,200 of which 41.6% are resident foreigners, there has recently been a trend towards formalizing the teaching of Luxembourgish to foreigners in this tri-lingual city. Luxembourgish is of course the least widely used of the three official languages (French and German being the others) but it is also the one that is constructed as the archetypal language of identity. Horner argues that discourses of integration serve the dual purpose of maintaining a traditional national sense of identity in the face of migration and globalization while also facilitating and legitimizing European integration.

Chapter 7, “Local actors in promoting multilingualism,” is an ethnography of the central library in Vienna. The author, Brigitta Busch, provides a brilliant reminder that language policy is not only the result of some grand plan hatched by a central bureaucracy but the result of civic engagement. The central library in Vienna is a space where a language policy that fosters social cohesion is negotiated: there are no barriers to access, linguistic diversity is valued, and language policy is ultimately seen as a negotiation process between the users of the library and the staff. Tim McNamara concludes the volume with a commentary on the other chapters and a focus on language tests as social policy. He demonstrates that the overt construct of citizenship tests (i.e., knowledge of the national language or knowledge of the national society) is a mask for the implicit construct, which is the imposition of a monolingual hegemonic identity. He argues that the field of language testing is thrown into crisis by this conflict between overt and covert constructs as it must deliver the goods (i.e. practical language assessment procedures) and can’t just offer a critique.

Each of the contributions in this volume is valuable and insightful in its own right. The authors

provide evidence from a range of contexts and with a range of approaches that citizenship testing is not about what it claims to be about (i.e., integration and inclusion) but the discursive construction of hegemonic national identities and the exclusion of migrants from the national body. As such, all the contributions except for the one by Brigitta Busch sound a rather pessimistic note about the state of multiculturalism in Europe. While each chapter is well worth reading, the book as a whole does not strike me as an effort where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In particular, I was disappointed that, the blurb notwithstanding, no comprehensive European perspective emerges. I'm therefore closing this review by offering my own: the way I see it, Europe's problem is the gulf of inequality that divides it from its neighbors. Furthermore, those poor neighbors are under demographic pressure from its many young people while most European societies are rapidly aging (see also Homer-Dixon 2006). Entry, residence and naturalization testing are an attempt to keep these poor neighbors at bay. Citizenship testing may be a fraught and compromised endeavor but the real moral, social and economic challenge is global inequality. Ultimately, Europe is confronted by two choices: either, the development gap is addressed, or Europe has to become ever more exclusive to maintain its "security." If it is going down the latter route, then citizenship testing will seem almost benign in contrast to the repressive state apparatuses needed in the future to keep the hungry out.

Reference

Homer-Dixon, Thomas F. (2006). *The upside of down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

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