Cultus

CULTUS

the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication

MEDIATING NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION

2020, Volume 13

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"Language barrier" in UK newspapers 2010-2020: Figurative meaning, migration, and language needs

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Abstract

This article investigates the use of the expression "language barrier" in online and printed newspapers in the United Kingdom between 2010 and 2020. The analysis focuses on occurrences published in news items dealing with migration and language needs in multilingual UK contexts. The usage of the expression is discussed referring to policies addressing language needs of long-term and recent culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Language policy changes in the UK over the same period indicate an adoption of progressively negative connotations of the concept of "language barrier", which reshaped language provision thus creating vulnerabilities for CALD communities. Being able to access information in a language that is understood in crisis settings relies on language policies recognising the linguistic diversity of the local population and accepting the need for language service provision for transient resident and/or recent arrivals in a country. The study focuses on the parallel between an increased frequency of use of the term in the UK media and a gradual dismantling of language service provision for the country's CALD communities. Mapping the usage of "language barrier" leads the article to reflect on the politicization of the discourse on multilingualism, as historically the UK pursued ever stricter migration policies, leading to policy-making choices that risk increasing societal vulnerability.

Keywords: language policies, integration policies, multilingual preparedness, figurative language, migration

1. Introduction

"Semantic" is often used as "academic" in derogatory constructs connotating picky and irrelevant differences. Language usage affects clarity of thought and changes perception of reality. When communication of crucial information relies on language to perform specific actions (e.g. take precautions and avoid risks), having access to clear messages in a language

that at-risk populations understand is non-negotiable; multilingualism and multiculturalism make this challenge extremely complex. Language access matters for migrants and ever more so in crises (Guadagno, 2016), from those triggered by natural hazards to epidemic, pandemic, and terrorist attacks (Alexander and Pescaroli, 2019). Setting up language provision for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities – be they established or establishing in their new environments – contributes to reducing risks for the local society as a whole, and provides better support for transient allophone residents (e.g. business travellers and tourists) as it creates resources for multilingual communication that can accommodate language needs during crises. These needs cannot be accommodated overnight, and even less so if the existing needs of CALD communities are routinely unmatched by the available offer of local language service providers (LSP). In these contexts, languages become barriers to acting timely and to mitigating risks. In the UK, the government department with responsibilities over local communities and emergency management drives the integration agenda and its associated language-related policies.

This paper engages with the expression "language barrier", as a figurative collocation that can connote the complexity of communication in multilingual societies in both positive and negative terms. The expression reflects political views of migration; through policy making and budgeting measures, it has influenced all practical measures connected with institutional language support to multilingual communities in the UK – be they permanent or temporary (services to tourists and business travellers). A definition or discussion of the metaphor itself goes beyond the scope of this paper whose specific aim is to question whether the metaphor has become *too* embedded in a political use in UK English[1]. The visible changes in the UK usage, elicited in the data, seem to correspond to privileging predominantly negative connotations. News articles provide evidence of how the expression, regardless of its semantic potential, has been overtly used in a weaponised manner. The data map a process framing the politicized narrative of discussing the cost and disadvantages of language provision in relation to immigration.

The process has happened over consecutive (and increasingly more) right-wing UK governments and almost flattened the figurative potential

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[1] In other languages, possibly even in other varieties of English, such as International or EU English, the same metaphor or other figurative expressions used to indicate complexity of communication between two languages might not necessarily share the connotations described here.

of the "language barrier" expression in portraying linguistic diversity by reducing multiculturalism into a two-dimensional problem of cost/benefit of social economics, regardless of the broader impact of language policies on economic and social resilience. Beyond its shorthand usefulness, the "language barrier" has become connected with the notion that local authorities' provision of translation and interpreting services were excessive and unnecessary expenditures in the UK, thus changing their public portrayals (see Maniar, 2014).

In the following four sections, the paper engages with journalistic usage of the expression in UK English-language newspapers between 2010 and 2020. Qualitative data is analysed to consider how "language barrier" specifies a view of language service provision and of support of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the UK, in terms of the risks it entails for emergency responders (police, medical personnel, and firefighters). The first section illustrates the data collection method in relation to the conceptualization of "language barrier" and its usage. The second section hypothesises a connection between the textual evidence and policy changes that ran in parallel to the emergence of increasingly far-right narratives in British news-making language. The third section looks at the contradictory conceptualization of language service provision as a hindrance to integration and a stimulus to global trade. The concluding remarks engage with direct and indirect effects of these narratives on the role that professional translators and interpreters are expected to perform in a globalised, yet ever more insular multilingual United Kingdom.

1. Methods: the case study and the data

In a theoretical void – a mere rhetorical exercise as no linguistic context is ever neutral – "language barrier" expresses the difficulty in communicating efficiently across linguistic, cultural, and social divides. Languages can become hurdles, obstacles, walls, a *barrier* when no resources are available to establish a form of communication among human beings. However, the expression is a favourite among language service providers (LSP) as it encapsulates the added value of the work of language-related professionals who make up the composite world of international communication. Widely-used in institutional settings of translation and interpreting – such as the Directorate General for

Translation (DGT)[2] and the Directorate General for Interpretation (SCIC/DGInterpretation), or the UN Language Services – and regularly present in academic debates, the term is effective. Its usage by those advocating for mutual understanding takes up a function that enables communication, thus breaking down such barrier, and is arguably – but not the point for debate in this paper – a positive (maybe positivistic) perception of interpreting and translating as crucial supports to enabling communication in multilingual settings. The metaphor works. It persuades, it speaks clearly. Among the many nuanced uses of the expression, the extremely negative view seems to equate linguistic diversity with difficult or refused integration. The term "integration" refers to a socio-political construct (for the UK context, see the comprehensive discussion in Phillimore and Goodson, 2008), with its own contextual and situational variants of meaning – e.g. the notion is different legally whether it refers to asylum seekers or to economic migrants. Some constant factors exist as the notion of integrating migrants into the host society is linked with language skills (see the link between law and migration policies in relation to language competences, detailed in the Europe-wide project entitled *Determinants of International Migration*; DEMIG, 2015). This paper looks at integration as described in language-related policies of the UK. Consequently, the definitions considered here stem from government definition(s). Almost exactly at the two ends of the 2010-2020 decade, two fundamental definitions were put forward by the UK institutions. In 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government, responsible both for language service provision to CALD communities and emergency plans to protect all members of local communities, defined it as follow: "Integration means creating the conditions for everyone to play a full part in national and local life. Our country is stronger by far when each of us, whatever our background, has a chance to contribute" (H.M. Government, 2012: 2).

The UK government has since adopted ways of measuring integration by looking at specific indicators. In its 2019 *Integrated Communities Action Plan*, the definition has been revised and consolidated; now integration refers to "communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities" (H.M. Government, 2019: 11).[3]

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[2] For example, Viola and Martikonis, 2017.

[3] The plan is achieved by measuring indicators of integration in '14 key domains: work, education, housing, health and social care, leisure, social bonds – with those you share a sense of identity, social bridges – with people from different

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"Language barrier" correlates to discussions of those contexts in which the presence of speakers of minority- or community languages (for which no practical distinction is made in UK language policies) signals issues. These issues concern communication with speakers of the official, main, or "dominant language" (for the definition of the latter, see Yule, 2020) and, by extension, they are issues concerning integration. For many years, in the anglophone LSP industry, the expression served as a useful shorthand to explain the most axiomatic functions of translating and interpreting (at least in their most noble and primal intentions). In this paper, the "language barrier" is however discussed with illustrations of its use in political settings and its manifestations in journalistic texts. Such use often seems to betray a disregard for the notion that the right to speak one's own language (be they minority, community, or rare languages) was enshrined in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see UN 1948; de Varennes, 2001), of which the UK is one of the signatories. It does not mean that learning the dominant language of a country in which one migrates is not expected, but it suggests that people cannot be discriminated for using their own languages in the early phases of integration, as language learning takes time (significantly, the 2019 *Integrated Communities Action Plan* policy refers exclusively to learning English as the solution to integration).

From a critical perspective, the notion of language as a barrier is influenced by monolingual perceptions of the world (see Yule, 2020). Extensively multilingual countries (e.g. Nigeria, Zambia, or India) see tens of languages spoken locally with limited mutual intelligibility every day. Languages are not barriers. They are something more fundamental: they are the intrinsic element of the genomic makeup of the *homo sapiens*. Languages become a barrier when we do not want to do anything to communicate across multiple languages (e.g. referring to learning other local languages, denying the existence of minority languages, shunning the services of LSP professionals, etc.). In the 2010-2020 decade, UK local authority budgets fell by a median average of 17% (Harris, Hodge, and Phillips, 2019). Local authority social services budget to support vulnerable groups (CALD communities fall in this category) fell in this decade by 80% (*ibid.*: 42). Financial support assists CALD communities to have access to services that facilitate integration. Budgetary changes in this area represent a political statement, as allocated budgets to language service provision suffered from these changes (Harris, Hodge, and

backgrounds, social links – with institutions, language and communication, culture, digital skills, safety, stability, rights and responsibilities.

Phillips, 2019: 42). When no budget is available, language needs of CALD communities become a problem. Although significantly alternative views (Marlowe and Bogen, 2015; Shackleton, 2018) indicate that early interpreting and translation support might become routes to social integration and access to services, the "language barrier" is presented as a problem to be solved by ensuring people learn English (see Section 3). This might be discussed as a fair perspective for integration. However, it does not account for immediate needs at point of access for aging, accepted migrant populations, recent migrants, business travellers, or tourists, whose main impact is on the healthcare system. The provision of services at point of access, which rely on interpreters, community interpreters, and local authorities as well as NHS budgets to support the local CALD members is a statutory expectation from local authorities and for primary care trusts (see H.M. Government, 2017), and it is part of non-discriminating statutory legal expectations as stated in the 2010 Equality Act.

This study carried out an analysis of the diffusion of the "language barrier" expression and its usage in relation to negative or positive connotations in newspapers and tracked this usage against the policy changes. A version of genre-based approach to journalism studies has been adopted in this paper (Buozis and Creech, 2018)[4] by focusing on the metaphor as a legitimizing narrative. Legitimizing narratives impose one potential interpretation as a truth through multiple adjustments of textual components, which become an "acknowledgement of the legitimacy of explanations and justifications for how things are and how things are done" (Fairclough, 2003: 219). By considering how the "language barrier" metaphor is used in the media, as an implicit tool for legitimizing political actions and policy-making, the paper indicates a correlation between the language policy changes and representation of translating and interpreting in relation to multilingualism.

A corpus of 146 articles, from 1,209 hits for the search query LANGUAGE and BARRIER, AND MIGRANT* was compiled to conduct the exploratory assessment of the usage of this metaphor. The data were then scrutinized, tagged, and coded by the author to ascertain connotations. The corpus aimed to test the hypothesis that (im)migration narratives skew the perception of multilingualism and its broader, more

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[4] "The study of news as narrative takes it as a given that journalism, as a site of textual practice, reveals broader social relations and cultural meanings" (Bouzis and Creech, 2018: 1431).

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complex, and nuanced needs once these are all grouped and discussed as part of the "language barrier".

1.1 Corpus parameters

News items were collected using the databases Nexis®, a single point of access to multiple news providers. Its search query can be used for constructing small-scale and simplified corpora by extracting articles from a range of press and online sources. UK national and regional newspapers as well as newswires were selected; for a more robust approach, online archives of individual news sources ought to be studied to ascertain whether the database is comprehensive. A randomised test was conducted on one of the chosen newspapers, *The Herald.* The same queries and search parameters that had been used on Nexis® were also used directly on the historical archive of the newspaper. The query returned identical results (bringing up all the same articles), thus satisfying a baseline of data accuracy for the analysis conducted for this paper. The search queries were repeated 5 times to ensure that the same hits were returned every time.

In structuring the corpus, priority was given to focus and feasibility: the corpus was compiled over a 3-month period by a single researcher, who also coded and tagged the articles after reading them. International press and foreign language news sources were excluded even when they referred to the British context. The query was filtered to focus on English-language sources, published in the United Kingdom, and only referring to residents in Britain. In practical terms, the query used parameters pertaining to time, sources, origin of publication, and geography of reference; it was then further narrowed down by considering a representative sample of outlets including local editions, online, paper, and news wires that had numerous hits for the selected time span.

Time:	articles published between 1 January 2010 and 31 January 2020.
Sources:	newspapers, newswires, and press releases published in English in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Sample:	Included publications were by frequency of usage *the Guardian*, *MailOnline* and *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, *telegraph.co.uk*, *the Independent*, BBC Monitoring: *International Reports, Financial Times*, *Express* and *Express Online*, *Financial Times* and *Financial Times Online*, *The Times* and *thetimes.co.uk*, *The Herald*, *the Express*, *the Observer*, *the*

	Sun, *walesonline.co.uk*.
Query:	Boolean search query: 'language AND barrier AND migrant'.
Raw data:	1,209 hits.

Table 1. Essential corpus parameters

As Table 1 shows, the corpus parameters were basic. Of the original hits, only news items from the 10 sources with most occurrences were analysed and coded individually (using NVivo ver. 12.0.0.71). Figure 1 shows how "language barrier" becomes a recurrent term in 2013 and 2016 (see discussion in 2.1) and Figure 2 shows the total number of news items focussing on issues of immigration that used "language barrier" to plot their distribution by year.
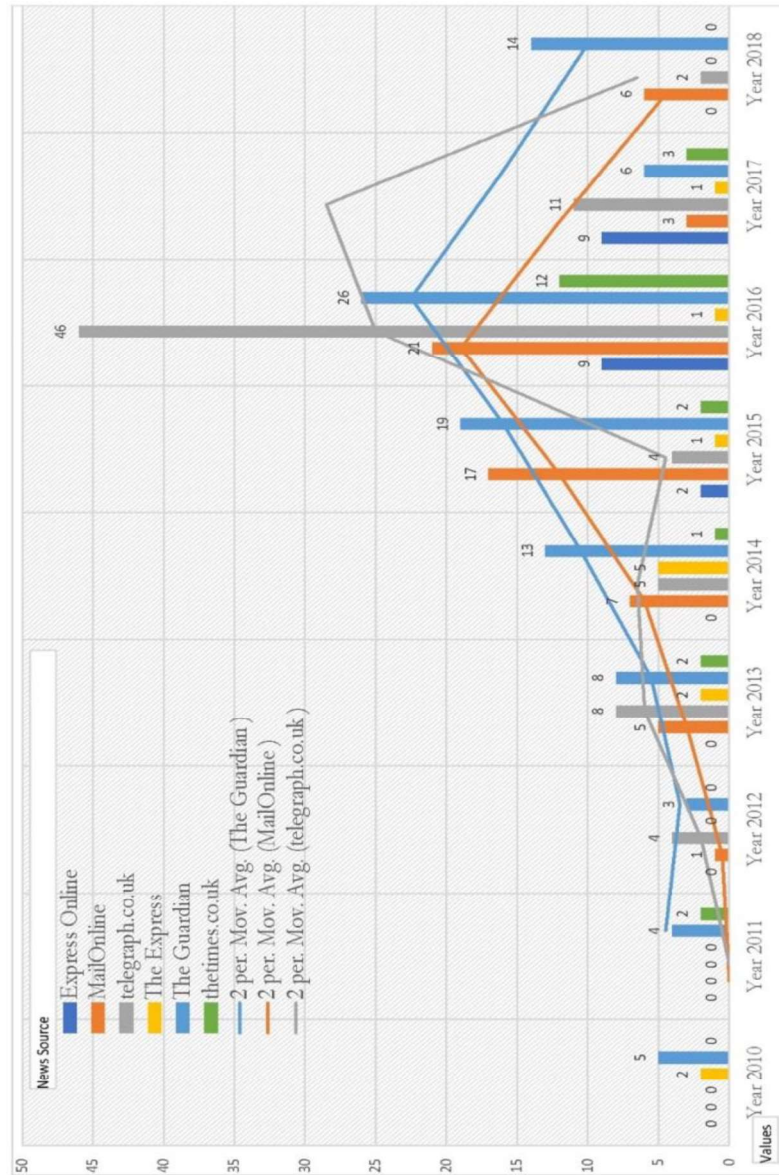
Figure 1. "language barrier" in news articles, 2010-2020

1.2 Data size

After applying all the parameters, the news items were selected and annotated manually; the 146 articles included references to the "language barrier" expression in relation to migrants and immigration matters. The frequency of occurrences increased in relation to changes to language policy in response to the issue of migration and reorganization of translation and interpreting procurement for the government (2013; discussed in Maniar, 2014) and in the year of the Referendum about UK membership of the EU. Clear clusters are visible in the *Daily Mail*, *the Guardian*, and *The Times*.
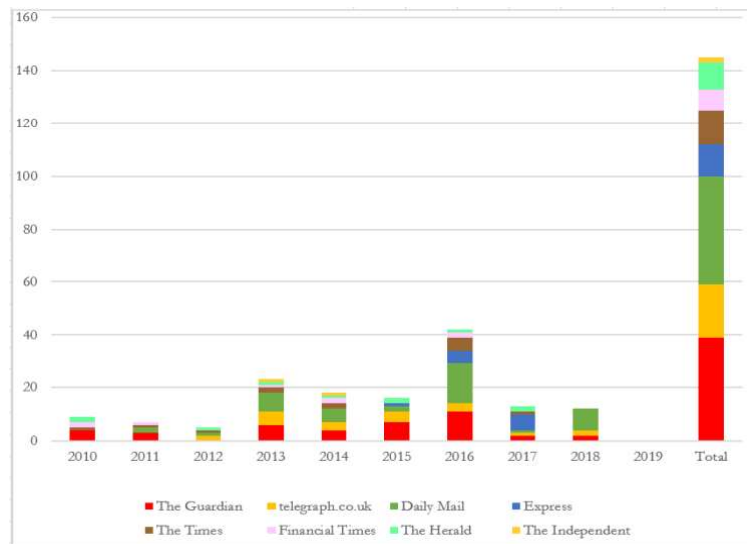
Figure 2. News items using "language barrier" in relation to migration by year

Paraphrases of "language barrier" (e.g. language skills are a barrier to integration) regularly occur in the data. They appear when discussing problems of exclusion in social, economic, and cultural terms. Long news items focusing on election nights, electoral campaign specials, letters, lifestyle (food, arts), and charity awards reports were excluded. Appendix 1 shows 23 examples of negative connotations and Appendix 2 shows 8 examples of positive connotations. A unique number (1 to 31) is

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associated to each example in the Appendixes[5]; in the article "Ex. No." is used to refer to that specific example.

2. Analysis

The sample suggests that "language barrier" became successfully politicized as a legitimation of the language policies that complemented the integration policies (H.M. Government, 2012, 2018, 2019) dictated by emphasis on excessive migration. These policies are discussed in section 2.1. "Language barrier" and its paraphrases are used to create narratives pertaining to immigration, without distinguishing between long-term established CALD communities, recent Eastern European citizens moving to the UK from the EU, former interpreters for the UK military forces, or refugees and asylum seekers (who are not allowed to work) from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Stylistically, the "language barrier" metaphor collocated close to noun-clauses such as "lack of integration" (also accepted by Labour politicians, ex. 21), "cost" (ex. 2, 8), and "benefits" (ex. 6, 11, 22). Three often overlapping narratives emerge from the corpus:

   a. Limited English proficiency (LEP) limits work opportunities and increases benefit expenditures on immigrant workers. (Ex. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14)
   b. LEP is a hindrance to provision of and access to healthcare and schooling. (Ex. 2, 11, 15, 17, 20, 22)
   c. Catering for immigrants' language needs is expensive and an obstruction to integration. (Ex. 1, 8, 10, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23)

The subdivision into three narratives[6] is merely used as a tool to analyse the data. As the examples are organized in chronological order, the progression shows that from initial concerns about job opportunities the focus shifted entirely onto the perception of LSP as expensive, in the second part of the decade.

   The moderate left-leaning *Guardian* used the metaphor too, as did *The Financial Times* with its financial focus determined by analysis and studies of world-wide market dynamics. For these broadsheets, the narrative sits within the first one of the three: individuals who succeed by overcoming

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[5] They are available here: https://tinyurl.com/FMFCultus2020.

[6] See Appendices for complete examples, available at: https://tinyurl.com/FMFCultus2020.

the barrier are likely to achieve higher degrees of success (e.g. "What it takes to be a migrant entrepreneur; Language and cultural barriers are the first hurdles when starting a business in a foreign country, but networking is key", *Guardian*, April 24th, 2016, also ex. 14); or natives fail despite not having to face the "language and cultural barriers" (*Financial Times*, November 3rd, 2010, ex. 24).

The frequency of use peaks in 2013 and 2016. Up to 2013 the main usage was that LEP was a hindrance to taking job opportunities or schooling. Then the Department of Work and Pensions introduced a mandatory English exam, as according to the Minister at the time, Ian Duncan Smith "The British public are rightly concerned that migrants should contribute to this country, and not be drawn here by the attractiveness of our benefits system. We are taking action to ensure that that is the case" (ex. 6). The *Guardian* defined this approach as "peddling populist myths about 'benefit tourism'" (ex. 25) but at this point in the data, "language barrier" turns into the expression connected to all the issues of migration. Commentators close to racist and extremist positions started referring to LSP as an expenditure that hurt integration: "Perpetuating the language barrier by hiring so many translators is not only costly, it's also harming the very people it aims to assist" (*Daily Mail*, January 14th, 2014; ex. 8).

The months leading to the 2016 Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union greatly focused on misleading immigration debates. Over that year, the "language barrier" appears repeatedly to infer lack of integration (ex. 18), under-performing (ex. 20) or overperforming (ex. 27) migrant pupils, and impact on service provision (ex. 22). The *Daily Mail* correlates issues with language skills (their view on "language barrier") to "ethnic diversity", 'linguistic diversity", and "migrant-background" thus providing incoherent readings about school children performance comparing "white British pupils" (ex. 22) to migrant pupils. Barely do these articles disguise institutionalised racism: the term "language barrier" is adopted to refer to all non-white residents, thus implying that all British Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) are migrants.

2.1 Legitimising the barrier

The legitimation of the negative connotation, increasingly linked to narratives b. and c. in the corpus, saw a surge when the government changed procurement rules for translation and interpreting services, because of a change in language policy. In the winter of 2012-2013, a cost-

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cutting language policy transformed the political discourse surrounding language service access into a political battle against efficient multilingual communication in the UK. On December 19th, 2012, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government published the policy entitled *50 ways to save: examples of sensible savings in local government*. Its 34th recommendation reads "Stop translating documents into foreign languages: only publish documents in English. Translation undermines community cohesion by encouraging segregation. Similarly, do not give community grants to organisations which promote segregation or division in society" (MHCLG, 2013: 11). Accommodating language needs is seen as the same as funding organizations that promote segregation (e.g. faith schools). The third sector, which had been hard-pressed to compensate for the cuts to interpreting services (ex. 1), was de facto excluded from governmental grants, should it contribute to offering LSP to CALD communities. This policy was not an accident. On March 12th, 2013, the Minister Eric Pickles defended it with a Written Parliamentary Statement:

> I would like to reaffirm my department's approach to the use of translation and interpretation services for foreign languages by local authorities.
> Some local authorities translate a range of documents and other materials into languages spoken by their residents, and provide interpretation services. While there may be rare occasions in which this is entirely necessary - for instance in emergency situations - I am concerned that such services are in many cases being provided unnecessarily because of a misinterpretation of equality or human rights legislation. Such translation services have an unintentional, adverse impact on integration by reducing the incentive for some migrant communities to learn English and are wasteful where many members of these communities already speak or understand English.[7]

There is no ambiguity of message: the UK government perceives multilingual communication to vulnerable CALD communities as an obstacle to their integration but wants them supported in emergencies. High quality translation and interpreting however rely on experienced and available professionals. Without supporting the services of regular pools of LSP professionals in ordinary circumstances, it is difficult to access suitable LSP when a crisis erupts. This governmental department has the

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[7] Written Statement archived in the official governmental website: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/translation-into-foreign-languages (last accessed 15 April 2020).

remit to create and enact policies to enable local communities in the UK to be prepared to deal with emergencies (floods, epidemic, pandemic, technological disasters, cyberattacks, and terrorism). Promoting this way of communicating with CALD communities the department created a substantial vulnerability in clear contradiction to its institutional and statutory functions (O'Brien *et al.*, 2018).

In 2018, the Conservative government led by Prime Minister Theresa May introduced more restrictive language and immigration policies. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, at the time led by Sajid Javid, further restricted access to language services. Mr Javid directly used the "language barrier" narrative in a legitimizing narrative that draws upon the path of "personal experience" of the speaker, who is from an established CALD community background:

> When I was a young child, I sometimes had to miss school so that I could go to the doctor with my mother. But it wasn't because I was ill. It was because more than a decade after arriving from Pakistan she still barely spoke a word of English and needed me - her six-year-old-son - to translate for her. For me, it was an early introduction to the way in which issues such as language skills create barriers to integration... eventually, my mother decided she'd be better off if she learned English. (ex. 23)

The personal remarks were used in an interview introducing the reiterated institutional opposition to translation services in favour of (a not-funded) programme to boost English language proficiency in CALD members (ex. 15):

> Low levels of proficiency also create costs for providers of local services, such as local authorities and health providers, which have to pay for translation of information and may impact on others in the family, including children, who have to act as translators for relations or friends who cannot speak English. (H.M. Government, 2018: 37)[8]

Accommodating language needs by providing translation and interpreting support became described as an act of institutional generosity – rather

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[8] The policy document refers to findings from a paper by Paget and Stevenson (2014).

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than statutory expectations to avoid discriminations and to fulfil requirements to equal opportunities as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

The legitimizing narrative emerging in relation to migrants and the "language barrier" followed a parallel trajectory with policies reducing access to services for all vulnerable groups. Reduction of language services map in the corpus against the consolidation in usage of the "language barrier" framing. To reduce the costs associated with language provision, machine translation systems were expected to support primary healthcare information as much as emergency information for CALD communities (see O'Brien, 2019 on translation technologies in emergencies). Figure 3 and Figure 4 are screenshots from the National Health Service (NHS) patient information page targeting access to information in languages other than English; they illustrate this change.
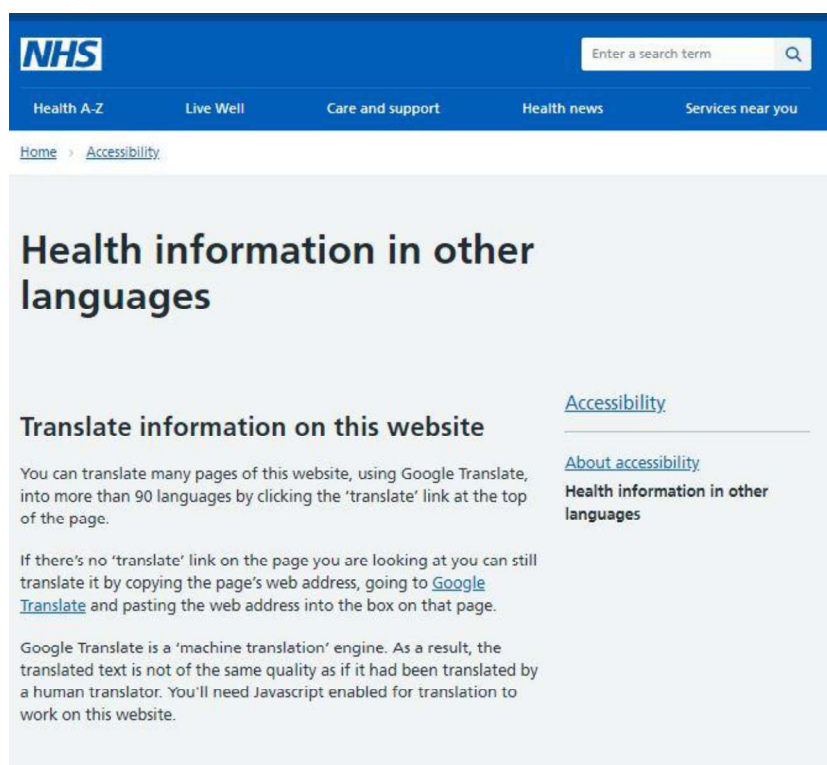

Figure 3. UK National Health Service information in other languages up to 2018

From 2013 onwards, links to Google Translate were introduced on patient information pages, only replaced by a more cautious message in 2019. The caveat added in the 2019 version of the website ("although online translators… information") might reflect a moderate push back from the NHS. It could, otherwise, be an alignment to the Government's own guidance for healthcare communication (2017), which reintroduced the need for efficient communication in healthcare, in an almost contradictory move to the official language policy for CALD communities.
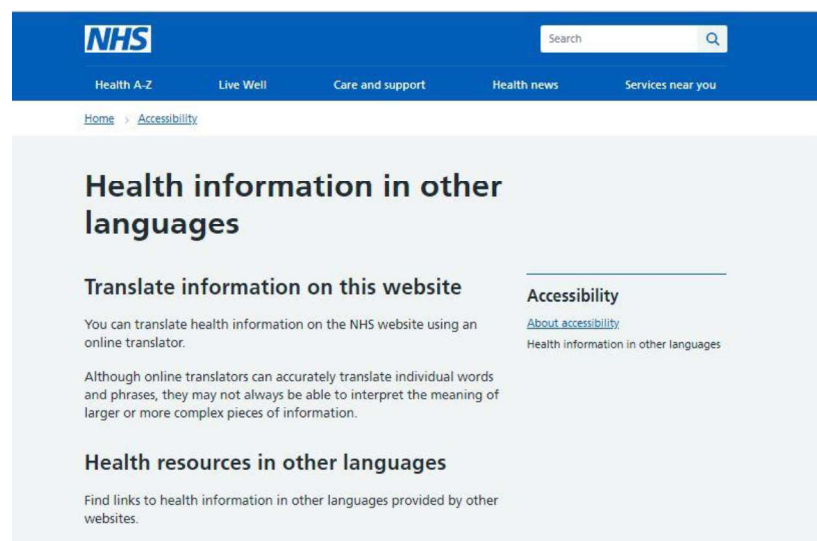

Figure 4. UK National Health Service information in other languages up since 2019[9]

Regular hypes about advanced technologies, especially in 2016 those around neural machine translation, and their powers may underpin the advice to break down the patients' "language barriers" presented in Figure 3. Technology-based translation services may reduce costs in line with institutional language policies if applied in a systemic manner and monitored by translators (see Halimi Mallem and Bouillon, 2019), whereas

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[9] Available at: https://www.nhs.uk/accessibility/health-information-in-other-languages/ (last accessed 15 April 2020)

their indiscriminate use might cause serious clinical issues (e.g. Albrecht *et al.*, 2013). The advice in Figure 3 ("You can translate"…) implies the type of blind faith in translation technologies that welcomes them as a solution-to-all-problems, key and self-sufficient tools to overcome issues determined by linguistic diversity. However, the use of translation technologies without human quality control poses serious issues in crises, just as the deployment of non-professional, non-trained, inexperienced translators and interpreters does (see O'Brien, 2019; O'Mathúna *et al.*, 2020). Once CALD communities have limited access to professional-quality language provision and might become reliant on sub-standard or ad hoc solutions (Angelelli, 2015; Taibi and Ozolins, 2016), they are more exposed to risks, in turn increasing exposure to risk for emergency responders and non-CALD residents in their communities.

The *50 ways* policy of 2013 established that accommodating language needs in crisis and emergencies was an exemption from the reduction in translation and interpreting services for CALD communities in ordinary times. Any barrier increases social vulnerability in crisis settings (Alexander and Pescaroli, 2019; Federici, 2020). Yet, as large events generating cascading crises initially affect people's health, barriers to standard operations in the NHS, determined by reduced funds for LSP, create that vulnerability in routine conditions. Such vulnerability might become unmanageable in crisis conditions. Even with the exemption of emergencies, the policy contradicts the government and NHS' aims to fulfil its statutory requirements of accessibility. NHS England – which influences but does not dictate standard practice on devolved healthcare provision in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales – indicates very clearly how

> Language is very important in the context of the health practitioner to patient consultation. It can help reduce barriers between practitioner and patient and ensure safety with respect to diagnosis and prescription.
> Where language is a problem in discussing health matters, offer a professional interpreter rather than using family or friends. Using neutral-speaking interpreters can help foster trust with the patient (H.M. Government 2017/2018).

From this perspective, to reduce the barrier, LSP is best embedded in services provided by local authorities that have knowledge and understanding of the demand and needs of local CALD communities – e.g. established Pakistani communities might have language needs only in ageing population, more recent Syrian communities might have complex

and different language needs by age and gender, and so on. As the "language barrier" metaphor became a policy-construct that restricted access to essential services for responders as much as affected CALD groups, it wiped out these subtle yet essential distinctions.

Once the Ministry responsible for emergency preparedness makes explicit efforts to reduce LSP investments for CALD communities, it is impossible to have access to appropriate resources in crisis communication settings. Unsurprisingly, a local tragedy in a multilingual borough such as the 2017 Grenfell Tower Fire (ex. 29) and the 2020 COVID-19 national response disproportionately affected BAME members and CALD communities. Changing LSP provision creates an additional vulnerability affecting social groups already more exposed to hazards by their socio-economic conditions: the metaphor of "language barrier" was endorsed by the department most interested in diffusing the potential impact of major incidents and emergencies. The hostility to cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity embedded in the language policies spills over to other forms of accessibility. British Sign Language (BSL) speakers face lack of access to translation and interpreting support regularly in healthcare settings and when accessing other services (Batterbury Magill, 2014: 28-29)[10].

2.2 Limiting integration and increasing vulnerability

There are strong indications that once politicians had legitimised the "language barrier" as a drain to welfare, schooling, and healthcare system, and connected the barrier only to migrants (but affecting also transient and often profitable communities such as business travellers and tourists), the discourse could move from journalistic representations to policy. Policy changes in 2013 and 2018 have a common denominator in how direct quotes from politicians (ex. 7, 16, 21, 23), editorialists (ex. 3, 8), and journalists' assessments (ex. 10, 19) of the complexity of multilingual societies coincide.

Even if the drive to reduce LSP in local authorities might serve plans for long-term integration through the use of English alone, impoverished

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[10] The lack of BSL interpreters during the COVID-19 briefings in March 2020 is an illustration of this issue. See the Statement from the British Deaf Association, 'Televised Sign Language interpretations. Letter to Prime Minister 31 March 2020', available at: https://bda.org.uk/statement-sl-interpretations/
(last accessed 15 April 2020).

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budgets for appropriate LSP to CALD communities (including those who cannot legally work and have to be on welfare benefits, as happens to asylum seekers and refugees waiting months for their applications) delay the very process of integration that the policies are supposedly seeking. This contradiction creates a significant vulnerability. Vulnerability has been defined as the resultant of measurable factors determining an equation between the potential impact of natural hazards (fire, flooding, disease, etc.) and vulnerabilities due to susceptibility, coping capacities such as resources, emergency personnel, level of training, social resilience, and adaptive capacity. Figure 5 shows how they correlate in an equation that offers a quantifiable Risk Index for each country of the world (Welle and Birkmann, 2015).
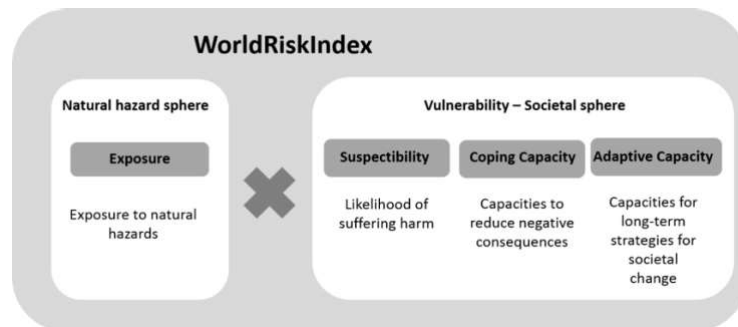

Figure 5. World Risk Index. Source: Institut für Raumordnung und Entwicklungsplanung, Stuttgart[11]

The UK has a low risk hazardscape for major disasters triggered by natural hazards, excluding pandemic for which several models from 2015 to 2019 had shown significant vulnerabilities. Urban hazards, such as high-rise building fires, terrorist attacks, and healthcare emergencies have a greater impact on linguistic and ethnic minorities. Crisis communication rests on trust and expedite information reaching everybody. Considering learning the local language as the only solution to the "language barrier" is a risk for the whole society. In a crisis, residents and multilingual transient population (tourists, business people, etc.) rely on the same finite number of medical personnel and equipment, of firefighters, of police personnel, and so on. These emergency services and responders cannot be expected

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[11] See https://www.ireus.uni-tuttgart.de/Internationales/WorldRiskIndex/#tabs-1.

to be proficient polyglots, nor should they be exposed to additional risks due to a systemic lack of language support.

Without financial resources for the local authorities that understand the needs of local CALD communities, it is to be expected that any emergency will have a more significant impact on the most vulnerable groups (the report on the COVID-19 impact on BAME communities demonstrates the impact of compounding vulnerabilities, which in several instances included issues with accessing information in the right language). According to the most recent integration policy suggestion that everybody must *know* English (H.M. Government, 2019), the "language barrier" in the UK can only be overcome by achieving a politically-induced monolingualism. The policy plans to "Boost […] English language" (2019: 13-14), but language learning takes time. Translation and interpreting remain services needed for the integration as well as for the safety of multilingual communities. The policy-construct around English learning actualizes the metaphor, and its reductivist approach to integration strengthens any potential "language barrier", because it restricts budget allocations for interpreting and translation services needed by the local authorities. By restricting access to essential services, not only does it create a barrier for the CALD communities and non-English speaking transient residents, but also for emergency services and responders.

Providing access to crucial information in a language that vulnerable groups understand relies on having access to established translation and interpreting services. Punitive language policies reducing LSP have an impact on crisis communication strategies, thus putting additional strains on other core, emergency services. In other words, de facto creation of "the language barrier" increases societal vulnerability. The legitimation of the policy can be used to change electorates' views but it strains social services for entire areas, not just for the CALD communities. This is the point where all negative correlations between cost and value of translation and interpreting services (as were found in the news items collected in the corpus) reveal the short-sightedness of the cost analysis. After having disinvested in the system, fewer practiced, experienced, and available translators and interpreters will be operationally suitable and immediately reliable to support crisis response operations (ex. 27).

2.3 Limitations

This study of the "language barrier" aimed to assess whether mapping the use of this expression in journalistic narratives might show a correlation with ill-conceived language policies. To some extent the corpus fulfilled

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this aim. The 2018 *Green Paper* on integration, including a new language policy, and the 2019 *Integrated Communities Action Plan* do not consider the different needs of CALD communities, do not differentiate between minority languages (which of course co-exist in situation of bilingualism, e.g. in Wales) and community languages (e.g. in the Greater Manchester, Birmingham, or London regions), nor on language needs of recent migrants seeking asylum, temporary refugees, and economic migrants. The lack of distinctions is a manifestation of political prejudice against non-English speakers, which in turn has affected preparedness and risk reduction of health treats, when communication requires all residents to be informed.

However, narratives on integration are far more complex to represent than merely using the "language barrier" metaphor as a key search. Mapping its use in journalistic discourse shows the need to consider alternative metaphors that might better embody the role, impact, and significance of translation and interpreting services. There is a need to go beyond one that considers them as mere means to overcome the "language barrier". Even the examples of usages with positive connotations (see Appendix 2) reveal a conceptualization of multilingualism as an extraordinary achievement (especially when British residents are those acquiring a second language, ex. 31). Further study would be required as well as a broader corpus to see correlations between perceptions of the "language barrier", the "cultural barriers", racism, and linguistic inequalities, or the connection between linguistic diversity and social justice (for a discussion of this connection, see Piller, 2016).

The corpus has limitations as it is too small and not fully representative of all the newspapers and magazines on the UK market. The mixed method approach, using frequency data, includes interpretative coding and tagging articles that could be replaced by more objective approaches: the coding would be more revealing had it been carried out by at least 3 people other than the author. Effectively, the assessment of connotations, although still subjective, might be better calibrated through peer interpretations. Extrapolated and interpreted data from the corpus cannot be considered as conclusive evidence that there is a causal relationship between increasingly framing "the language barrier" as an economic problem and changes in the provision of professional translation and interpreting services. However, from the illustration of NHS webpages to prescriptive references in the UK national emergency plans of using Red Cross resources, the "language barrier" framing seems to exempt the UK government from protecting and serving the people inhabiting its territories.

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3. Conclusions

Analysing a sample of news items stretching over a decade and connecting the expression "language barrier" with migration, the legitimized narrative to emerge more prominently is that multilingualism is a problem to be resolved with fewer opportunities to accommodate language needs of CALD communities. From narratives about the superdiverse, multilingual UK society that flourishes by breaking "language barriers" of the articles in 2010, the newspapers discourse shifted to a dominant use of the negative connotation that legitimized the conceptualization of linguistic diversity as a hindrance to integration (up to 2013). The legitimized use in newspapers was further consolidated (from 2016) by political discourse on language policies as a way of supporting ongoing representations of issues connected with migration.

The negative connotation of "language barrier" appears to have become a pervasive representation of the risks of multilingualism; it has legitimized monolingual views of the world and corresponded (pushed by other factors) to a decline in the number of UK learners of foreign languages. A study that focused on English-speaking countries and their respective trends in learning languages reported that "since 2002 entries to MFL [modern foreign language] exams have reduced by almost half" (Churchward, 2019: 11). Institutional provision of language access services for vulnerable groups in established or recent CALD communities was reduced, thus exacerbating the "language barrier". Not only are these socio-economically disadvantaged groups, who might also be vulnerable due to age, low-literacy levels, and low-income jobs, but their vulnerability to crises increases the demands on emergency responders, thus augmenting risks for the whole population. Alexander and Pescaroli (2019) show how there could be extremely valid economic as well as social arguments in ensuring that access to accurate information exists for all members of the population when a crisis erupts.

The opposition to LSP in favour of immediate acquisition of the English Language (e.g. H.M. Government, 2019) is also indicated increasingly as the solution in the journalistic narratives emerging from the corpus used for this study. Linguists may want to engage with the shorthand expression "language barrier" in its usage in English, at least for the UK context. After all, the expression emerged in monolingual cultures, in which bilingual and trilingual competences are often perceived from the point of view of dominant (European) languages and the life-long training efforts needed to master foreign languages, rather than from ordinarily polyglot environments in which billions of people world-wide live.

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The data collected in the corpus suggest that mapping the usage of "language barrier" corresponds to mapping the ten-year-long rise of monolingual language policies, restrictive immigration policies, damage to the LSP professionals (see the early report by Maniar, 2014), and to language learning in the UK (Churchward, 2019). Compounding these changes together, England-driven monolingual policies hostile to migrants are likely to pose serious risks, in current and future emergencies, also to the devolved countries of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland that continue to use slightly different language policies with their CALD communities, but are affected by the budgetary implications of these policies.

Acknowledgements

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Appendices 1 and 2 are available at:
https://tinyurl.com/FMFCultus2020.