

## Afterword: Language, Affect and Everyday Citizenship

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In 2014, Nigel Farage, the former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a party that was pivotal in campaigning for Britain leaving the European Union, told a story about feeling ‘awkward’ when he heard foreign languages spoken on a train. This was an anecdote delivered as part of a conference speech, made in anticipation of the 2014 European Elections. In it, he described the UK as feeling like ‘a foreign land’ because of immigration (Sparrow, 2014). He talked about getting on a train at Charing Cross, London, and not hearing English spoken until he had passed at least four stops out of the city: ‘it was not until we got past Grove Park that I could hear English being audibly spoken in the carriage’. Asked what the problem with foreign languages was, he replied that they made him uncomfortable, because he did not understand them. Later, in a radio interview, he was challenged about these remarks, as journalists pointed out that his wife’s first language is German, and that he and his children live in a multilingual home (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2021). The ensuing discussion raised further contradictions, but nevertheless made some things clear: some languages

appear more foreign than others, and multilingualism is acceptable in some spaces, whereas in others, it represents peculiarity, if not a threat.

What this anecdote suggests is that language is more than a means of communication. Languages also operate affectively. As the philosopher and poet Denise Riley (2005, 1) puts it, there is 'a forcible affect of language'. Language carries not only a symbolic meaning, then, but also sensory elements (Houen 2011, 216; Riley 2005, 3). Language is a place where people dwell together; it also forms a way we can feel out of place. Consider how someone's use of spoken English makes our own English feel inadequate or feel 'marked' in classed or racialised ways. Or consider how learning to speak like an organisation might make us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. Language therefore has affective and performative powers (Houen 2011, 216). This is not only because language provides the *means* through which we might discuss, say, a happy or a sad subject. As Alex Houen argues, it is because the very syntax, vocabulary, punctuation as well as ideological discourse through which that happy or sad subject is discussed carries its own affects. This can be explained by thinking of the experience of reading a bedtime story. The story itself may or may not move us. But the affective arrangement of words, the fact that we have spoken them a hundred times before, the repetition of key words and letters, or the rhythm of the sentences as we read them for someone else's attention, might all carry affective resonances.

Language therefore provides an interesting, provocative, and important portal for discussing citizenship. As the anecdote about Nigel Farage feeling uncomfortable on hearing a foreign language suggests, language takes us to questions of inclusion and exclusion. But it also expands the focus of debates around citizenship beyond the formalities and mechanics of citizenship as status, to consider the informal, everyday, and mundane ways people are cast out of belonging or rendered into noncitizens. Through six original research articles and

a comprehensive introduction, this special issue makes a significant contribution towards unpacking how language binds and unbinds, and establishes connections and disconnections. It examines the many different ways in which language discloses how we are 'with' others (Shindo in this issue). It contributes to this journal's aims of highlighting the ways citizenship excludes, marginalises, and differentiates. For example, all the articles address how citizenship is often held up as a category that brings people together, and how it 'serves an exclusionary function, dividing up the world's population into smaller subpopulations that can then be managed and governed by states' (Nyers 2004, 203). Yet this special issue also makes a refreshing contribution, by taking this point into the field of the everyday, to examine the minute, banal, and ordinary ways in which citizenship and language intertwine. The collection examines how language is felt and mobilised, how it corrals and binds, and how it offers a site for addressing the relations between us.

Accordingly, this special issue discusses a range of entanglements between citizenship and language. They encourage us to conceptualise language broadly, to take into consideration what might not be considered 'proper' languages, such as indigenous languages, sign languages, languages whose tradition is oral, or how people living with disabilities such as autism may have a very different relationship to speech and language. As we learn, other means of communication, such as pictures, might be considered a language, as well as electronic devices that generate speech alongside a person. **The everyday filled with different forms of language (or what counts as language) – monolingual, multilingual, verbal, sound and noise.** As Yael Peled argues in this issue, 'language' is often considered quite simplistically, if not unanalytically. However this collection of articles mobilises against such a restrictive or prescriptive reading of language, asking us to consider a whole range of

spaces and moments when language becomes visible or audible, works to include or exclude, or becomes a point of connection involving citizens and noncitizens.

Further to this, several of the articles discuss how citizenship constitutes and involves its own language. This is evident in the case of language classes made obligatory for migrants and those who want to become citizens (Fortier 2017). But it is also clear in how citizenship is understood, talked about, and rendered into a desirable or compulsory set of actions. It is evident in the range of norms, concepts, and ways of behaving that migrants and those who want to become citizens need to learn by way of citizenship education classes (see Milani et al. in this issue). Citizenship forms a language that certain populations are made to learn, and that others never have to bother with. But as Milani et al discuss, even in those spaces where a language is being imparted and taught as a code of conduct, that language is also put into play in the classroom, through disagreement, irony, laughter (PAGE), and by exploring all sorts of variations to the unity of citizenship.

To return to the opening anecdote, the idea of hating or fearing a foreign language reminds us of how language is intimately tied with the geographies of 'us and them'. Anne-Marie Fortier usefully describes this as language operating not only as a set of sounds, but as a noise. That is, language emerges as 'the locus of a *regime of audibility*' (2017, 1265). It is a means through which certain people are heard and seen, and others remain not heard, and unseen. We might consider here the ways states have at least one dominant or official language, and how this creates other 'minority languages'. And how some languages, such as American English, have an imperialist power over others (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 113). But as Fortier says, a language also 'finds its object in minute and arbitrary marks' and 'variously combines with racial *regimes of visibility*' (2017, 1265). This point about the 'minute and arbitrary marks' is relevant for considering how we experience and encounter

language affectively. For these major and minor languages are not stable or bounded communities. Consider the ways speakers of a minor language in a majority culture know the moments and spaces when they need to switch to the majority language to feel safe—but also the times when it will be necessary to speak in a ‘mother tongue’. The ‘regimes of audibility’ are changeable, and assume a different intensity in various contexts. And such ‘languages’ will not be composed of words alone, but will combine with a gestures, movements, postures as well as ways of holding and using our bodies. Hence, although some languages are more dominant than others, even within *a* language, they can be used both to uphold power, and to intervene and pluralise the social order.

Accordingly, for many of us, it remains difficult to understand what would make someone fear or hate a foreign language. The word ‘foreign’ refers to something that is strange and unfamiliar (Collins English Dictionary 2007). A speaker of English might sound ‘foreign’ in some parts of Berlin, but whilst English may not be a major language in that locality, it remains a *dominant* language. It is not simply a matter of the numbers, then, but of histories and context, the connections between language, capital, and state, as well as the histories of colonialism and empire. Furthermore, this is not a static relationship but one that is constantly evolving and moving in relation to different elements. Speaking English, as Fortier (2017, 1257) shows, has become a ‘British value’ on which the community of citizenship is made to rest. But it is possible to take the Pledge of loyalty to the United Kingdom in Welsh as well as English (Home Office 2019), raising further questions about the ways languages of domination can be transposed into a ‘minor’ language (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 113). The question that emerges, then, is how might we trace the relationship between language, power and knowledge, without assuming that power belongs

to a language? How also might we then consider how languages are made of variation, and the work that goes into keeping variation at bay?

### **Language and the question of living with others**

Language takes us to the core of the relationship between citizenship and community. But it also provides a route for unpacking how communities, cultures, and ways of being in the world exceed the languages of citizenship. For example, whilst language (along with race) has been figured as the kernel of national belonging, and as what provides a necessary point of cohesion for the state, languages also suggest the plurality of ways of belonging. As Glissant puts it, 'The fact remains, nonetheless, that, when a people speaks its language or languages, it is above all free to produce through them at every level—free, that is, to make its relationship to the world concrete and visible for itself and for others' (1997, 108). Language points to difference and to the question of living with others, nonviolently.

The question of language therefore takes us not only to speaking and communicating, but also of *listening* to others. Expanding our understanding of language helps address this question of what it might mean to listen. Recalling the opening anecdote about encountering foreign languages on a train, Lisiak, Back and Jackson (2021) introduce the concept of *xenophonophobia* – meaning, the fear of foreign sounds (it builds on *xenoglossophobia* – the fear of foreign languages). They argue that the study of racism and xenophobia has generally centred around the study of linguistic discourse, and they call on us to expand this to include the study of non-verbal sounds too. In this context, they argue that it might be as important to listen to 'the frequencies of the street' as it is to listen to people's words or written

comments, to better understand the social life of cities, its inclusions and exclusions. Inviting us to listen to a range of sounds beyond speech, Lisiak, Back and Jackson turn to the example of the 'silent walks' carried out by the citizens of West London and their supporters in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, when on 14 June 2017, a housing tower block in West London burned and killed 72 people, and injured, displaced, and traumatised hundreds. In response, local residents began organising a silent walk for the 14<sup>th</sup> day of each month, to remember the victims and support their families and friends. This was powerful for the way it temporarily silenced, or changed the everyday sonic frequencies of these urban streets. It engaged questions of citizenship because it highlighted how some of the victims of the fire had arrived in the UK as refugees and so had uncertain status ([BBC News, 15 June 2017](#)), and how many of the victims were Muslim (Bulley et al. 2019, xx). As several of the articles in this collection show, Muslim populations across Europe are repeatedly cast as not-belonging, even when they have secure citizenship status. These silent walks mobilised silence as an affective political intervention, to reveal the inadequacy of the standard political responses and the injustice suffered by the people of Grenfell.

How then, might language offer a portal for examining the possibilities for improved co-existence as well as for justice? In an article titled, 'The Risks of Dialogue' (2018), by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, he bemoans the ways cosmopolitanism has been contrasted with 'various forms of rootedness and provincialism' and seeks another way of thinking about living together with others. Whilst 'cosmopolitanism' offered much potential for naming a form of belonging to the world, or perhaps living with others 'across frontiers', the concept got caught in a trap, Appadurai argues, as being of the world was contrasted with being from somewhere. Indeed, in the context of the 'Brexit' vote, when the UK voted in 2016 to leave the European Union, this binary resurfaced, as the then British Prime Minister Theresa May

blamed 'people from nowhere' for the result (2016). This framing is relevant for questions of language and citizenship, as some, typically minor languages are often grafted on to ideas about rootedness and provincialism, just as other languages are presumed to be a marker of universalism. As Appadurai puts it, cosmopolitanism has too often been seen as the opposite of an attachment to 'one's own friends, one's own group, *one's own language*, one's own country and even one's own class, and a certain lack of interest in crossing these boundaries' (2018, 1 my emphasis). Language, is here equated with what makes someone attached to the local, rather than global.

To undo this presumption, Appadurai casts a different image of cosmopolitanism, and he does so through an attention to the multilingualism of the urban poor. As a counter-image to the idea of cosmopolitanism as a form of 'privileged nomadism', he draws on his work with the unhoused poor of the city of Mumbai (and as he notes, 50% of the 15 million population live without secure housing). However, this community is made of 'Hindus, Muslims, Tamil speakers, Telugu speakers and Urdu speakers' – an 'extraordinary diversity' —and to work together, or indeed, to get anything done, they 'have to engage each other's languages' (2018, 3). Here, Appadurai insists, cosmopolitanism is not a privilege but an essential way of life. Multilingualism is a necessary survival tactic, part of the experience of precariousness, and essential alongside skilfulness and improvisation for navigating the city's streets, as well as its organisations of regulation and control.

This is relevant for thinking about citizenship because it casts it as the active work of getting by from day to day, and how that involves negotiating with all kinds of languages and cultures, 'under conditions of asymmetry, not of equality' (2018, 4). Appadurai is aware of the risk of romanticising this experience, noting that this 'compulsory cosmopolitanism' is



hard. But what is interesting in terms of thinking the politics of citizenship is how he develops a strong image of the hard work as well as of the noise of dialogue, as people participate in a constant effort at learning to talk across differences, and across power relations as part of a 'contested conviviality' (Appadurai 2018, 5). Recalling this special issue's focus on translation, on the lively cultural life of urban neighbourhoods, as well as the murmurs taking place in the interstices of citizenship classes, this image of contested conviviality presents this work as incomplete, and as part of the melee of social life (Nancy 2003) that cannot be resolved or redeemed. Nevertheless, within it we can hear how chatter involves all the risks and realities of misunderstanding and miscommunication, but as part of the endless effort at navigating ways of living together. All dialogue is a form of negotiation, Appadurai says, which means it involves 'shared ground, selective agreement and provisional consensus' (2018, 6). This won't sound very exciting to those who seek transformation or revolution through politics. But it is where we begin to get at when we think about politics through more than one language, working across languages, as well as through multiple examples of what counts as language, as the authors of this special issue show.

### **Engaging citizenship through the everyday**

The interest in affect in the humanities and social sciences has involved an attempt to better bridge the gap between academic theory and everyday life (Sedgwick 2003, 145). This special issue gets into and roams around in the everyday—in sites ranging from social media chatrooms to union activities, practices of preparing and sharing food in an urban neighbourhood to the jokes, laughter, and quiet dissent circulating in citizenship education

classes. Overall, the collection expands on the spaces, moments, and practices we might identify as involving or constituting questions of citizenship. But the point here is not to bring the examples together to offer a coherent theory, but to invite us to think again about what citizenship is as well as what it might be. As Lauren Berlant (1997, 10) puts it, '[p]ractices of citizenship involve both public sphere narratives and concrete experiences of quotidian life that do not cohere or harmonize'. An examination of the tensions and divergencies between public life and the everyday can form productive terrain for the study of citizenship.

For several articles in this collection, language offers a portal into questions of everyday life. In '**The linguistic boundary problem**', Yael Peled engages the boundary problem in political theory by examining its linguistic aspects. That is, the article addresses the role language plays in establishing the demarcation of the demos. In this, Peled addresses the exclusionary aspects of ideas around linguistic *competence*, as a basis for participating in the demos. She interrogates ideas about 'active participation', to open the possibilities of and potential of democratic theory. For example, she considers the possibility of dialogue from the standpoint of those who have hearing loss or who are deaf, or from the perspective of cultural traditions that are mostly oral, not written. Taken together, the article questions what it means to participate 'actively' in democratic life, and mobilises the idea of a 'language ethics'. I found this desire to loosen the presumption that politics involves able-bodieds behaving as 'active citizens' extremely fruitful, complementing recent efforts to rethink the political through the concept of 'vulnerability' (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016). Through language, this article hints at the plurality of different ways in which we might be political. This opens possibilities for thinking about politics as involving listening as much

as speaking, staying quiet as much as speaking up, or staying alongside as much as marching out front.

The article by Nasreen Chowdhory and Shamna Thacham Poyil also engages the question of language communities, and negotiating boundaries through language, in this case through the everyday experiences of people living in the enclaves along the India-Bangladesh border. Following the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary agreement (LBAT) in 2015, the inhabitants of these territories were invited to choose whether they wanted to join India or Bangladesh as citizens. Addressing the case of the chitmahal people, who live in-between these states, this article looks at how patterns of belonging and unbelonging cohere around language. The article is based around fieldwork carried out with the 'new citizens' from the Haldibari, Dinhata and Mekhligunk transit camps in North Bengal in 2016-17, who chose to affirm their Indian citizenship following the ratification of the treaty, which involved either staying where they were or physically moving to Indian territory. What this article reminds us of is that citizenship 'rights' do not always straightforwardly correspond to better conditions on the ground. However, this article is interested in how language forms an important marker of identity, allowing new citizens to develop connections and attachments beyond the enclave, and beyond one particular community, in the process of navigating everyday life.

Accordingly, the article '**Everyday discourse as a space of citizenship**' by Simo K. Määttä, Ulla Tuomarla, and Karita Suomalainen also discusses the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion with respect to language, but in a very different case study. With this article, we return to Europe, and the case of online discussion boards used in Finland, Denmark, and France. This article shows how in-groups and out-groups are construed linguistically and discursively in these sites, and how participants in these forums negotiate citizenship

categories. Affirming an interest in the realm of everyday life, the authors refer to the significance of studying the ‘murmur’ of ordinary, everyday discourse and mundane interactions (PAGE). But they also show how these contribute to racialised geographies of ‘us and them’. Specifically, the authors trace how Muslim populations (or those perceived to be Muslim) are racialised as ‘risky’ populations in the context of present day life in Europe, and the increasing politics of resentment, nationalism, and certainty. This article reminds us of how paying attention to everyday practices does not mean addressing a kinder or softer politics, but also ugly ideas.

The attention to everyday ideas is extended in **‘Whether you like it or not, this is the future!’**. In this article, Eeva Puumala and Karim Maïche are concerned with how the boundaries of community are negotiated through everyday encounters and practices of language use in a socially and culturally mixed urban neighbourhood — specifically, Hervanta, a suburb of Tampere, in Finland. Interestingly, this article shows us that greater proximity to differences does not necessarily lead to a more peaceful coexistence. However, rather than seek commonality and agreement as a basis for citizenship, the authors embrace the idea of the city as a site of difference — a longstanding theme in urban theory—to explore how negotiation, tension, and everyday diplomacy offers another route to conceptualising a form of everyday convivial culture (Gilroy 2004). Significantly, this is not about overcoming differences but acknowledging disagreement as what constitutes political and social life, and through which, citizenship is practised, navigated, and negotiated.

This approach to the political as involving tension and disagreement, rather than commonality, is pursued further in **‘Translators as Mediators of Citizenship’** by Reiko Shindo. This paper caught my attention for its interest in how citizenship is practised through points

of *misunderstanding*, *partial* commonalities, even ignorance, rather than through a framework that assumes commonality. I am interested in this potential for how it reworks ideas about being-in-common, which necessarily go together with debates around citizenship (Closs Stephens and Squire 2012). It gets at some of the foundational questions for Citizenship Studies, such as what happens if we think about citizenship beyond something that presumes membership or status in a polity? What happens, for example, when we think about citizenship as something practised across frontiers (Isin 2012)? This article draws on Shindo's participation in labour union activities organised for migrants living and working in Japan. Critically, the article tries to consider 'what kind of relationality might be possible when we fail to understand each other?' (PAGE). Whilst we might think of translation as the task of better achieving understanding, this article upends this presumption. The translators in this case do not only *speak on the migrants' behalf*. Translation is presented as a relational practice, where moving between languages is accompanied with speculation, misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Shindo emphasises the ambiguities in this process, and exploits this to develop a different, account of community. Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's work, she suggests language is not self-contained, but works 'in the with'. That is, language emerges in the relation between what is spoken and what is heard. It therefore offers rich material for thinking about citizenship as involving a persistent effort at learning to speak and listen better, harder, and more carefully.

Finally, the article on '**Citizenship as status, habitus and acts**' by Tommaso M. Milani, Simon Bauer, Marie Carlson, Andrea Spehar, and Kerstin von Brömssen, utilises Engin Isin's formulation of citizenship as involving all these elements – status, habits and acts - to offer a critical reading of a civic orientation course— *samhällsorientering*, that is, citizenship classes for new migrants in Sweden. The authors analyse how power operates through these classes.

What is interesting and most useful here is how their focus on the everyday in these classes, leads them to reconceptualise resistance. Contrary to the image of agents acting coherently and with purpose, **they** invite us to consider resistance as involving plural, everyday, minor tactics. This includes laughter in class or using irony in response to a PowerPoint slide. This article offers a valuable contribution to current debates that seek to reframe resistance through the everyday. For example, in a valuable intervention for Citizenship Studies, they contrast Engin Isin's account of citizenship as an act that is intentional and volitional with anthropological critiques of intention, purpose, and consciousness (PAGE). In so doing, they expand our understanding of 'acts of citizenship' to include small-scale embodied practices involving low-levels of self-awareness (PAGE). Drawing on anthropologists, they suggest such acts typically avoid 'symbolic confrontation', but nevertheless involve objection, dissent, and disagreement. This aligns well with Sarah Hughes's work, where she asks whether resistance can take forms other than what is already *identifiable to us* (2020) as well as Reiko Shindo's work on considering resistance beyond a sovereign politics (2018). The challenge here is to consider the plurality of ways in which resistance and being political might materialise, including by refusing, enabling, repeating, interrupting, amplifying, dissenting, staying-with, encouraging, being present, and/or walking away.

What, then, is the force of an everyday analysis, made possible through this attention to language? Overall, we can draw three conclusions. First, we can say that this is not a lower order to that of a formal politics but entangled with it. A line spoken has affective force on account of how it echoes and bounces in an intimate public sphere, as part of a 'resonance machine' (Connolly 2005). But it is also made personal for us, in lines we hear from family members, neighbours, or friends. Secondly, foregrounding the everyday situates the political

as something we are already part of, and indeed, as something we are up to our necks in. For example, processes of inclusion and exclusion are not taking place from a sovereign point of authority *over there*, but *here* and all around us. As Debbie Lisle (2016, 22) puts it, ‘architectures of enmity’ operate in ways that ‘do not simply enrol and exclude particular bodies and populations, [but] also make themselves felt—and indeed, achieve their power—by enrolling and excluding objects, landscapes, infrastructures, atmospheres and materials’. Thirdly, it offers another approach to thinking resistance, which is mindful of all the ways in which are already implicated in power, but also keen to look all around ourselves, for what remains to do.

To all the contributors - congratulations!

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