

Making Sense of ESOL policy: Tutor Perspectives

Clare Courtney
University of Manchester, England

Article received 15 September 2016, accepted 4 October 2016, final version 23 January 2017
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.730>

Abstract

This paper explores tutor perspectives on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners in the UK. Government policy towards ESOL is increasingly driven by an ideology in which citizenship is conflated with the acquisition of English language skills. Underpinning this way of thinking are concepts of Othering and deficiency. My research aimed to investigate how tutors “make sense” (Spours, Coffield, & Gregson, 2007; James & Biesta, 2007) of ESOL policy in the UK, how this informs tutors’ attitudes towards English language learners, and to understand the potential impact that such attitudes could have on learners. The study demonstrates that tutors are influenced in their attitudes towards their learners by the persistent external issues of funding and the contradictory discourse implicit in ESOL policy. Such attitudes can have a tangible effect on learners.

Key words: deficiency, ESOL, ESOL teaching, Othering

Résumé

Cet article explore les perspectives des éducateurs sur les apprenants d’ESOL (anglais pour les locuteurs d’autres langues) au Royaume-Uni. La politique gouvernementale envers ESOL est de plus en plus guidée par une idéologie dans laquelle la citoyenneté est confondue avec l’acquisition de compétences en langue anglaise. Sous-jacent cette façon de penser sont des concepts du « Othering » (de l’Autre) et de la déficience. Ma recherche visait à examiner comment des éducateurs « rendent sens » (Spours et al., 2007; James & Biesta, 2007) de la politique envers ESOL au Royaume-Uni, comment cela informe leurs attitudes envers les apprenants et quel est l’impact potentiel des attitudes sur les apprenants. Cette étude démontre que les éducateurs sont influencés dans leurs attitudes envers leurs apprenants par les problèmes externes persistants de financement et le discours contradictoire implicite dans la politique envers ESOL. De telles attitudes peuvent avoir un effet tangible sur des apprenants.

Les mots clés: déficience, ESOL, enseignement d’ESOL, « Othering »

Resumen

Este artículo explora el punto de vista de profesores con respecto a hablantes de otras lenguas (ESOL en inglés) en el Reino Unido. Las políticas gubernamentales hacia la provisión de ESOL están cada vez más guiadas por una ideología en la cual la adquisición de nacionalidad está mezclada con la adquisición de habilidades en inglés. Conceptos tales como la Otredad y deficiencia sustentan esta manera de pensar. Este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar cómo los profesores “comprenden” (Spours et al., 2007; James & Biesta, 2007) la política ESOL en el Reino Unido y cómo ésta informa sus actitudes hacia los aprendices de inglés. El estudio también intentó entender el impacto en potencia que las actitudes de los profesores podrían haber tenido en los aprendices, demostrando que sus actitudes son influenciadas por las persistentes problemáticas de financiamiento y las nociones contradictorias

implícitas en la política ESOL. Dichas actitudes pueden tener un efecto real en los aprendices.

Palabras claves: deficiencia, ESOL, enseñanza del ESOL, ‘Otreddad’

Introduction

Immigration has always been a part of UK history, raising questions pertaining to language use and citizenship; in the contemporary climate, however, the topic has become the subject of heated debate. Even before the most recent cases of immigration, and the June 2016 referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union (EU), immigrants were under pressure to prove themselves of value in the new society. One way of assessing this is through individuals’ commitment to the acquisition of English language skills; this conflation between language learning and citizenship can be detected in much of government-funded ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision. However, underpinning such policy are ideologies which position immigrant learners of English as Other and draw on paradoxical notions that migrants are simultaneously deficient and “a threat” to society (Brine, 2006).

Having worked in various ESOL settings, I was interested in how the tutors themselves made sense of this “messy” (Hamilton & Hillier, 2009) area. Ball, drawing on Foucault, asserts that policy takes the form not only of text but of relations of power, which can be developed through “a production of truth and knowledge, as discourses” (1994, p. 21). Placing a focus on those who construct and occupy this area of ESOL is important in understanding the design of ESOL policy. Lederach explains that we do a disservice to the generation of knowledge within our professions when “we believe in the knowledge we generate but not in the inherently messy and personal process by which we acquired it” (2005: viii). My Master’s study, conducted in the summer of 2013 in language centres in a large city in northern England, thus aimed to investigate tutors’ perspectives on ESOL policy and how their understanding of it informs their attitudes to the English language learners they are teaching.

This current paper draws on interviews conducted with ESOL tutors. I firstly explore how some commentators conflate a lack of competency in English with an unwillingness to commit to notions of citizenship. I will also look at how migrants are frequently positioned as deficient. This is followed by a brief description of how the study was conducted, and the main findings of the data. I suggest that ESOL tutors’ attitudes to their learners can unwittingly echo those found in the wider societal discourse regarding migrants.

Language and Society

Migrants and migration are issues that dominate media and political debates surrounding British national identity (Cooke, 2006). Fuelled by the media, immigrants are often demonised (Ameli, Marandi, Ahmed, Kara, & Merali, 2007). They are portrayed as a drain on the economy (Doyle & Walker, 2011), to which they are however unable to contribute (Gillborn, 2010). Lacking knowledge and skills, they are characterised as “in ‘need of training’” (Brine, 2006, p. 651). There is thus a sense that immigrants are some sort of problem to be solved.

Aligned to the above is the issue of language: the linguistic needs of Britain’s more recent migrants have been/are framed by strong views regarding national identity and the English language (Cooke, 2006; Hamilton & Hillier, 2009; Conteh, 2012). The supposed relationship between poor language skills and lack of assimilation can be traced back to the Bradford Riots of 2001 (see: Blackledge 2000; Cooke 2008), following which Ann Cryer (then MP for a Leeds constituency) directly linked social unrest in northern towns to certain people’s lack of ability to speak English (BBC news, 2001). The link was also made explicit in the Community and Cohesion Report into the riots (Cantle, 2001), although this correlation was widely disputed (e.g. Han, Starkey & Green, 2010).

Following the Bradford Riots, the Home Office commissioned a report into integration, ‘Indicators of Integration’. The report set out to identify certain indicators which would point to an individual having become part of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2004). One of the key facilitating elements in this process was identified as “Language and cultural knowledge”; that is, an individual is said to have integrated when she has “sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge [...] to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship” (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 5). This in turn has fed into government policy on ESOL and learning. In order to become a naturalised British citizen (UK Border Agency, 2013), migrants have to take English language and sit citizenship tests about ‘Life in the UK’ (Gov.UK, 2013a). Although this may appear logical, with English being the main language spoken in the UK, the message here implies that the critical factor in validating ‘Britishness’ is possessing a command of the nation's dominant language and having a knowledge of selective aspects of culture. Accordingly, the motivations behind these compulsory tests and language programmes have been contested (e.g. Han et al, 2010; Goldsmith, 2008).

The association between language skills and citizenship pervades further through to

ESOL related government policy texts. In 2009, John Denham, then Secretary of State for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, stated:

Learning and using English demonstrates to the wider community an individual's commitment to adapting to life in the UK and enables them to make a productive contribution to the nation's economy (2009, p. 2).

Comments in the same vein were made in 2013 by Eric Pickles, then Member of Parliament for The Department for Communities and Local Government; Pickles suggested that a lack of English is detrimental to:

people's ability to integrate into British society; to participate in the life of their local community; to support their children through their education and to contribute to the wider economy. (2013, p. 3)

Two aspects of these remarks seem worthy of note. The first is the explicit association between linguistic competency and societal value. The second implicit message is that the sole responsibility for demonstrating societal worth lies with the individual, rather than it being a two-way responsibility (Goldsmith, 2008). It thus becomes incumbent upon each individual immigrant to acquire the requisite language skills needed to integrate and through this, express commitment to the host society and to contribute to the economy (Cantle, 2001).

Although ostensibly addressing linguistic competency, ESOL policy has become concerned not only with the provision of language classes, but draws on a deeper ideology whereby language acquisition is aligned implicitly with citizenship. Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge, and Tusting have described ESOL classes as:

Community based language teaching with the ethics of social integration for ethnic minority people planning to be long-term residents. (2007, p.10)

Two ideological positions may be identified as underpinning the wider thinking behind ESOL provision: the notion of the Other, and the idea of deficiency. This paper argues that even though tutors are sympathetic towards the learners in their classes, they are influenced by these two ideological positions.

Construction of the 'Other'

Said posits the notion of the Other is a "man-made" construct, created by discourses of imagined histories, ideas, and cultures (1978, pp. 4-5). The power of these forces is maintained by systems of communication. Thus, the construction of the 'Other' has been described as an external label (Skeggs, 2004), placed onto an individual to serve the outside which "generates coherence for the purposes of understanding control" (Benhabib, 2002, p. 5). Cherif argues that Othering occurs due to entrenched attitudes from the West, stemming

from a “refusal to accept plurality and to recognize that there exist other, completely different ways to see the world” (2008, p. 10). How the ‘Other’ is constructed is crucial in understanding where inequalities in the multicultural UK are generated and the negative impact they have on ethnic minority groups (Ball, *et al.*, 2002; Archer, 2008; Gilborn, 2010). People who do not fit into mainstream thought and categories of culture in a country are seen to be a threat to society (Brine, 2006). Within such a framework, the immigrant is thus seen as the ‘Other’ in British society. Drawing on such notions, Tate regards it as a given that learners in ESOL classes will have experienced elusive and “deeply ingrained” (1997: 234) forms of ‘Othering’ in their lives (Ball *et al.*, 2002; Archer, 2008). Integral to the process of ‘Othering’, is the positioning of language learners as deficient.

Deficiency

Deficiency is said to occur if individuals are expected to have a preconceived standard set of skills against which their ability and intelligence are measured (Barton *et al.*, 2007). However, by emphasising what an individual does not have, rather than acknowledging the set of skills and experiences she does have (Mehmedbegović, 2012), this notion may be seen as a form of ‘Othering’ (Conteh, 2012; Mehmedbegović, 2012).

In the context of ESOL, Barton *et al.* (2007) argue that the language used to describe *Skills for Life* learners in the UK reinforces a deficit view of such individuals. Mehmedbegović’s (2012) research also reveals the deficient terminology used amongst staff in primary education to describe students who have English as their second language. Such individuals are categorised as learners “with bilingual problems” or even “with no language” (2012, p. 68). Thus, not being able to speak English is seen as a deficiency, an attitude which is also reflected in tutors’ attitudes to adult learners. Here, linguistic resources or an individual’s “funds of knowledge” (Conteh, 2012), are considered to be of minimal value and are overlooked. Thus, while an individual may speak several languages, an ESOL learner could be regarded by ESOL tutors simply in terms of their apparently problematic lack of English language proficiency. It is important to note that not all ESOL teachers subscribe to such a view; the focus here is on those who, however, unknowingly, do so.

ESOL: a solution to the problem?

There is a long history of ESOL provision in the UK (see: Rosenberg, 2007); many changes have been made in regard recently both to the nature of ESOL and to the way in which it is funded (Refugee Council, 2011). However, this paper will focus on developments since

ESOL was incorporated into the government's *Skills for Life* strategy.

The association between ESOL and immigration can be seen in the way in which ESOL has been funded. Initially, rather than funding coming from the Department for Education and Science (DES), as might be expected for language classes, until 1998 ESOL funding came from the Home Office known as 'section 11' (Hamilton & Hillier, 2009). For Hamilton and Hillier, it was this that led to the "framing of ESOL as an immigration issue"; accordingly, ESOL "was treated as a social "problem" resulting from immigration rather than primarily as an educational issue" (2009, p. 4).

Several studies have explored the challenges ESOL face in terms of funding (e.g. Cooke, 2006; O'Leary & Smith, 2012). In more recent years, ESOL funding has become still more complex, demonstrating the contradictory nature of government attitude towards ESOL. For even as the government emphasised "the importance of English for integration", it "was simultaneously responsible for cutting funding for the very ESOL classes that would enable immigrants to meet this requirement" (Roberts, Cooke, Baynham, & Simpson, 2007, p. 20). Confusion over eligibility for ESOL funding has continued, as emphasised in the NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) Policy Briefing of 2011.¹ ESOL funding now falls under the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), which stipulates that free or subsidised classes, are also linked to achievement. According to the Skills Funding Agency guidelines for 2013-4:

Eligibility for funding is based on the idea that any learner, of any age, must be able to achieve the learning aim or programme of study within the time that they have available. (2013, p. 9)

This may be seen to put additional pressure not only on ESOL learners, but also their tutors when it comes to selecting eligible learners for exams.

In addition to this, how teachers redefine their professionalism is strongly influenced by the impact of funding, government policy and auditing (Shain & Gleeson, 1999). It affects their "economies of performance": choices, decisions and meeting targets in the workplace (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warne, 2002). Other research has reported extensively on the detrimental effects of funding on staff (Colley, James, & Diment, 2007; O'Leary & Smith, 2012).

Concern arises when tutors are also expected to be supportive and understanding of the many complex issues the learners face outside the classroom in regards to immigration, employability, health, social and economic issues and discrimination. Colley et al. touch on

the idea that external pressure that teachers face conflicts “with their own deeply held professional ethos of caring for their students” (2007, p. 175), raising a conflict of expectation between the tutor and the external policies placed upon them. Integral to the provision of ESOL are the tutors who are conducting the classes and who often take on additional roles: counsellor, social services advisor and advocate for the learners, amongst others (NRDC Roberts et al, 2004b). As Hamilton and Hillier note, not only do “ESOL teachers have to work within a cultural and political climate that is marked by racism and xenophobic attitudes towards newcomers”, but they also have to confront the predominant discourse through which ESOL is regarded i.e. “a compensatory education programme to aid the assimilation of immigrant communities into what is perceived as a traditionally monocultural, monolingual heritage” (2009, p. 4).

The study

Research Questions

The aim of the study was therefore to investigate how tutors understand ESOL policy and how ideologies underpinning this policy inform tutors’ attitudes to the English language learners they are teaching. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do ESOL tutors make sense of the thinking behind ESOL policy as defined above?
2. How do tutors make sense of ESOL policy through their attitudes towards the learners, and the decisions that they make as a result?
3. Does this making sense of ESOL policy by the tutors have an impact on the learner, and if so, how?

By *make sense* I mean to *mediate* and *translate* national policy and the messages surrounding it (Spours et al, 2007; James & Biesta, 2007). Mediation is used here as a general process by which actors on different levels interact with policy (Spours et al., 2007: 194); translation is used to refer to specific interpretative acts by either professionals or policy-makers within the general process of mediation (ibid). In this study, the aforementioned actors are ESOL tutors, while the processes of mediation take the form of the tutor’s interaction with messages surrounding a learner’s culture(s), her perceived abilities and the ESOL system in which they both operate. The acts of translation take the form of the tutor’s decisions made or attitudes generated as a result of this mediation.

This paper constitutes part of a wider ethnographic study of two Adult Learning Centres in a city in northern England, conducted in the summer of 2013. The participants

were Janet, Sally and Anne,² three ESOL tutors who worked at various Adult Learning Centres across the city. These teachers were selected because they were female, white, and their dominant language was English. Based on experience and relatively recent statistics (Lucas, Casey, & Giannakaki, 2004), these were typical characteristics of an ESOL tutor in adult learning centres across Britain at the time of the study.

The paper focuses on the data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews where scenarios were used as a starting point for discussion. While Sally was interviewed by herself, Anne and Janet were interviewed together. The three scenarios used were developed from a reflective journal written by the researcher during a 13-week ESOL project; the aim was to bring my own employment experience as an ESOL tutor to the research questions, process and analysis (Gunter, 2004). Three main themes started to emerge from the journal: personal ideas of culture, ESOL policy, and teaching methods. Drawing from the reflective journal, three fictional scenarios were then written to provide a framework for the interviews.

Emergent Themes

The analysis will be categorised loosely by the themes from each scenario and matched with the three research questions consecutively.

Incoherence

Tutors appeared to recognise the incoherence of policies surrounding ESOL, and the effect of such incoherence both on themselves and on learners. Anne admits:

It just feels like really hotch-potchy doesn't it? Like pulled in all different directions and no one's got really any clear ideas.

The tutors feel that the emphasis on ESOL being linked to employability restricts what they are able to teach. Janet sees the focus on employability as a “bone of contention”; she suggests that the pressure to teach particular vocabulary linked to employability, as well as having to get learners through the exam, restricts lesson time allocated for “improving” learners’ English for everyday life. Anne echoes this view:

If you're not improving their English, you're not improving the skills that they need to get a better job you know, so you are literally just preparing them for a job that they can do at their level.

Tutors therefore express sympathy with the position in which learners find themselves, and share their frustration with a system which they feel is similarly constraining for tutors. However, although they do not necessarily appear to make the wider connection, the way that

tutors view the learners is nonetheless shaped by wider policies. As Ball suggests, “we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies” (1994, p. 22). The tutors are often contradictory in their attitudes; something which may be argued to echo the incoherence of ESOL policy itself.

Deficient learners

The notion of deficiency as explored above is apparent in many of the tutors’ comments. All three tutors describe some of their learners as “weak” or “very very slow”, while Anne and Janet categorise learners as either “fast-tracks” (able), or “plodders” (not able) and having “poor literacy” skills. These comments appear to emphasise what an individual does not have, rather than the previous set of experiences they do have. Such experiences could be seen to include proficiency in their first language(s) (Mehmedbegovic, 2012), “gained at home or in a complementary school, or maths skills related to a specific cultural activity practised in the community” (Conteh 2012, p. 102). The idea of ESOL learners being compared to children (Barton *et al.*, 2007) is also evident in tutors’ comments. On one occasion, Sally compares the literacy skills of one of her learners to those of a child: she has the “literacy of a 14-year-old”, a comparison which is highly problematic. Not only does it disregard the possibility of very able teenagers, it also ignores the wide range of skills, knowledge and prior experience adult learners bring with them.

Ethnicity or Otherness

A tendency to infantilise ESOL students was also observed in tutor’s perceptions on learners’ beliefs. This following extract shows Janet reliving a lesson where she attempted to discuss homosexuality:

There was a lesson I did a few years ago [...] we were looking at. Gay ... lesbian ... transgender, [...] I don't know why I was doing all of this... maybe it was a week of equality and diversity [...] and one man did actually say: “I'm sorry [...] I can't stay for this, and I thought well ok yeah and he'd stayed for like 10 -15 minutes and was like no I can't...

This is Anne’s response to Janet’s story:

I think it's such a foreign concept – you know when I was like 10 or something and someone told me what lesbians were or something and I was like “really?!” and I think that... *they're at that level* do you know what I mean? (emphasis added)

Although Anne attempts to personalise the situation and try to understand it in a familiar context, she nevertheless places the man at “that level” of thought, suggesting that his views are undeveloped and child-like. In these conversations about fixed ideas of culture, tutors

unknowingly express attitudes that devalue ‘other’ viewpoints and appear to position learners as lacking more dominant, “high knowledge skills” (Brine, 2006), containing “liberal” “civilised” and “Western” ideas (Said, 1978; Cherif, 2008).

While the tutors appear to be complimentary towards the learners, they nevertheless appear to limit expectations for some learners. If students from certain ethnicities are successful language learners, this is seen as extraordinary. Archer argues that minority ethnic or ‘Other’ success is always positioned as “abnormal”, whereby a student is considered to be “achieving it in the wrong way” (2008, p. 101). Janet and Anne mention a student from Kurdistan who was “really good” and therefore an “exception” compared to other Kurdish learners. Shazma, a student in her 20s from Pakistan in the beginner-level class, is also seen as an “exception”.

This reveals a contradiction: Anne and Janet appear to doubt Shazma’s ability, while earlier Anne also shows recognition of what may be holding learners back, that is, the restrictive nature of language lessons. Thus, tutors may be seen to replicate and yet question the way in which ESOL policy positions learners as deficient.

Tutors’ attitudes also reflect the notion that a learner is supposed to take sole responsibility for her own learning (see: e.g. Brine, 2006). Sally appears to imply that her learners are putting the onus on the teacher to provide what they need, rather than contributing to their own learning. Tutors do not see their learners as very engaged with what they are learning, describing them as “very passive” (Janet), “taking what they can get” (Anne). Sally also appears to feel that students put the responsibility on teachers, something which she resents. The learners whom Sally feels are not “hard workers” and not achieving “very, very quickly” do not, in her view, deserve to be there:

I’ve seen people 3 years – stuck in E1 [beginner level]. We should you know – we shouldn’t really be giving them a chance really not taking it upon themselves to make progress.

This way of thinking is further echoed by Anne. When Anne is asked if her learners disclose any information about their experiences of discrimination in Britain or British culture, she asserts that “I don’t think people put themselves out enough for that to happen”. She elaborates:

I think they’re very very much in their own cultures because a woman asked me “oh could you give me advice on how to practise my speaking” and I said do you speak to any English people and she said no but I think she was expecting me to say read this book and do this grammar exercise and I said [...] why don’t you go to a toddler group, [...] that would be really good and actively do things with your children and

she was like “oh no” I said you could volunteer in a charity shop she was like “oh no” things like that that are so normal for us would be really difficult for them I think.

Anne acknowledges at the end that the different choices and decisions someone can make in Britain are so “normal for us” and that it would be “difficult for them”, but does not then make the connection that language could then be a potential barrier stopping learners from putting “themselves out enough”. Despite learner motivation and “investment and individual ‘agency’” (Cooke, 2006), such as when the woman approaches Anne for suggestions to improve her English, learners are still positioned as the problem, for not “putting themselves out enough”. However, whilst many ESOL learners may face a plethora of barriers that inhibit their language learning, tutors do not always appear to take external factors into account.

Potential impact on learners

While tutors may sometimes show themselves sympathetic towards their learners in acknowledging the challenges they face, their overriding assumptions regarding their learners can be seen to feed into a lack of expectation. Tutors often saw learners’ prospects as limited:

Sally: [R]ealistically in lots of cases with ladies who are in their sort of 50s, they're never going to – they're going to – be – literate. [...] They're never going to get to the stage where they are passing their level 1, level 2 exams.

Tutors seemed resigned to what they saw as the apparent inertia of their students. Janet explained:

There are people who have been in the system for years and years and just kind of stagnating and they're never going anywhere.

More than simply expressing a defeatist attitude, such negative assessment of students’ abilities to progress can have a direct impact on their futures. As mentioned previously, providers receive funding based on whether a learner achieves a certain level of English (Skills Funding Agency, 2013-14). This has a direct impact on tutor’s decisions. Janet explains here about other learning centres:

Janet: [S]ome people are also very selective over who they enter. For exams whereas I think maybe we perhaps bear towards –

Anne: Being generous.

Janet: Yeah and on a good day, if they’ve eaten a good breakfast, they might possibly pass.

Learners who are seen by tutors to possess the appropriate skills are the ones that tend to be

entered, as they have more chance of passing, securing funding.

Sitting English language exams is necessary not simply as a way of showing attainment in the language, but is tied to other aspects of an individual's civic life. According to the UK Border agency (2013), an individual must have attained Entry 2-3 English to be able to take the 'Life in the UK' test which allows them to apply for citizenship. Learners in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA), also rely on exams and qualifications to demonstrate their commitment to learning English and actively searching for work. Without proof of this commitment through the acquisition of an appropriate language qualification, job centre advisors may implement sanctions or withdraw benefits (Gov.UK 2013b).

It is therefore of concern that tutors have the power to decide whether a learner has the opportunity to take an exam. As mentioned earlier, all three tutors reflected the incoherence of ESOL policy and did not make the connection between barriers to learning and assumptions of ability, thus expressing attitudes of a link between learner ability and ethnicity. Because of this, certain learners could be positioned as "never" being able to learn, or "stagnating" due to their positioned deficiencies. As a result, learners perceived as 'Other' could be excluded from being selected for exams, and this could restrict their access to further opportunities.

Conclusion

Successive governments have made explicit the way in which English language skills are related to issues of social cohesion (Blackledge, 2005). The overarching aim of ESOL policy is thus to enable migrant learners to become part of British society, to support their families and show a commitment to the wider economy. However, this may be seen to be undermined by the ways in which ESOL learners are often framed as 'Other' and deficient, by both society and their tutors.

This study therefore implies contradictory perspectives. Tutors' comments suggest that they feel that learners have a choice to learn and progress, reflecting wider thinking implicit in ESOL policy whereby learners are seen as autonomous: when progress is not made, learners are seen as responsible for their own failures. However, little attention is paid to the knowledge which learners bring with them, including their linguistic repertoires and skills. Although it may be unintentional, tutors also appear to regard learners as 'other', suggesting that they are directly influenced by the thinking which underpins ESOL policy. Yet in contradiction to these findings, all tutors allude to a lack of learner voice, suggesting that learners in fact, did not have a choice.

This attitude also has an impact on learners' lives beyond simply not progressing in their English language skills. Exemption from exams can have a tangible impact on learners, given that progress in English language is seen as a sign of their commitment to becoming part of British society. Overall, a bleak picture of ESOL emerges from the study, with the paradoxes implicit in the tutors' comments suggesting at the deep incoherence in successive ESOL policies.

While the study on which this paper is based was conducted in the summer of 2013, many of the points remain relevant in a society where social values and knowledge of the English language are conflated. Arguably, in a new post-Brexit environment, such questions will only become more pertinent and the strains on ESOL teaching and the juxtaposition between language and citizenship in a post-Brexit will become still more complex and intricate.

References

- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2004). Indicators of integration: final report. Home Office Development and Practice Report Home Office. Retrieved from: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr28.pdf> Accessed 10-10-2015.
- Ameli, S.R., Marandi, S.M., Ahmed, S., Kara, S., & Merali, A. (2007). *British muslims' expectations of the government. The British media and muslim representation: The ideology of demonisation*. The Islamic Human Rights Commission. Wembley: Impeks
- Archer, L. (2008). The impossibility of minority ethnic educational 'success'? An examination of the discourses of teachers and pupils in British secondary schools, *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(1), 89-107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2008.7.1.89>
- Ball, S.J. (1994). *Education reform: a critical and poststructural approach*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3121942>
- Ball, S., Reay, D., & David, M. (2002). 'Ethnic choosing': Minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 5(4), 333-357. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3121942>
- Barton, D., Ivanic, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, H. and Tusting, K. (2007). *Literacy, Lives and Learning*. New York: Routledge.
- BBC News. (2001). 'MP calls for English tests for immigrants'. *BBC News Online* Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1436867.stm> Accessed 03-07-2013.
- Benhabib, S. (2002). *The claims of culture: Equality and diversity in the global era*. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Blackledge, A. (2000). *Literacy power and social justice*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Blackledge, A. (2005). *Discourse and power in a multilingual world*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brine, J. (2006). 'Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: those that know and those that do not—the discourse of the European Union'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(5), 649-665. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600895676>
- Cantle, T. (2001). *Community cohesion: A report of the independent review team*. Home

- Office. Retrieved from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14146/1/communitycohesionreport.pdf>
Accessed 05-11-2016.
- Cherif, M. (2008). *Islam and the west: a conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Colley, H. James, D. and Diment, K. (2007). Unbecoming teachers: towards a more dynamic notion of professional participation. *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(2), 173-193.
- Conteh, J. (2012). Families, pupils and teachers learning together in a multilingual British city, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(1), 101-116.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.638077>
- Cooke, M. (2006). “When I wake up I dream of electricity”: The lives, aspirations and ‘needs’ of adult ESOL learners. *Linguistics and Education*, 17, 56-73.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2006.08.010>
- Cooke, M. (2008). “What We Might Become”: The Lives, Aspirations, and Education of Young Migrants in the London Area’. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 7(1), 22-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348450701804698>
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2013). *Stage one prospectus: Community-based English language competition*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-based-english-language-competition-stage-1-prospectus> Accessed 28-09-2016.
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2001). *Adult core curriculum*. London: DfES. Retrieved from:
http://cdn.cityandguilds.com/ProductDocuments/Skills_for_Work_and_Life/English_Mathematics_and_ICT_Skills/4692/Centre_documents/Adult_ESOL_Core_Curriculum_v1.pdf Accessed 19-10-2016.
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. (2009). *A new approach to English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)*. Retrieved from:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121212135622/http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/corporate/MigratedD/publications/E/esol_new_approach.pdf Accessed 14-11-2016.
- Department for Education and Employment. (2001). *Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. Executive Summary*. Crown copyright. Retrieved from:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100210151716/http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/ABS_Exec_Summary_16pp.pdf Accessed 08-11-2016.
- Doyle, J., & Walker, K. (2011, August 4). “There ARE too many immigrants in the UK”, say seven in 10 Britons. *Daily Mail*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2022432/There-ARE-immigrants-UK-say-seven-10-Britons.html> Accessed 03-07-2013.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Gillborn, D. (2010). The white working class, racism and respectability: Victims, degenerates and interest-convergence. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(9), 3-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071000903516361>
- Goldsmith. (2008). *Citizenship: Our common bond*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from:
<http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2008/03/11/citizenship-report-full.pdf> Accessed 01-10-2016.
- Gov.UK. (2013a). *Becoming a British citizen - Life in the UK test* [Online]. Retrieved from:
<https://www.gov.uk/becoming-a-british-citizen/life-in-the-uk-test> Accessed: 03-08-2013.
- Gov.UK. (2013b). *Jobseekers allowance: what you’ll get* [Online]. Retrieved from:

- <https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/what-youll-get> Accessed: 18-08-2013.
- Gunter, H. (2004). Labels and labelling in the field of educational leadership. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 25(1), 21-41.
- Hamilton, M., & Hillier, Y. (2009). ESOL policy and change. *Language Issues*. 20(1), 4-18. Retrieved from: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc_library/edres/hamilton_07_esol_policy_and_change.pdf Accessed 08-11-2016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930701541758>
- Han, C., Starkey, H., & Green, A. (2010). The politics of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages): implications for citizenship and social justice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29(1), 63-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370903471304>
- James, D., & Biesta, G. (Eds.) (2007). *Improving learning cultures in further education*. London: Routledge
- Lederach, J.P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Lucas, N., Casey, H., & Giannakaki, M. (2004). *Skills for Life core curriculum training programmes 2001-03: characteristics of teacher participants*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) Retrieved from: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22481/1/doc_2831.pdf Accessed: 23-10-2016.
- Mehmedbegović, D. (2012). In search of high level learner engagement: Autobiographical approaches with children and adults, In D. Mallows (Ed.) *Innovations in English language teaching for migrants and refugees* (pp. 67-77). London: British Council. Retrieved from: http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/C328_Innovations_book_FINAL%202_web.pdf Accessed 28-10-2016.
- NATECLA (2016). *Towards an ESOL strategy for England*. NATECLA. Retrieved from: <http://natecla.org.uk/uploads/media/208/16482.pdf> Accessed 06-02-2017.
- NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) Policy briefing (2011). *Policy update: The impact on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners of the funding and eligibility changes*. Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22790/1/SN05946.pdf>
- O'Leary, M., & Smith, R. (2012). Earthquakes, cancer and cultures of fear: qualifying as a *Skills for Life* teacher in an uncertain economic climate. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(4), 437-454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.710545>
- Refugee Council Briefing. (2011). *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)*. Retrieved from: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0001/5853/ESOL_update_March_2011.pdf Accessed 25-10-2016.
- Roberts, C., Cooke, M., Baynham, M., & Simpson, J. (2007). Adult ESOL in the United Kingdom: Policy and research. *Prospect*, 22(3), 18-31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2006.08.003>
- Rosenberg, S. (2007). *A critical history of ESOL in the UK, 1870-2006*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Shain, F., & Gleeson, D. (1999). Under new management: changing conceptions of teacher professionalism and policy in the further education sector. *Journal of Education Policy*, 14(4), 445-462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026809399286288>
- Skeggs, B. (2004). *Class, self, culture*. London: Routledge.
- Skills Funding Agency (2013). *Funding rules 2013/4*. (Version 3). P-130330. Crown copyright. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sfa-funding-rules> Accessed: 07-08-2013.

- Spours, K., Coffield, F., & Gregson, M. (2007). Mediation, translation and local ecologies: understanding the impact of policy levers on FE colleges. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 59(2), 193-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820701342889>
- Stronach, I., Corbin, B., McNamara, O., Stark, S., & Warne, T. (2002). Towards an uncertain politics of professionalism: teacher and nurse identities in flux. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(1), 109-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930110100081>
- Tate, W.F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, 22, 195-247. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x022001195>
- UK Border Agency home office (2013). *British Citizenship*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship> Accessed 12-12-2012.

¹ Also, see NATCLA (National Association of Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults)

² All names are pseudonyms.

Author's information

Clare Courtney obtained her Masters in Education (International). She has worked in ESOL for over 8 years, and currently works as an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) lecturer in Manchester. Clare also works with women from migrant communities and runs her own social enterprise, 'Heart & Parcel'.

Email: clare@heartandparcel.org

To cite this article:

Courtney, C. (2017). Making sense of ESOL policy: Tutor perspectives. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 10(2), 25-40. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.730>

