

Sociolinguistics and immigration: media discourses in immigrant societies

Chambers (2003) categorizes immigrant countries according to settlement patterns (insular, transitional, immigrant-based) and speculates there may be correlates with certain linguistic and social attributes. This study builds on this idea by investigating discourses in media reports on citizenship tests in two countries with very different histories of immigration – the US and the UK. Citizenship tests are used as an obligatory step towards citizenship in an increasing number of countries. Media discourses around such tests are interesting as they highlight ongoing debates about national identity. Previous research on the discursive construction of the nation in the media has shown again and again that the media tends to construct an ideologically and culturally homogenous nation (van Dijk 1993, Blommaert & Verschueren 1998, Wodak 1999, Blackledge 2002, Bishop & Jaworski 2003, Ricento 2003). Although the specifics of such constructions may vary *within* a nation, they nonetheless tend to be visions of homogeneity. This presentation pursues the question of variability *between* nations, with a particular focus on the discursive construction of the nation in relation to immigration. It aims to detect the elements of nation and citizenship discourses in the US and the UK.

The data for this project derive from American and British ‘quality’ newspaper articles on a new citizenship test in each of those countries the day after such a test was announced. The presentation focuses on a content analysis, elements of discursive evaluation of the test and the role of the immigrants in these articles. Analysis suggests that in both countries homogenous nations are constructed in particular in relation to society and values, history, language and geographic territory. However, evaluative comments and the inclusion of the immigrants varies from country to country. It is argued that this is a reflection of personal and constructed histories as well as experiences with the idea of immigration which allows much more assimilationist discourses to emerge in US newspapers, while British newspaper articles are not focused on assimilation, but on a discussion of Britishness. These results will be related to Chamber’s (2003) framework and will be used to propose a finer differentiation of Chamber’s typology.