Social Exclusion and Reproduction of Asymmetry via Standard Language Ideology: A Stumbling Block for Immigrants

As a consequence of the influx of immigrants, work places in Canada have become increasingly multicultural and multilingual on the contrary to once homogeneous work places. According to Statistics Canada (2014), in 2011, 74.5% of Canada's foreign-born population was able to conduct a conversation in more than one language, compared to 36.6% of the total population. Furthermore, 54.6% could speak two languages and 19.9% had knowledge of at least three languages. In Canada, skilled immigrants consist of more than half of total intake of immigrants (Zaman, 2010). Economists highlight the importance of having a multicultural and multilingual work force in a country (Grin & Vaillancourt, 1997) although multilingualism is not facilitated and valued in state policies. Therefore, this conceptual paper investigates how language practices promoted in Canadian state policies impact integration of new immigrants in Canada. An extensive review of scholarly articles and government policy documents was conducted to analyze some of the state policies, which are directly or indirectly linked to language practices and social integration in Canada. The findings of the literature review suggest that certain Canadian policies endorse covert hegemonic linguistic constructions, such as linguistic imperialism, language standardization, and legislative bilingualism. Bilingual policy in Canada facilitates asymmetry through practices of language standardization, monolingualism, native speakerism, acculturation and the concepts of target language and culture. Consequently, many second language speakers of the two official languages of Canada seem to be subject to alienation and exclusion due to their racial, linguistic, and cultural differences. The Ontario Human Rights Code recognises language proficiency as a bona fide occupational requirement and recommends objective decisions on language proficiency based on standardized language tests. The standardized tests widely used in Canada, such as IELTS and TOFEL recognize and
validate British and American varieties of English and do not consider the fact that English is now a global language that may have different varieties based on various social, cultural and geographical factors. The notion of language standardization “perpetuates beliefs about one, stable, correct language variety that is a superior and, therefore, common sense dialect for school, business and public settings” (Davila, 2016, p.128). Moreover, the analysis of discourse used in Canadian Charter of Rights reveal underlying political ideologies, especially the super-ordination of the two settler languages of the nation state. The language standardization, and language imperialism lead to denial of immigrants’ legitimacy and belonging in Canada. Thus, it is clear that mainstream social spaces in Canada do not provide an inclusive and an impartial set up for non-English speakers although they are in possession of valuable professional skills. The paper finally suggests plurilingual strategies, such as the use of Lingua Franca English, developing receptive competence in a foreign language, and maximizing the communicative efficacy through mixing languages as ways to challenge language imperialism and attain efficacy, equity and equality of Canadian multicultural work settings and the society at large.

(493 words)

References


