

THE LANGUAGE DEBATES ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN FRANCE. IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION OR IMMIGRANT CONTROL?

Vicent Climent-Ferrando*

Quiconque met en cause la République attaquerait les principes même de la Nation, fille de la Révolution française... C'est précisément à cette équation qu'il faut résister. Interroger certains fondements de la République ne peut que l'aider à se séparer d'un héritage qui la plombe.

N. BANCEL. *La République coloniale. Essai sur une utopie.*

Abstract

This paper presents a discourse analysis of French language policies regarding the integration of immigrants. It traces the evolution of policy debates on language and analyzes how these have progressively mutated from immigrant integration to immigrant control, becoming the current dominant ideology and creating a linkage between these two previously separate domains. The paper empirically analyzes the compulsory language requirements adopted for immigrants seeking to enter France, or reside, be reunited with family or become naturalized there. It also conducts an empirical analysis of the rhetoric and narrative devices employed to invoke national myths, conventions, identities and values aimed at legitimizing this utilitarian approach to language. It concludes that this new instrument –language– reveals strategic thinking by the French political elites to use a politically accepted discourse –that of integration, participation and inclusion– to achieve the potentially objectionable and discriminatory outcomes of exclusion and control.

Key words: policy; immigration; integration; language; France; discourse analysis; debates; control; ideology.

ELS DEBATS LINGÜÍSTICS SOBRE LA INTEGRACIÓ DELS IMMIGRANTS A FRANÇA. INTEGRACIÓ IMMIGRATÒRIA O CONTROL IMMIGRATORI?

Resum

Aquest treball presenta una anàlisi del discurs de les polítiques lingüístiques de França relatives a la integració d'immigrants. Segueix l'evolució dels debats de política lingüística i analitza com aquests han mutat progressivament des de la integració dels immigrants al control dels immigrants, convertint-se en la ideologia dominant en l'actualitat i creant un lligam entre aquests dos camps anteriorment separats. Aquest treball analitza empíricament els requisits lingüístics obligatoris adoptats pels immigrants que pretenen entrar a França, residir-hi, reunir-s'hi amb la família, o naturalitzar-s'hi. També analitza de forma empírica el discurs i els dispositius narratius emprats per invocar els mites i les convencions, identitats i valors nacionals, destinats a legitimar aquest enfocament lingüístic utilitari. Conclou que aquest nou instrument –la llengua– revela un pensament estratègic per part de les elits polítiques de França consistent a utilitzar un discurs políticament acceptat –el de la integració, la participació i la inclusió– per assolir resultats potencialment criticables i discriminatoris de l'exclusió i del control.

Paraules clau: política; immigració; integració; llengua; França; anàlisi del discurs; debats; control; ideologia.

* Vicent Climent-Ferrando, policy advisor for the European Network for Linguistic Diversity in Brussels, a governmental network aimed at promoting lesser-used languages in Europe, vicent.climent@upf.edu

Article received: 16.12.2014. Review: 02.02.2015. Final version accepted: 26.02.2015.

Recommended citation: CLIMENT-FERRANDO, Vicent. «The Language Debates on Immigrant Integration in France. Immigrant Integration or Immigrant Control?», *Revista de Llengua i Dret*, núm. 63, 2015, p. 144-164. DOI: [10.2436/20.8030.02.97](https://doi.org/10.2436/20.8030.02.97)

Summary

Introduction

Theoretical framework, corpus and methodology

1 A socio-political account of the role of language on French debates on immigrant integration. Reinventing the Republican myth

1.1 The ideological underpinnings of the role of language in French debates and policies on immigrant integration. *À chaque parti son mot, a chaque mot son temps*

1.1.1 Inventing a new concept: l'intégration républicaine (2005-2011)

1.1.2 *L'assimilation*: Towards the postulates of the *Front National* (2011-2012)

1.1.3 The failed proposal of a new term: *inclusion* (2012-2014)

1.2 Analyzing the socio-political account of the role of language in immigrant integration

2 Legitimizing ideologies on language for immigrant integration

2.1 The recurring idea of *integration failure* as a justification to legitimate language measures

2.2 *Contre l'immigration subie, pour une immigration choisie*. The invented motto to instrumentalize language for immigrant control

2.3 *Communautarisme*: Blaming immigrants' lack of language skills for their isolationism in French society

2.4 Linking lack of language skills to a threat to National Identity

2.5 The European Union rhetoric as a legitimating resource

2.5.1 Referring to individual European states

2.5.2 Adopting an exclusionary interpretation of already-existing EU soft law within the framework of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union

3 Concluding remarks: Analyzing the language debates on immigrant integration in France: problematizing a never-existing problem

Bibliography

Introduction

Immigrant integration has become one of the most recurrent debates in contemporary France, which has witnessed a remarkable number of intellectual reflections, political and media debates over the past few years. Integration is depicted as one of the country's greatest challenges and political leaders of all sides recurrently call for the reformulation of the politics of integration, placing it at the top of the political agenda.

In these debates, language has occupied a prominent position. Depicted in political discourses as necessary, often under the rhetorical umbrella of a new "civic integration agenda", the past few years have witnessed an explosion of measures aimed at making language compulsory to enter, reside, reunite or naturalize. An increasing number of scholars (Joppke 2007, Guiraudon 2008, Carrera 2009; Hogan-Brun *et al.* 2009, Kostakopoulou 2010, Van Oers 2013, Azoulai & de Vries 2014) have pointed out the instrumentalization of language as a gate-keeping mechanism for immigrant control, being transformed into a regulatory technique for the state (Carrera & Atger 2011).

This paper traces the discursive evolution of the progressive instrumentalization of language for immigrant control, analyzing the ideological underpinnings and the rhetorical devices that have served to legitimize this exclusionary role. I will analyze how the alleged lack of language skills among the immigrant population has been artificially constructed by a particular party in power – the centre-right UMP –, and framed as an threat to the values of *la République* using the rhetoric inherent to the extreme-right wing *Front National* (FN). The analysis will show how this exclusionary approach has progressively become the current public philosophy on immigrant integration and how the attempts by the current party in government, the Socialist party, to break this dominant ideology have failed, bringing to the surface the deep ideological cleavage on immigration in France.

Theoretical framework, corpus and methodology

The analysis has been carried out through Thompson's Depth Hermeneutics, developed in Discourse Analysis, which allows us to provide a thorough analysis in three stages:

1) the socio-political analysis, which looks at the historical, political and social context in which debates are produced 2) the rhetorical devices and chains of reasoning used as legitimating strategies and 3) the interpretative phase, which is closely intertwined with the previous two.

As for the selection of empirical material, the corpus used for the analysis consists of six different sources:

- 1) Using the specialized search engine *Factiva*, I have gathered 364 newspaper articles and debates in French media dealing specifically with language and immigration over the period 2005-2014.
- 2) 44 official government speeches on immigration, integration and language by French Ministers and Prime Ministers.
- 3) 20 policy measures on language for immigrant integration.
- 4) 12 official reports and recommendations linking language to immigrant integration policies, mainly from the governmental advisory body *Haute Conseil de l'Intégration* (HCI).
- 5) 10 Government Annual Reports to the Parliament containing the strategic goals on immigration.
- 6) Five semi-structured interviews with senior government officials and minister advisors from three departments, the Department of the Interior, the Cabinet of Manuel Valls, former Minister of the Interior, and the Language Policy Department of the French Government.

The analysis of such a considerable wealth of information has been facilitated by the use of the software programme *Atlas.ti*, which has allowed me to code, categorize and systematize the recurrent references on language on immigrant integration debates in my corpus. The analysis has allowed me to interpret how, inserted in material practices of modulation and reproduction over time, the language debates on immigrant

integration in France have shaped a dominant ideology of immigrant control. Figure 1 below provides a succinct account.

Figure 1. Corpus and methodology

Process	Corpus
Data gathering	<i>Factiva</i> specialized search engine: 364 newspaper and media references on language and immigration 44 Government official discourses 20 legislative measures legislation on language and immigration derived from Parliamentary debates 10 Government yearly reports on immigration 10 Official HCI reports 5 semi-structured interviews
Coding	Codes assigned inductively from the corpus through ATLAS.ti software
Categorizing	Systematizing codes and establishing categories
Analyzing/ interpreting	Analyzing the recurrent categories in discourses on language

The period chosen for the analysis – 2005 to May 2014 – is not ascribed to chance: 2005 witnessed an outbreak of public reflection on the failure of immigrant integration due to the unprecedented violent riots across France. Along this period, lack of language skills has often been blamed as one of the reasons for integration failure. Not all political parties, however, have adopted the same rhetoric. Given that the period chosen has seen a party alternation in power – UMP and Socialists – the analysis will also serve to bring to the surface the ideological variation on the topic.

The paper is divided into three sections. Following Thompson’s framework, section one analyzes how the social and political conditions under which debates on language for immigrant integration are produced; section two provides an in-depth analysis of the rhetorical devices and chains of reasoning used to legitimate language measures. Finally, section three highlights the main conclusions derived from the empirical analysis.

The results are expected to provide a thorough account on how, followed through in a determined way and shaped relentlessly over time, France has adopted an exclusionary approach on immigrant integration through the problematization of language, turning it into a gate-keeping mechanism for immigration control, transforming it into the dominant ideology and making it part and parcel of the current French public philosophy on immigrant integration.

1 A socio-political account of the role of language on French debates on immigrant integration. Reinventing the Republican myth

The role language occupies in French politics on immigrant integration today cannot be fully understood without a succinct account of the political, economic and social context of the late 80’s. In his masterfully written account of France’s philosophy of integration, Favell (1998) attributes the passage from an unproblematized, pragmatic approach to immigrant integration to a discourse involving grand concepts of *la République*, identity and values to two specific moments in the early 90’s: the creation of the *Commission de la Nationalité* (1990-93) – established after an all-party recognition of the need to reflect on the new social, cultural and economic order of the 80’s – and the setting up of the *Haut Conseil de l’Intégration* (HCI) in 1989, the official advisory body on integration issues.

According to Favell, this frame was created to build an interpretative scheme locating immigrant integration policies as the “natural” product of French particularisms. The French public philosophy on immigrant integration was depicted as if it had always been dealt with within the same parameters of the ideas of Republicanism and citizenship, a theory “at pains to mask the recentness and artificiality of its construction and the incompleteness of the question it focuses on” (Favell 2001: 43).

Discourses were remarkably different before the 90’s, where there was no automatic link between integration and the grand ideas of Republican citizenship or national identity and where debates revolved more around socio-economic issues. Favell attributes this passage from a pragmatic, socio-economic approach to a symbolic, highly ideological strategy to three different political events taking place during the mid-80’s which laid the foundations of current discourses on immigrant integration: a) the growing power of regionalism, b) the decline of the nation as a source of social solidarity and c) France’s growing engagement in the European Union, perceived as a threat to centralized France.

All these issues would not have been problematized and framed in terms of grand symbolism – Favell argues – had not been for the emergence of the *Front National*, the party that adopted a well-prepared rhetorical line on blaming immigrants for the political and economic malaise of the country, exacerbating fundamental questions on national identity, a line politically attractive enough which would be progressively confiscated by the UMP to attract the far-right votes, as we shall see in the empirical analysis below.

This is how the reconceptualization of the French community took shape. With the aid of periodic reports by the HCI and the support of en-vogue intellectuals disseminating the new terms of the debate in the media, the new philosophy of integration rapidly gained ground. The new framework was mainstreamed, gaining pre-eminence in public debates on immigrant integration. As we shall see below, language was soon placed at the service of this new strategy.

1.1 The ideological underpinnings of the role of language in French debates and policies on immigrant integration. *À chaque parti son mot, a chaque mot son temps*

The infamous violent riots of late 2005 sparked an outbreak of public reflection in France on *le modèle français d’intégration* (Mucchielli 2006), in which the lack of language skills was blamed as one of the main reasons for failure. The number of references attributing failure to lack of language skills and the subsequent legislative language measures skyrocketed over the period 2005-2014, as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Language measures for immigrant integration in France (2005-2014)

	Date	Measure	Effect
1	January 2005	<i>Loi 2005-32 de la programmation pour la cohésion sociale</i>	Language proposed as a condition for residence
2	July 2006	<i>Loi 2006-911 du 24 juillet 2006 relative à l’immigration et à l’intégration</i>	Language becomes compulsory for residence through the signature of an integration contract (CAI)
3	May 2007	<i>Décret 2007-999 du 31 mai 2007 relatif aux attributions du ministère de l’immigration, de l’intégration, de l’identité nationale et du codéveloppement</i>	Creation of new ministry with the explicit tasks of setting language requirements for immigrants
4	November 2007	<i>Loi 2007-1631 du 20 novembre 2007 relative à la maîtrise de l’immigration, à l’intégration et à l’asile.</i>	Compulsory language requirements for family reunification
5	October 2008	<i>Décret 2008-1115 du 30 octobre 2008 relatif à la préparation de l’intégration en France des étrangers souhaitant s’y installer durablement</i>	Oral AND written compulsory language knowledge must be proven before entering France

6	December 2008	<i>Arrêté du 1 décembre 2008 relatif à l'évaluation dans leurs pays de résidence du niveau de connaissance, par les étrangers, de la langue française et des valeurs de la République</i>	Instructions on how to evaluate language knowledge in countries of origin
7	January 2009	<i>Circulaire NOR IMG900055 C: Dispositif de la loi 2007-1631 du 20 novembre 2007</i>	Instructions on how to apply the November 2007 law on compulsory language knowledge in countries of origin
8	Nov. 2009	<i>Circulaire sur le Débat sur l'identité nationale (2 nov.)</i>	Language in national identity debates
9	March 2010	<i>Projet de loi 2400 du 31 mars 2010 relatif à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité</i>	Proposal to raise compulsory language standards to obtain French nationality
10	May 2011	<i>Circulaire du 31 mai 2011 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration professionnelle</i>	Instructions to use language as a tool to keep immigrant workers (mainly foreign students) from working in France
11	June 2011	<i>Loi 2011-672 du 16 juin 2011 relative à l'immigration, à l'intégration et à la nationalité</i>	Language standards raised to obtain French nationality
12	August 2011	<i>Circulaire du 24 août 2011 relative au contrôle de la condition d'assimilation dans les procédures d'acquisition de la nationalité française</i>	Instructions on rigorous when granting nationality
13	October 2011	<i>Décret 2011-1265 du 11 octobre 2011 relatif au niveau de connaissance de la langue française requis des postulants à la nationalité</i>	Language standards raised to access French nationality
14	October 2011	<i>Décret 2011-1266 du 11 octobre 2011 relatif à la création d'un label de qualité « Français langue d'intégration »</i>	Specific language requirements needed to access French nationality.
15	November 2011	<i>Arrêté du 25 novembre 2011 portant définition du référentiel du label qualité « Français langue d'intégration »</i>	Privatization of language testing
16	January 2012	<i>Décret 2012-127 du 30 janvier 2012 approuvant la charte de droits et des devoirs</i>	Charter requesting that immigrants know French to become a French citizen
17	May 2012	<i>Press release canceling the 31 May 2011 Circulaire</i>	Easing criteria to grant work permits
18	October 2012	<i>Circulaire NORINTV 1234497C du 16 octobre 2012</i>	Easing criteria to interpret the June 2011 Law on nationality
19	February 2013	<i>Report La Grande Nation : Pour une société inclusive</i>	Revision of France's integration policies
20	November 2013	<i>Publication of 5 Reports:</i>	New proposals on language for immigrant integration

Source: own elaboration

Initiated by the UMP while in power, this “legislative frenzy” on language was an overt strategy to capture to capture the *Front National* votes by adopting its rhetoric and chains of reasoning. The evolution towards the exclusionary approach was achieved in three demarcated phases:

- 1.1.1 Inventing a new concept: *l'intégration républicaine* (2005-2011)
- 1.1.2 Confiscating the term *assimilation* from the *Front National* (2011-2012)
- 1.1.3 The failed proposal of a new term: *inclusion* (2012-2014)

1.1.1 Inventing a new concept: *l'intégration républicaine* (2005-2011)

Used since the early 90's as the consensus term by the mainstream French political parties, the term *intégration* began to be questioned in the early 2000's, giving birth to a new syntactic unit: *l'intégration républicaine*. Far from being a simple terminological mutation, the ideological implications of the new syntactic formula were simple: there is no conceivable integration other than the Republican one and, reciprocally, anything that is Republican is integrative. *L'intégration républicaine* expressed the dual obligation of integrating *and* respecting the Republican values: *liberté, égalité, laïcité* (Lochak 2006).

The *intégration Républicaine* considered language as the centre of gravity. Consecrated legislatively for the first time in the 2003 law on immigration, it would not be until 2006 that compulsory knowledge of language would be required to immigrants applying for residence within the framework of the compulsory *Contrat d'accueil et d'intégration* (measure 2 in figure 2 above): “This contract is the essential element of the new *intégration républicaine* that I have always wished for France, in which language plays a pivotal role”¹ –claimed the then president of the Republic J. Chirac, a similar tonality of the then Immigration Minister, N. Sarkozy, who claimed that “L'intégration républicaine is about learning the French language, about respecting the laws and the values of the Republic”².

The new politics on integration were the beginning of an ideological shift towards the postulates of the *Front National*, with a clear intention of occupying its electoral space. “My intention is to seduce the *Front National* voters. I will even attract them one by one...If the *Front National* has progressed, it's because we haven't done our job properly.”³ – overtly admitted N. Sarkozy in a press interview in 2006.

In the race towards this *lepenisation des esprits* (Geiser 2007), the instrumentalization of language as a gate-keeping tool became evident in the increasing number of measures justified under the constant invocation of *l'intégration républicaine*, aimed at making knowledge of language compulsory elements in all stages of the immigration process: residence (measure 2), family reunification (measures 4, 6 and 7), work permit (measure 12) and nationality (measures 9 and 11).

Far from being a concealed objective, the utilitarian approach to language was an explicit goal: “France must have the right to choose its immigration, reinforcing the quality of its border control, installing a true *intégration républicaine* based on our language, culture, history, and the respect to our national identity”⁴ claimed French Prime Minister F. Fillon after the approval of the 2007 law on making language compulsory for family reunification (measure 4).

To the compulsory language requirements, we must add the measures raising language standards in the name of *l'intégration républicaine*. The 2008 law (measure 5) specified that compulsory measures would not only be oral but also written in the countries of origin. Despite the apparently minor change, this measure entailed a significant step towards greater discretion granted to the authorities in the immigration control process. Around 20% of immigrants in France are illiterate in writing even if their command of spoken French is high,

1 Statement by J. Chirac, 26 June 2006

2 Statement by N. Sarkozy, 06 June 2006

3 Le Nouvel Observateur. *Sarkozy : J'irai chercher les électeurs du FN*, 29 June 2006

4 L'Humanité, 08 October 2007

as they come mainly from former French colonies⁵. Making *written* knowledge of language compulsory in the language tests made a remarkable number of immigrants non-eligible to enter the country.

1.1.2 *L'assimilation: Towards the postulates of the Front National (2011-2012)*

The race towards the votes of the *Front National* intensified exponentially in 2011. After the cantonal elections of April 2011, which witnessed a remarkable increase of the *Front National*, and a few months prior to the 2012 presidential elections, debates on language for immigrant integration skyrocketed in the public arena.

The idea of *intégration républicaine* began to progressively fade to give way to *assimilation*, the exclusionary term rejected in the 90's by the mainstream political forces for being the choice of the *Front National*. In an editorial on one of the most widely-read newspapers in France, *Le Monde*, the then Minister for immigration C. Guéant, justified the discursive mutation in these terms:

“France must offer the right conditions for a successful *integration*, read *assimilation*. The learning of French, the history of France and the rules to live together and, in general, our identity, are the indispensable conditions to this integration which, over time, leads to a successful assimilation. I speak of *integration* to refer to those who do not foresee to settle in France... I speak of *assimilation* for the rest, for those who come in our country willing to settle permanently... Assimilating is going beyond, it's about embracing our culture, about full participation in the social and cultural French life... I am expressing a true political choice. This is the choice that we want for the France of tomorrow”⁶ An overt declaration of intention towards the ideological postulates of the *Front National*.

The mainstreaming of the term *assimilation* intensified over the following months, prior to the 2012 national elections, which witnessed an exponential increase in language measures – six in less than six months (measures 10 to 15 in figure 2 above):

- a) Measure 10 on work permits, giving the instruction of “adopting a selective and quantitative approach” to immigration and instructing local authorities (*les préfets*) to grant work permits only if “sufficient knowledge of French was proven” – the word sufficient being left at the discretion of the authorities, instructed to be “rigorous in the selection process”.
- b) Measure 11 on nationality, modifying the evaluation system through which language knowledge is accredited. As pointed out by Lochak “this system introduced a new obstacle to access French nationality, especially those with a low literacy level and will also make the process longer and more expensive” (2013: 4).
- c) Measure 12 on nationality, instructing local authorities to carry out a rigorous control to grant nationality: “lack of linguistic assimilation can result in nationality being refused”.
- d) Measure 13 raising language standards to obtain French nationality, from A1 to B1 in the European Common Framework of Reference.
- e) Measure 14 creating a new compulsory language diploma (*Français langue d'intégration*, FLI) to access French nationality, managed now by private companies⁷ and infuriating universities across France, which denounced the instrumentalization of language for ideological and electoral reasons.⁸
- f) Measure 15, providing specific instructions on how to manage the FLI diploma.
- g) Measure 16, approving the Charter of Rights and Duties to become a French citizen, setting the rules with which immigrants must comply, including proof of knowledge of the French language.

⁵ Data provided by Immigration senior officials in the French Administration. See also Adami (2008)

⁶ *Le Monde*. *Quelle France pour demain ?* 31 May 2011

⁷ See C. Daadouch (2013)

⁸ Press release by French Universities: *FLIC? Le français, langue d'une intégration contrôlée*. 09 November 2011

The governmental discursive tonality became so close to that of the *Front National* that their discourses became indistinguishable during the 2012 presidential campaign.⁹

1.1.3 The failed proposal of a new term: inclusion (2012-2014)

The governmental change in 2012 entailed a major discursive break with the dominant ideology on language set by former UMP government. Soon after being elected, the new Minister for Immigration, M. Valls (current French Prime Minister, 2015) announced the softening of the measures¹⁰ to apply for nationality and withdrew¹¹ the 31 May Circular (item 11 in figure 2 above), which instrumentalized language to keep immigrants from working in France. Similarly, two highly symbolic key events exemplified this ideological turn: the closing-down of the *Haute Conseil de l'Intégration*, the former government's conceptual blueprint, and the publication of an overarching report - *La grande nation. Pour une société inclusive* (2013), also called the Tuot report (item 19 in figure 2), – calling into question France's previous policies on immigrant integration, including language. Five other thematic reports followed this overarching report (item 20 in figure 2).

Discarding the term *assimilation* as being associated to the ideological terrains of the *Front National*, the report also proposed to drop the term *intégration*– considered “too widely used with negatively connotations and devoid of content”¹² – and adopt the term *inclusion*, which, according to the report, is linked to the idea of participation.

The terminological break also came along with an ideological one. While recognizing the central role of the French language for immigrant integration, the report explicitly mentions the existence in France of multiple identities, cultures and languages – a radical discursive and ideological shift away from previous postulates which placed French, and only French, at the core of the debates. The public recognition of France's diversity, however, would be rather symbolic as the report itself rejects the idea of providing any kind of active support “France's linguistic diversity needs to be recognized, without necessarily providing any contributory recognition. Just because they exist and simply because of their presence on national soil”.¹³

These highly novel proposals breaking the dominant ideology were met with an intense contestation by the UMP and the *Front National*, which used the same discursive devices to attack the proposal. The UMP bluntly rejected the attempts by the Socialist to create a new policy framework on immigration: “The UMP will not allow the Socialists to break the Republic, our values, or culture and our language for ideological and political reasons... These proposals are an offence to Republican assimilation”¹⁴ was stated in a press release, fully coinciding with the *Front National's* ideological reasoning in their 2014 electoral programme.¹⁵

1.2 Analyzing the socio-political account of the role of language in immigrant integration

Thrown strategically centre-stage in electoral campaigns and depicted as *the* national problem, compulsory language requirements have shaped the dominant discourse on immigrant integration, becoming the obsession of past UMP governments. This ideology has become dominant, and the current socialist government has been unable to break. The socio-political analysis has shown the utilitarian, exclusionary approach to language for immigration control with the goal of winning the votes of the *Front National*, which has immigration as one of its founding principles. The sentence *À chaque parti son mot, à chaque mot son temps* succinctly summarizes the political dynamics of contemporary French policies on immigrant integration.

9 See the proposals by all the political parties: France/présidentielle: *grandes propositions des candidats en matière d'immigration*, 22 April 2012

10 See *Circulaire* NOR INTK1229185C, 28 November 12

11 See Press release of 31 May 12

12 *La Grande nation. Pour une société inclusive*, p.12

13 Report *Connaissance – Reconnaissance*, November 2013 p.4

14 UMP Press release, 17 December 2013. <http://www.u-m-p.org/actualites/argumentaires-infographies/argumentaire-integration-la-gauche-ouvre-la-porte-au-102861812>

15 See 2014 electoral program <http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/autorite-de-letat/immigration/>

What emanates from this socio-historical analysis is the highbrow rhetoric and grand symbolism attached to language in integration debates, showing a remarkable gap between the dominant discourse and the empirical data. Despite being traditionally an immigration country, figure 3 below shows that the influx of immigrants into France has been somewhat steady.

Figure 3. Number of entries in France (2005-2012)

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
New arrivals	221 700	223 100	215 700	218 700	218 900	229 100	238 400	250 800

Source: Report *Estimer le flux d'entrées sur le territoire à partir des enquêtes annuelles de recensement*. French Institute for Statistics, INSEE, June 2014.

In terms of knowledge of language, French has never been a major problem for immigrant integration. Figure 4 below shows that, on average, more than 75% of immigrants applying for residence already have sufficient knowledge of French, given that a significant part of immigrants come from former French colonies, where French is still an official language and the language of instruction in education.

Figure 4. Evolution of the Contrat d'Accueil et d'Intégration, CAI (2007-2012)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of audited people	101 770	104 336	99 402	103 574	105 109	104 401
Number of people signing contract	101 217	103 952	97 736	101 355	102 254	101 368
% of people signing the contract in relation to audited people	99,5 %	99,6 %	98,3 %	97,9 %	97,3 %	97,1%
Number of people registered in civic training	99 705	102 441	95 720	97 252	95 252	99 632
Number of language training registrations	26 121	22 338	21 802	24068	24 358	24365
% of language training courses followed by immigrants having signed the CAI	25,8 %	21,5 %	22,3 %	23,7 %	23,8 %	24,0%

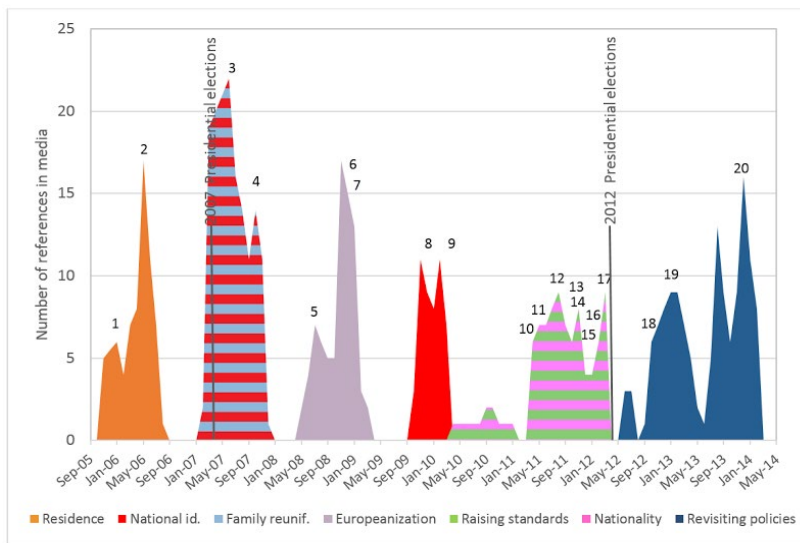
Source: Data from French Ministry of the Interior (2013)

The grandiloquent discourses on language, depicted as one of France's greatest integration problems, do not therefore correspond to the factual data on real language needs by immigrants. Why has language become such a salient issue in the French politics on immigrant integration? What rhetorical devices have been used to instrumentalize language for immigration control? How has the new ideological paradigm been mainstreamed, legitimized and institutionalized, to become the current public philosophy on immigrant integration? Why have the recent attempts to break the exclusionary dominant framework failed? Section 2 below seeks to provide answers to these questions.

2 Legitimizing ideologies on language for immigrant integration

The corpus compiled has allowed me to trace the discursive evolution of how the exclusionary approach on language has progressively taken shape as well as to identify the rhetorical devices and chains of reasoning used as a legitimating strategy. Figure 5 below illustrates graphically this evolution, and contains information on three specific aspects: 1) the intensity of the debates, measured through the number of references appearing in media, official speeches and reports, showcased along the Y axis; 2) the tangible materialization of discourses: the 20 concrete language measures (numbers 1 to 20) further explained in figure 2 above, and 3) the dominant topic thrown at specific periods, highlighted in different colors in the graph, which provides a bird's-eye view of how the different discursive elements that have shaped the dominant discourse at specific moments. The graph also highlights the specific electoral periods in 2007 and 2012 so as to better illustrate the instrumentalization of language in (pre) election campaigns.

Figure 5. Discursive evolution of language in French politics on immigration



Source: own elaboration

The dynamic, fluctuating evolution of language debates, modulated and reproduced over time, has allowed me to identify the five main narrative features that have been recurrently used in the dominant discourse to legitimize the instrumentalization of language for immigrant control:

2.1 The recurring idea of *integration failure* to legitimate language measures

2.2 *Contre l'immigration subie, pour une immigration choisie*. [Against suffered migration. Chosen migration] The invented motto to instrumentalize language for immigrant control.

2.3 *Communitarisme*: Blaming immigrants' lack of language skills for their isolationism in French society

2.4 Linking lack of language skills to a threat to *national identity*

2.5 The European Union rhetoric as a legitimating resource

2.1 The recurring idea of *integration failure* as a justification to legitimate language measures

“French people know that the violent riots in our *banlieues* last fall [referring to 2005] are linked to the failure of our immigrant integration policy... Allowing a large number of immigrants to enter France without giving them the necessary means leads to explosive situations. How can we expect them to integrate if they do not speak a word of French”.¹⁶, stated Minister of the Interior Sarkozy to legitimate the first law making language compulsory for residence (item 2 in figure 5 above).

What began to crystallize was not so much the idea of *failure* itself – an argument often used in French discourses on integration¹⁷, but linking failure to the lack language skills. Invoked for the first time to legitimize the 2006 Law making language compulsory, the notion would be constantly invoked to justify further measures on language in all stages of the immigration process.

Of particular relevance is the high number of references in press, official speeches and reports linking language to family reunification, depicted as necessary to avoid integration failure (see measure 3 in figure 5 above): “The French integration system has failed... We must give a response to the French people, who are asking us to manage migration flows to preserve the balance of our national community.... Language

¹⁶ Speech by N. Sarkozy 02 May 2006

¹⁷ See the epic discourse of French Prime Minister on the Constitutional reform due to immigrant integration failure on 14 October 2002. Available at <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/027000276.html>

is the best tool for integration...Immigrants must not wait until they arrive in France to learn the French language”¹⁸.

Thrown in the months prior to the 2007 electoral campaign, the number of references on language skyrocketed, as shown in figure 5 above. Along with the idea of failure, discourses revolved around mass migration pouring into France, immigrants being poorly qualified and unable to speak French, as stated by the then Immigration Minister Sarkozy: “Against any logic, we have accepted an increasing number of immigrants for family reunification purposes, which heavily unbalances our labor market, allowing foreigners in our country who are for the most part little qualified and poorly integrated...I want those immigrants applying for family reunification to take a language test in our consulates to prove proper knowledge of French”¹⁹. The law was justified as necessary by UMP spokesperson, Y. Hugo, as “I witness on a daily basis the tragedies of hundreds of families in which one of the parents does not speak or practice French.”²⁰, an argument hard to sustain empirically as shown in figure 4 above.

The idea of *failure* was discursively symbolized in the high unemployment rates among immigrants, attributed to their low level of French. This reasoning was used to justify the compulsory nature of measures and the raising of language standards, as succinctly summarized in the Minister’s 2009 speech on new immigrant integration guidelines:

“The language level required in France is relatively low and this undoubtedly constitutes a real handicap to access the job market. This largely explains the fact that 93% of women who have applied for family reunification do not have any activity in France. This situation is unacceptable. I have asked the Directorate for Immigrant integration and Citizenship to consider raising the language level in all four phases of the so-called *parcours d’intégration* “integration path”: in the countries of origin, within the framework of the CAI, to obtain the residence permit and in the naturalization process”²¹.

Other than from an ideological standpoint, these tenets are hardly justifiable empirically. If language is compulsory for family reunification, residence and nationality – often becoming a triple hurdle – if language standards are raised and if more than 75% of immigrants applying for residence permits do not need any language provision, as shown in figure 3, one wonders how the high unemployment rates among immigrant population can be attributed to lack of language skills.

Resorting to *failure* was to take a U-turn in 2012 with the new Socialist government in power. Rather than attributing it to the lack of language skills, the the 2013 Tuot report revisiting France’s integration policies (item 19 in figure 5) openly admitted *failure* but not due to lack of language skills by immigrants, but rather because of the erroneous attribution of failure to language, a non-existing problem: “Reducing integration to language has been one of our problems, both intellectual and operational, of the past politics of integration”²². The report overtly admitted that “language is not a problem. Even in the best years, it only concerned less than one third of the immigrant population”²³. Despite these recommendations, however, the Socialist government has maintained the compulsory nature of language tests.

2.2 *Contre l’immigration subie, pour une immigration choisie*. The invented motto to instrumentalize language for immigrant control

“*Contre l’immigration subie, pour une immigration choisie*... France must be able to choose the number of immigrants it hosts, according to its objectives and conditions... *Immigration choisie* means, above all, the possibility to set the quantifiable objectives, and to determine the composition of migration flows in the best interest of France”²⁴.

18 Speech by Minister for Immigration, C. Guéant, 18 September 2007

19 Speech by Minister for Integration and subsequent Prime Minister, N. Sarkozy, 05 March 2007

20 Agence France Presse, 04 July 2007

21 Speech by Immigration Minister E. Besson, 21 January 2009

22 *La Grande Nation. Pour une société inclusive*, 2013 p. 50

23 *Op.cit.*

24 Speech by N. Sarkozy, 02 May 2006

The idea of selecting only immigrants that serve the interest of France was an overt objective of the UMP government from the very outset, discursively crystallized through the invention of the motto *Contre l'immigration subie, pour une immigration choisie*. Recurrently repeated to justify legislative measures adopted, this utilitarian approach was found not only in government speeches but also in countless reports, commissioned by the government itself to “profoundly revisit the French immigration policy to better manage migration flows and favor *une immigration choisie*”²⁵, which left no doubt on the ideological path France had initiated: “a more efficient selection system distinguishing immigrants who are more determined to integrate in France must be put in place”²⁶, proposed the influential Milhaud report.

If immigrant selection was the goal, language was the instrument: “we must select future newcomers, better prepared for integration and fewer in number, through language tests”²⁷, concluded the report. The official reaction to these recommendations was a clear declaration of intentions of what was to follow: “This report represents a decisive point in our immigration policy. Its application shall be one of the State grand priorities of this government in the field of integration.”²⁸

The instrumentalization of language to select immigrants was to be the main rationale in France’s integration policies over the period 2005-2012, becoming the dominant discourse through the persistent use of the motto. The new aspect in this discursive line was not so much the utilitarian approach to language, often used in immigration strategies of many states (see Van Oers 2013, Kostakopoulou 2010, among others) but the fact that reducing the number of immigrants through language measures was an explicit objective.

The idea of selecting migration was met with fierce opposition not only by the left-wing political spectrum, immigrant associations and NGOs²⁹ alike but also by the Catholic Church. During the months prior to its approval in 2006, the Church expressed high concerns on the law, labeling it as utilitarian, arguing that “the law considers immigrants as mere laborers and not human beings”³⁰. The intensity of the debates – illustrated in figure 5 by the high number of references around this measure (item 2) – forced the Minister of the Interior to state that “the Church is in its role to insist on the need to respect the dignity of people. I have therefore accepted to amend the draft bill and incorporate certain remarks”³¹. This modification did not include, however, any modification on language, which remained compulsory.

The constant invocation of the motto was to serve to legitimate further measures: “Our first goal is to manage immigration quantitatively. New instruments will allow us to better regulate migration flows. From now on, the Government will define each year in a report to Parliament the number of immigrants France wishes to host”³². If bringing numbers down was the goal, language was, again, one of the main instruments: “our ultimate goal being to better manage family reunification flows, you have now two new tools at your disposal: DNA tests and language tests”³³ instructed Minister for Immigration B. Hortefeux to all ambassadors of France when presenting the 2007 family reunification law, a measure that sparked high controversy and contestation due to its discriminatory, utilitarian nature.

Invented to legitimize the 2006 law on residence and used exponentially to justify the 2007 law on reunification, the motto would also be the narrative feature used to justify the measures raising the language standards (items 9, 10, 11 and 12 in figure 5): “We need to continue to better control access to French nationality... The level of French language required to access nationality has been raised because naturalization consecrates, for those who wish so, the end of the integration and assimilation process into our society”³⁴.

25 Government Mission Letter to expert C. Milhaud, 15 December 2005

26 The Milhaud report. *L'intégration économique des immigrants*, September 2006 p.12

27 *Op.cit.*

28 Speech by Immigration Minister N. Sarkozy 05 October 2006

29 AFP. *L'Assemblée rend obligatoire le contrat d'accueil et d'intégration*, 04 May 2006

30 Sud-Oest. *Les Églises s'inquiètent*, 25 April 2006

31 Speech by Immigration Minister N. Sarkozy, 02 May 2006

32 Speech by Immigration Minister N. Sarkozy, 06 June 2006

33 Speech by Immigration Minister B. Hortefeux, 28 August 2008

34 Speech by Immigration Minister C. Guéant, 03 March 2012

It did not take long to achieve the expected results: family reunification permits went down by more than 35% (as shown in figure 6 below), and the same trend followed by work permits, down by 26%, and nationality permits, down by 30% in 2012³⁵.

Figure 6. Evolution of family reunification permits (2005-2011)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Family reunification permits	22 990	19 419	18 950	17 304	15 166	15 589	14 998

Source: French Ministry of the Interior (2012)

This utilitarian line intensified during the 2012 election campaign, used indistinctively by the UMP and the *Front National*: “the idea is to go down to the immigration figures of the 90’s” stated Immigration Minister C. Guéant, an idea also highlighted by Prime Minister Sarkozy when he stated that “we must reduce the number of immigrants by half”³⁶ in which reference to the idea of “sufficient knowledge of French” was recurrently invoked, the same rhetoric used by the *Front National* in their campaign³⁷.

Opposing this utilitarian approach, the new Socialist government withdrew the 31 May 2011 Circular limiting work permits³⁸ to foreign students (item 10) and eased the conditions to grant nationality (item 19), but maintained, however, the compulsory nature of language tests.

2.3 *Communautarisme*: Blaming immigrants’ lack of language skills for their isolationism in French society

French rhetoric has often used the term *communautarisme*, a French concept, roughly translated as *isolationism*, coined in the mid 90’s by the *Front National* to portray immigrants’ unwillingness to assimilate. This term insufflates a certain ethno-nationalist ideology aimed at sustaining the nation-state and serves to introduce any issue in public national debates on immigration under the threat of having the enemy inside (Dhume 2010: 1), an idea fully captured by the discourse of the Minister of the Interior: “Immigrant communities organize themselves against *l’intégration Républicaine* to engage in endogamic practices”³⁹.

Portraying immigrants as the enemy inside and agitating the fear thorough the idea of *communautarisme* was to become a recurrent narrative device in immigrant integration debates. The idea was simple: language must be compulsory to prevent immigrants from remaining isolated from *la République*, as shown in the speech by Immigration Minister to justify the 2007 family reunification law: “If we want to prevent immigrants from remaining isolated in their communities and in their languages of origin, we must give them the possibility to learn French when they decide to immigrate to France... Imposing a language test on family reunification candidates will help us fight *communautarisme* and compensate those immigrants willing to make an effort to really integrate. Those refusing to take the test or refusing to follow the training language courses will not enter France”⁴⁰

Language was depicted as necessary to “facilitate contact and access to an active life, rather than to remain isolated in their communities”⁴¹ and measures were justified because of the “high concerns raised by the resurgence of certain *communautarismes*”⁴², as it was claimed to legitimate the need for a national identity debate in 2009, causing a public stir as shown in the high number of references around these debates (item 9 in figure 5 above). “The government wants a society in which there is no *communautarisme*. Immigrants in our country must adopt customs and respect our laws. When immigrants do not regularly attend our

35 Le Jeudi ,10 January 2012

36 Le Point, 6 March 2012

37 Available at <http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/autorite-de-letat/immigration/>

38 Government Press Release, 31 May 2012

39 Cited in Lochak (2006)

40 Speech by Minister for Immigration, C. Guéant, 18 September 2007

41 Le Figaro. *Le français obligatoire pour les candidats à l’immigration*, 30 October 2008

42 *Circulaire* of 2 November 2009 NOR : IMIK0900089C

language and integration programmes, our legislation foresees sanctions”⁴³ was the discursive line used in the 2012 election campaign. Invoking constant fear was an extremely useful rhetorical device to legitimize the language measures.

In the legitimating process, the government also resorted to the rhetoric of the HCI to further legislate its actions making reference to *communautarisme*. In the 2010 report *The Challenges of Integration in Education* (2010) on integration and schooling, the HCI proposed the suppression of mother-tongue instruction (ELCO), as it considered to have negative consequences for children⁴⁴, concluding that “by promoting mother tongues, students risk becoming detached from the Republican values while the mission of schooling is to bring them closer to them. ELCO can lead to *communautarisme*... The HCI proposes the elimination of the teaching of languages and cultures of origin as they seem to go against the objective of integration”⁴⁵.

The attempts by the new Socialist government – through the expert reports published in November 2013 – to break this dominant language ideology, not only by omitting reference to *communautarisme* but also recognizing France’s linguistic diversity, sparked a heated reaction (measure 20). The new government was accused by the UMP and the *Front National* alike of attempting to dismantle *la République*. “This report breaks the Republican assimilation model and considers *communautarisme* as the new French model. I cannot accept that our language, French, be put at the same level as the rest of the languages”⁴⁶ stated UMP spokesperson A. Jupé, the same discursive reaction as the *Front National* leader Marine Le Pen, who claimed that “this will mean the end of the Republican model and the putting in place of an ultra-*communautarized* society”⁴⁷.

Representing an abrupt rupture of the dominant ideology, the ideas proposed in the reports caused such a stir in French politics – as perceived in the high number of references around the publication of the report (item 20 in figure 5) that the French President, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration had to come up front stage to clarify the Government’s official position: “this is not the official Government position”⁴⁸ unanimously claimed the three members of government. The attempts to break the dominant discourse and introduce new elements such as the idea of multiple languages and identities had utterly failed.

2.4 Linking lack of language skills to a threat to National Identity

“We are the only country where a small intelligentsia considers that we have no right to talk about national identity... France is going through an identity crisis, and I don’t want the extreme right to monopolize the national identity issue”⁴⁹. This is how, in the 2007 presidential election campaign, the Minister for Immigration and candidate to the Presidency of France, N. Sarkozy, tactically threw the issue of national identity into the public arena. While it is true that the subject had already been inserted in past discourses (Martigny 2009), it adopted an unprecedented scale during the campaign, as exemplified in the remarkably high number of references in public debates shown in figure 5 during the 2007 campaign.

Throwing in the issue of national identity was justified as a need to break the monopoly of the *Front National* over this issue. As highlighted by Martigny, “evoking the subject of national identity crisis was, up until then, *to play by the rules of the Front National*” (2009: 23). The UMP strategically used this issue in the 2007 campaign, confiscating it from the *Front National* and inserting it in its ideological repertoire.

As pointed out above, the idea of using national identity as a legitimating tool and linking it to immigration debates had one single goal: winning the votes of the *Front National*, as expressed by the then candidate to the Presidency F. Sarkozy: “If we didn’t have the national identity issue, we would be behind Ségolène

43 Le Parisien. *Guéant prône l’assimilation*, 18 November 2011

44 HCI, *Les défis de l’intégration*, 2010, p.27

45 HCI, *op.cit.*, pp.29-30

46 UMP Press release, 13 December 2013

47 Libération, *Vives réactions après l’exhumation d’un rapport sur l’intégration*, 13 December 2013

48 Le Parisien, *Intégration : «Pas du tout la position du gouvernement», tranche Hollande*, 13 December 2013

49 Le Figaro. *Identité nationale : Sarkozy persiste et signe*, 14 March 2007

[Royal, the Socialist candidate to the Presidency], We have reached the *premier tour*. If I have obtained 30%, it's because we have Le Pen's voters. If they leave me, we go down"⁵⁰.

The 2007 electoral promises soon translated into two ideologically charged actions: the creation of the Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development in 2007 (item 3) and the creation of the Grand Debate on National Identity in 2009 (item 8), two measures that met not only with the fierce contestation of the rest of the political spectrum⁵¹, excluding the *Front National*, but also renowned scholars and members of the UMP themselves such as Simone Veil.⁵² An illustrative example of the heated debates is the remarkably high number of references during this period, as shown in figure 5 above.

Language occupied a prominent position in the legitimating strategy: "National identity is, above all, about language"⁵³, stated Immigration Minister B. Hortefeux. The idea of lack of language skills posing a threat to French identity was added to the government's argumentative repertoire to legitimate the compulsory nature of language in the 2007 law on Family Reunification (item 4) under the pretext of "preparing immigrants to better integrate them when they arrive in France as they need to respect France's identity, history and values"⁵⁴, a highly controversial position, contested by left political spectrum, immigrant associations and NGOs alike.

The same discursive line was replicated at the end of 2009, when the government launched the "Grand Debate on National Identity"⁵⁵. From November 2009 to January 2010, 350 public debates across France were held, and an online platform was created, with some 750 000 visits and more than 58 000 contributions⁵⁶, an idea heavily contested by all the other political forces⁵⁷, excluding the *Front National*.

The results of the debates illustrate the high importance attached to language in these debates⁵⁸: "96% of those who participated considered language as one of the most important elements in the representation of France"⁵⁹, an idea confirmed by the TNS Sofres opinion poll, which concluded that "90% of French people consider that the level of French and of the Republican values demanded to acquire nationality must be raised"⁶⁰.

Used as a thermometer to measure the opinion of people and a legitimating tool, these opinion polls became the perfect excuse to continue legislating on tougher language measures: "I am going to propose that language play a determining role in acquiring French nationality"⁶¹, the discursive line adopted by the then Minister for Integration E. Besson that soon translated into the subsequent 2010 Law on Nationality toughening language standards (items 9 and 11). And "more measures will be proposed in the months that follow now that the question [of French national identity] is no longer a taboo"⁶². The high number of measures passed in 2011, as shown in figure 5, represents the tangible materialization of these ideological intentions.

The strategy of discursively confiscating the subject of national identity to the *Front National*, skillfully mainstreaming it and placing it at the core of national debates on immigrant integration, and artificially elevating it to the category of "national problem" had been completed. The UMP invoked the highly symbolic and ideological questions of national belonging and the integrity of France, mixed with the idea of threat to

50 Cited by L. Joffrin (2007)

51 Le Figaro, *Seriez-vous choqué par la création d'un ministère de l'Immigration et de l'Identité nationale?*, 16 March 2007

52 L'Humanité, *Nouvelle provocation de Nicolas Sarkozy*, 19 March 2007

53 News Press, *Pourquoi un ministère de l'Immigration*, 04 June 2007

54 L'Humanité : *Un « détail » lourd de symboles*, 08 October 2007

55 See Circulaire of November 2009 Ref: IMIK0900089C

56 L'Express. *Fillon enterre l'identité nationale avec des mesurètes*, 08 February 2010

57 Of special relevance is the press release published by the Socialist Party denouncing the instrumentalization of national identity for electoral reasons on 03 November 2009

58 See C. Jeannot *et al.* (2011)

59 Bulletin Quotidien *Un séminaire gouvernemental autour du Premier ministre François FILLON pour un «point d'étape» dans le débat sur l'identité nationale*, 08 February 2010

60 La Croix. *Vu de France, Le gouvernement cherche une porte de sortie*, 08 February 2010

61 *Interview to Immigration Minister M. Éric Besson*, 08 February 2008

62 Associated Press. *Débat sur l'identité nationale: Fillon tente de prendre de la hauteur*. 08 February 2010.

French national values and language, which served to justify the creation of a Ministry linking immigration, integration and national identity, and later the setting up of a national grand debate on national identity.

The issue of national identity was dropped when the Socialists took power in 2012 and overtly criticized “the constant invocation of grand concepts and supreme values”⁶³, deemed highly ideological and not corresponding to the need to tackle real integration problems. The UMP and the *Front National* would continue to resort to the same rhetorical line, continuing to depict immigrants’ lack of language skills as a threat to national identity in their 2014 election programmes⁶⁴.

2.5 The European Union rhetoric as a legitimating resource

The attempts to use EU rhetoric and comparison to other countries to legitimate domestic policies has also been a recurrent strategy in the debates. This strategy can be broken into two main types of arguments

2.5.1 Reference to EU countries where similar language measures have been adopted

2.5.2 Adopting an exclusionary interpretation of already-existing EU soft law within the framework of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union (second semester 2008)

2.5.1 Referring to individual European states

The resource to comparing the French case to other European states with compulsory language measures has been systematically observed in French discourses to legitimize its domestic measures. The argument was simple: if other countries are adopting measures on language for integration, France must do the same: “In all Western European countries, immigration integration is considered what it is: a major political issue... In these grand countries, the reform of their immigration policies has entailed a truly democratic and political debate, which I also want to take place in France, as the French people expect it”⁶⁵.

However, systematic reference is only made to countries with a restrictive approach to language: Germany, Denmark and especially the Netherlands. Constant references to these three countries abound in reports, and policy measures: the 2006 report comparing integration policies in the EU⁶⁶ considers these three countries as role models in terms of language compulsory measures, as well as the numerous HCI reports,⁶⁷ or the influential Milhaud report, which proposed that “it is advisable to be inspired by the experiences carried out in the Netherlands, where knowledge of language, tested through an exam, is the condition to obtain a long-term residence visa”⁶⁸. Reference to the Netherlands would be recurrently used, especially to legitimize laws related to language for family reunification as it was one of the first countries to apply compulsory language knowledge in the countries of origin: “It is my wish to take the example of the Netherlands. Integration, in order to be successful, must be prepared in the countries of origin”⁶⁹ – stated Sarkozy during the 2007 election campaign.

2.5.2 Adopting an exclusionary interpretation of already-existing EU soft law within the framework of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union

In an attempt to Europeanize the exclusionary approach to language in immigrant integration policies, France used the 2008 European Presidency to impose its particular vision at EU level: “Language courses should be applied systematically, including before entry into Europe. The integration contract for third-country nationals must be encouraged throughout all Member States... This integration contract should be compulsory and should include the learning of the national language, national identities and European values”⁷⁰ – stated

63 Tuot report. *Une grande nation. Pour une société inclusive*, February 2013, p.10

64 See <http://www.frontnational.com/le-projet-de-marine-le-pen/autorite-de-letat/immigration/>

65 Speech by N. Sarkozy, 02 May 2006

66 Report *Politiques d'intégrations des migrants dans l'Union européenne* December 2006

67 See the report *Analyse comparative de différents modèles d'intégration en Europe*: HCI, December 2006

68 *L'intégration économique des migrants*, 2006, p.12

69 *Le Figaro Immigration : le candidat de l'UMP hausse le ton*, 06 March 2007

70 Speech by Minister Hortefeux, 28 January 2008

Immigration Minister to present the French Presidency's lines of action. The same domestic rhetoric, now elevated to EU level. The French proposal met with the fierce opposition of a remarkable number of European countries, which rejected⁷¹ the proposal of making language compulsory at EU level.

In a similar vein, the European Commission published a report diplomatically suggesting that the already-existing European soft law – the Council Directive (2003/86/EC) on the Right to Family Reunification and the Council Directive (2003/109/EC) on the Status of Third-Country Nationals – which give Member States the possibility to require third-country nationals to adopt integration measures, should not be interpreted in an exclusionary way:

“A few Member States have introduced language as an integration measure into national legislation... The objective of such measures is to facilitate the integration of family members. Their admissibility under the Directive depends on whether they serve this purpose and whether they respect the principle of proportionality. Their admissibility can be questioned on the basis of the accessibility of such courses or tests, how they are designed and/or organized whether such measures or their impact serve purposes other than integration”.⁷²

After intense negotiation with the European Member States, the compulsory nature of the French proposals was dropped. Instead, a much more watered down text was agreed, the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, which did not include the term “compulsory”, and only stated that “the learning of the host society's language is one of the essential factors for integration”, a similar idea contained in the final European document agreed by the EU Member States, the so-called Vichy Declaration.⁷³

3 Concluding remarks: Analyzing the language debates on immigrant integration in France: problematizing a never-existing problem

The analysis of the language debates on immigrant integration in France has shown the mutation of language as a tool aimed at procuring conformity and immigration control, creating a linkage between these previously separate domains. I have traced the evolution of how language has been discursively problematized by a particular political party in power, the UMP, by adopting the discourse of the *Front National*, and how the opposition parties, mainly the Socialist Party, have been unable to break the dominant discourse.

Through this analysis, the article has shown how the notion of integration has been gradually transformed into a regulatory technique of immigration control managed by the state. The conditionality subsumed in this new version of integration paradoxically demands that foreigners demonstrate knowledge on the way of life, values, culture, history and language of the receiving state as a *sine qua non* condition for integration (Carrera & Atger 2011). The new approach imposes the heaviest burden of proof on immigrants' shoulders to demonstrate their integration into a homogeneous framing which ideally exists at the foundation of the nation: *la République*.

The mandatory nature of language for integration implies that immigrants' failure to comply with this obligation justifies the application of sanctions by the state – which range from denying access to the country to the non-granting of a visa/residence permit or non-renewal of the latter, falling into irregularity and/or the consequent expulsion from its territory. Language, in this case, far from being an instrument for integration, becomes an effective tool for immigrant control.

The combination of legislation along with formalized institutional structures –the *HCI* being the most remarkable one – on the one hand, and a constant invocation of idiosyncratic national myths, rituals and conventions, on the other, have built up the current French public philosophy on immigrant integration in which language has strategically occupied a central role. The analysis has shown that it is not only the formal content of the public policy that counts but also the grand symbolism and the discursive packaging around the role of language, sustained through the rhetorical devices of *logos* – the innocuous-looking motto “*Contre l'immigration subie. Pour une immigration choisie*” – *pathos* – appealing to the people's fears

71 AFP. *Immigration : le contrat d'intégration, un «tout petit détail*, 05 June 2008

72 Communication from the European Commission, COM (2008) 610 final, p.7

73 Council Conclusions on Integration Policies in the European Union, 5 November 2008

through the idea of *communautarisme* – and *ethos* –invoking French national identity – along with the constant invocation to *failure* to legitimize stricter policies on language.

The highbrow Republican rhetoric and the grand symbolism of the debates have shown a remarkable gap between discourses and the empirical data. While the lack of language skills among immigrants is discursively depicted as one of France's greatest integration problems, actual figures are far from this rhetorical line. The empirical analysis has shown that immigrant entries into the country have remained somewhat constant. Similarly, the data on language needs indicate that more than 75% of immigrants wishing to reside in France already have sufficient knowledge of French.

Far from being a covert strategy, the ideological shift towards the instrumentalization of language for immigration control has been an explicit, systematic policy, producing the expected results: a remarkable reduction in permits for residence, family reunification or nationality.

The recent attempts by the Socialists, in power since 2012, to shape a new rhetoric by breaking the terms of the debate – dropping the over-encouragement of grand symbolism, recognizing the multiple identities, cultures, religions and languages in France – have met with the frontal opposition of the right and the far right, considering it an offence to the sacrosanct *République française*.

The blunt opposition has not only brought to the surface the deep ideological cleavage over the terms of the debate between the UMP-*Front National*, on the one side, and the Socialists, and other more left-wing parties, associations and NGOs on the other. It also showed the impossibility of breaking a well-forged exclusionary dominant ideology on language, constantly followed through in a determined way, shaped relentlessly over time and skillfully transformed into a public philosophy.

During its time in government, the UMP imposed a language, epistemology and scheme on the role of language for immigrant integration, tenaciously sustained over time, become the current dominant ideology on language, discursively legitimated and justified after being previously problematized artificially. As pointed out by Favell “once established, the political forces that are invested in the current status quo by the political parties that have thrown it centre-stage need to continually reaffirm and reproduce the policy framework. Against this background, adaptation is problematic because it cannot bring into question the overall framework without risking a renewed crisis” (Favell 2001: 29) as the one sparked by the recent attempts by the Socialist government to de-problematize language.

Despite the deep party cleavage, this article has also shown the existence of an element that is persistently present across the political spectrum: the idea of *le parcours d'intégration*. Integration is depicted as a process, a path, a journey – *le parcours* – that immigrants must go through. In this *parcours*, knowledge of language, along values and identity play a pivotal role. Language alone, however, is not enough for *full* integration. Discourses and legislation alike focus on the concept of *nationality* –often used interchangeably with the concept of *citizenship* – as the final stage in the *parcours*. The end of the journey, the finishing line in the integration process is to become “a French citizen”, that is, to obtain French nationality.

De l'immigré au citoyen [From immigrant to citizen]. This formula, coined by HCI advisor J. Costa-Lascoux, succinctly illustrates France's approach on immigrant integration, regarded as a process with different steps along the way; a political formula that places all the weight at the “end” of the integration process, *le citoyen*, who must comply with all the norms of *la République* to become part of the polity. Language is a core element, but citizenship is *only* achieved through nationality. In other words, for *full* integration, emphasis is placed mainly on the concept of citizenship as a legal status (nationality), and not so much on the concept of citizenship as political activity (participation) and citizenship as identity (loyalty to the country). Debates often link language to participation and identity but it is only when discussing the language-nationality binomial that the concept of citizenship appears. The analysis has therefore shown that the political consensus reached over the French Republican public philosophy in the late 80's based on the concept of citizenship – with a strong connection with the formal status of membership in the nation, spelled out in nationality law – remains as valid today as in the past.

Rather than addressing the real causes of integration failure – notably poverty, inequality and a declining welfare state – the French philosophy on immigrant integration continues to be dominated by grand, highly symbolic notions and endless terminological discussions on France’s philosophical peculiarities that in the current dynamics of increasing complexity, diversity and rapid social change, fail to provide effective policy responses. French politics on immigration: *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

Bibliography

- AZOULAI, Loïc. & DE VRIES, Karin. (eds.) *Migration Law, Legal complexities and Political Rationales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014
- ADAMI, Hervé. “Le rôle de la littératie dans le processus d’acculturation des migrants” in : Proceedings of the Seminar *L’intégration linguistique des immigrants adultes*. Council of Europe, 26-27, online (2008)
- BANCEL, Nicolas, BLANCHARD, Pascale & VERGES, Françoise. *LA République coloniale. Essai sur une utopie*, Paris: Albin Michel, Paris, 2003
- BROUNTEL, Chantal. *Estimer les flux d’entrées sur le territoire à partir des enquêtes annuelles de recensement*. Paris: Institut National de la Statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), Paris, 2014
- BOUCHER, Manuel. *Les théories de l’intégration. Entre universalisme et différentialisme. Des débats sociologiques et politiques en France: analyse de textes contemporains*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2000
- CARRERA, Sergio. & WIESBROCK, Anja. *Civic integration of the third-country nationals. Nationalism versus Europeanization in the common EU immigration policy. CEPS Liberty and Security in Europe*, paper online (2009)
- CARRERA, Sergio & ATGER, Anaïs. *Assessing the Relationship between the European Integration Fun and the Common basic Principles on Integration*”, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Brussels online (2011)
- DAADOUC, Christophe “Quand la maîtrise du français s’achète” in: *Plein droit*, num 98, vol. 3 pp. 8-11(2013)
- DHUME, Fabrice. « L’émergence d’une figure obsessionnelle : comment le communautarisme a envahi les discours médiatico-politiques français » in: *Asylon* vol,8, pp. 2-12 (2010)
- FAVELL, Adrian. *Philosophies of Integration. Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*, Basingstoke: McMillan, 1998
- FAVELL, Adrian. *Philosophies of Integration. Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*, 2nd edition, Basingstoke: McMillan, 2001
- GEISER, Vincent “Le Pen Academy, promotion 2007: mots et maux d’une campagne présidentielle” in: *Migrations Société* vol 19, num. 110 pp. 3-15 (2007)
- GUIRAUDON, Virginie. “Integration Contracts for Immigrants: Common Trends and Differences in the European Experience (ARI)”, Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, online (2008)
- GOODMAN WALLACE, Sara. *Controlling Immigration through Language and Country Knowledge Requirements*, West European Politics, 34:2, pp. 235-255 (2011)
- HOGAN-BRUN, Gabrielle; MAR-MOLINERO, Clare; STEVENSON, Patrick. (eds.) *Discourses on Language and Integration: Critical Perspectives on Language Testing Regimes*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin (2009)
- JEANNOT, Celine; TOMC, Sanda; TOTOSANI, Marine. “Retour sur le débat autour de l’identité nationale en France : quelles places pour quelle(s) langue(s)” in *Lidil*, vol. 44 on line, (2011)
- JOPPKE, Christian. *Beyond national models: Civic integration policies for immigrants* in: West European Politics, num 30, pp.1-22 (2007)

- JOFFRIN, Laurent. « Immigration et Identité Nationale : un ministère en question » in : *La Règle du jeu* vol. 35, pp. 232-330 (2007)
- KOSTAKOPOLOU, Dora. “Matters of control: integration tests, naturalisation reform and probationary citizenship in the United Kingdom” in: *Migration and Citizenship Attribution: Politics and Policies in Western Europe, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36, (5), pp.829-846 (2010)
- LOCHAK, Danielle. “Intégrer ou exclure par la langue ?” in: *Plein droit*, num 98, vol 3 pp. 3-6 (2013)
- LOCHAK, Danielle. “L’intégration comme injonction. Enjeux idéologiques et politiques liés à l’immigration” in: *Cultures & Conflits*, num. 64, pp. 131-147 (2006)
- MARTIGNY, Vincent. *Le débat autour de l’identité nationale dans la campagne présidentielle 2007 : quelle rupture ?* Vol. 27, num 1, pp 23-42 (2009)
- MUCCHIELLI, Laurent. “Les émeutes de novembre 2005 : les raisons de la colère”, in V. le Goaziou & L. Mucchielli (eds.), *Quand les banlieues brûlent. Retour sur les émeutes de novembre*. Paris, La Découverte, pp. 13-16 (2006)
- NORIEL, Gérard. *À quoi sert ‘identité nationale ?* Marseille, éditions Agone, collection « Passé et présent », Paris, 2007
- THOMPSON, John. *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984
- VALLUY, Jérôme. “Quelles sont les origines du Ministère de l’identité nationale” in : *Cultures et Conflits: Xénophobie de gouvernement, nationalisme d’Etat*, vol. 69, pp. 7-11 (2008)
- VAN OERS, Ricky; ERSBOLL, Eva; KOSTAKOPOLOU, Dora. (eds.) *A re-definition of belonging? Language and integration tests in Europe*, Leiden/NL, Martinus Nijhoff, 2010
- VAN OERS, Ricky. *Deserving Citizenship. Citizenship in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013