Multilingualism and identity

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Blunkett: Speak English in your homes

by DAVID HUGHES, Daily Mail

David Blunkett is urging ethnic communities to speak English in their homes.

The Home Secretary says that using English can prevent the 'schizophrenia' which 'bedevils' relationships between the generations, particularly in Asian families.

UKIP leader Nigel Farage says he feels awkward when he doesn't hear English on the train
SPLIT LOYALTIES?

• many newsstories seem to confuse “being able to speak English” with “using only English”
• there seems to be the perception that one can only identify with one language community
• this is echoed in the debate about dual citizenship
PERCEPTIONS OF BILINGUALISM

normal: one language for all purposes
and (possibly) one or more (instructed) foreign languages (as a bit of a useless luxury)
normal: one language with parents (or: one with mother, one with father), one for education/as a lingua franca, one for religion, ...
LAYERED IDENTITIES

• we all have multifaceted identities
• each of them is associated with different languages, dialects or speaking styles
• this is entirely normal
• none of these personae means the other are less real or committed
SPLIT LOYALTIES?

• Our previous research suggests that
  • wanting to distance yourself from your country of origin may impact negatively on the maintenance of the native language
  • embracing the culture and values of a new society plays less of a role in helping to learn the new language than one might thing
  • it is not necessary to give up one language in order to learn another!