Identifying shifting ideologies in immigration policy thinking: A textual analysis

Laura Charles, Metropolis annual conference, March 2011

Scenario

Immigration and settlement services across Canada are facing surprising and sever federal funding cuts to their agencies and organizations announced Christmas Eve, 2010. For Ontario in particular, this translates into some 100,000 residents losing language, job search and family counselling services, the closure of agencies, some of which have existed for over 25 years and changes in many other agencies facing cuts of 25% to 50% by March 31st of this year.

In contrast

Last year, the Government of Canada, announced “an expanded overseas orientation services” to help immigrants “jump start” the credential recognition process before they arrive in Canada with an additional $15 million funding “to expand overseas foreign credential recognition services in China, India, the Philippines and the United Kingdom” (Federal Government web site news release, Vancouver, February 18, 2010). This increase in funding has been added to a previous Canadian Economic Action Plan (CEAP) allocation ($13.7 million) directed toward the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) and Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP). Working in concert with Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) project, this initiative will be funded by CIC for the next 3 years. (CIC RPP, 2010/11)

A sideways glance

These recent moves in funding allocation by CIC towards its integration and settlement programming, taking away in one case and enhancing in the other, has prompted a sideways glance from my larger thesis project into a small investigation examination the particular character or nature of the current CIC policy thinking. This ‘glance’ or smaller paper is nested within a larger doctoral thesis project which seeks to identify how such an anxious climate and its resulting shrill discourse around issues of Canadian immigration impacts Canada’s current immigration landscape.

Why this glance?

This smaller study is a part of my larger study and will help create an understanding of how specific texts, through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be mined for interesting research offerings that can contribute to a wider understanding of how texts are instrumental in creating and carrying particular ideological attitudes.

Method

- Two CIC immigration policy and planning texts, Reports on Plans and Priorities', (RPPs) submitted to the Treasury Board by CIC in the years 2006/7 prior to the global recession and 2010/11 post recession.

- I engage CDA, to first identify and then compare the ideological underpinnings or attitude expressed through the two policy and planning documents, through comparable sample extracts taken from these documents.

- Extracts are taken from the Section I – Overview in each case. The RPPs are submitted to the Treasury Board of Canada in defense of CIC's chosen strategies, plans and priorities for the coming year as all government departments are required to do.

Policy making in the context of the late capitalism or free market neo-liberalism Discourse

David Harvey, in *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism,* interpreting “the current financial mess” of the recent world financial collapse begins his enquiry by defining a pre recession ‘neo-liberalism’ which, he says, began as a class project which took formation in the crisis of the 1970s. He adds, “Masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade, it [neo-liberalism] legitimized draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power” (2010:10).

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis "is based on the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other with pother elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language" (Fairclough, 2003:2).

In CDA, ideologies are representations of aspects of the world and texts actively carry the changing ideologies of late capitalism into social relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003: 9). Fairclough describes a range of properties that texts have such as vocabulary, metaphor, grammar, politeness conventions, generic structure and style and these meaning-making properties of language carry “ideological potential” (Fairclough, 1995: 2). Fairclough’s critical view of ideology sees it as a modality of power, “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson in Fairclough, 2003:9) and not merely representative of a particular perspective for example.

CDA Research Issues

- Globalization and New Capitalism
- Social Relations of Power, Domination and Exploitation
- Social Difference
- Hegemony
- Ideology
- Types of Meaning
- Inter-textuality
- Genre, Discourse, Style
- Semantic and Grammatical Relations

Discourse figures in social practice in three ways:

- Genre: How a text acts

  Genre structure, Genre chain

- Discourse/discourse: Representations

  ‘D’ High level abstraction

  ‘d’ Low level abstraction (metaphor)

- Voice/Style: Construction of identities

Mapping the Governance Genre Chain

- Whole-of-government framework
- Report on Plans and Priorities
- Request for Proposals
- Local program planning

- **RPP 2006-2007**
  Citizenship and Immigration Canada
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- **The Honourable Monte Solberg**
  Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
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- **Section I – Overview**
- **Minister's Message**
- Canadian Immigration: Building Canada's Future
- Departmental Priorities
  - Priority 1 – Implementing an Integrated Policy Framework
  - Priority 2 – Improving Client Service
  - Priority 3 – Building the Workforce of the Future
- Summary Information
  - Vision, Mission and Mandate
  - CIC's Strategic Outcomes
  - Critical Partnerships
  - CIC's Management Agenda

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

- **2010-2011**
  Report on Plans and Priorities
- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

- **The Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P.**
  Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism
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- **Table of Contents**
- **Erratum**
- **Section I — Overview**
- Message from the Minister
- Raison d'être
- Responsibilities
- Strategic Outcomes and Program Activity Architecture
- Planning Summary
- Departmental Operational and Management Priorities
- Risk Analysis
- Expenditure Profile

Extract from 2006/7 RPP: Minister's Message

- 1. As Minister, I am privileged to lead a department that plays a central role in our nation's history
- 2. as well as its future. Canadians have a timehonoured [sic] tradition of welcoming newcomers
- 3. from around the world – people who contribute greatly to our economic growth and diverse
- 4. culture. Many of these people have come in search of freedom, others have sought refuge from
- 5. war or famine, and millions of others have wanted to assume our unique citizenship values
- 6. firmly rooted in respect, compassion and justice.

Extract from 2010/11 RPP: Raison d'être

- 1. In the first years following the Canadian Confederation, Canada’s leaders had a powerful
- 2. vision: to connect Canada by railway and make the West the world’s breadbasket and the
- 3. foundation for the country’s economic prosperity. Achieving this meant quickly
- 4. populating the Prairies, leading the Government of Canada to establish its first national
- 5. immigration policies.

Continued (2nd paragraph)

- 1. Over the last 150 years, immigrants have been a driving force in Canada's nationhood and
- 2. its economic prosperity – as famers settling lands, workers in factories fuelling industrial
- 3. growth, as entrepreneurs, and as innovators who help make Canada competitive in the
- 4. global, knowledge-based economy

Samples from ‘Risk Analysis’ RPP: 2010/11

- “In the face of the global economic downturn, CIC has focused on modernizing the immigration system to maximize its contribution to Canada’s economic growth”.

- “Given Canada’s aging population, economic growth will require that Canada admit new immigrants to meet labour market demand”

- “The challenge, however, is getting the *right* immigrants with the *right* skills, including language skills,…”

- “CIC must, ensure its *selection process* is responsive to labour market realities..” (my italics)

Analysis Summary

- What appear as mere collocations drawn from the Discourses of finance and free market neo-liberalism: “high level outcomes”, “a fair and secure marketplace”, “an innovative and knowledge - based economy”, “appropriations”, “must plan and manage their operations”, “report their performance”, “strategic outcomes” etc. are actually ideological representations massively implanting and inculcating the neo liberal, late capitalist discourses of management-accounting, finance and strategic business planning. Further, these are not mere ideological descriptions, but “modalities of power” (Fairclough, 2003) operating through the power carrying texts of policy making.

‘Right’ Immigrant or ‘Wrong’ Immigrant?

In terms of the way that immigrants are constructed this abstract planning language, creates particular kinds of *empty shells (Smith, 2005)*: “Economic Class Immigrants”, “Federal Skilled Workers”, “Canadian Experience Class” etc. This abstract planning language objectifies the subject turning actual people, newly arrived from another place and facing a multitude of barriers, into units for wealth planning and wealth accounting purposes. In this abstraction, subjects disappear, so too, do actual political intentions and agendas of the authors - the government. Unlike the 2006/7 RPP which gives recognition to immigrants as “nation builders” in the widest sense, the later report reduces immigrants to commodities. If immigrants are commodities, the services which help them integrate are reduced to midwives to the market.

Those smaller organizations targeted for the cuts promote social agendas and often advocate for immigrants rights. They also help immigrants settle, identify and locate the particular social entry points, language support, advice on housing, schooling etc. necessary for full and successful integration and are not so focused towards CIC's "Action Plan for Faster Immigration". Instead, the cuts hide behind the empty shell of a *modernized approach*, "full implementation of a *modernized approach* that is outcome based and responsive to newcomer needs…" (Program Activity 5 – Integration Program, RPP, 2010/11)(my italics).

Three Questions

1. Is it a coincidence that the organizations recently targeted for the most sever cuts in Toronto were the ethno-specific, smaller scale agencies often created by the communities themselves and without the resources of other larger, multi service agencies which can attract funding from several sources and meet the rigorous “outcomes” set within the RFP?.

2. Has the 2010/11 CIC policy planning and activities drawn deeper lines between class divisions, “restoring class power” (Harvey, 2010), withdrawing funding from programs that exist for the social and economic integration of immigrants already here facing tremendous barriers - the *wrong* immigrants, and placing it into new programs creating a new economic upper class of immigrant, whose language is proficient, who has been well advised and prepared before arriving in Canada and will not drain Canadian ‘social’ resources, the *right* immigrants?

3. Is it also a coincidence that at the same time, the Government of Canada, very recently announced “an expanded overseas orientation services” helping certain categories of immigrants, economically ‘upper class’ immigrants, “to jump start” the credential recognition process before they arrive in Canada and by giving an additional $15 million funding “to expand overseas foreign credential recognition services in China, India, the Philippines and the United Kingdom” ?