Je n'ai plus osé ouvrir la bouche ...
Témoignages de glottophobie vécue et moyens de se défendre
[I did not dare to open my mouth any more ...
Testimonies of experiences of glottophobia
and means to defend oneself]
By P. Blanchet and S. Clerc Conan (2018)
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'Giving a name to an evil and being able to explain to people that there is a term that describes what they do: this seems to give way for becoming aware'¹ (p. 49²). This is just one of a total of 137 testimonies presented in Philippe Blanchet's and Stéphanie Clerc Conan's recent book *I did not dare to open my mouth any more ... Testimonies of experiences of glottophobia and means to defend oneself*. It is emblematic of the aim of this book, as well of Blanchet's groundbreaking previous work *Discrimination: Fighting Glottophobia*, which was published in 2016. Philippe Blanchet (University of Rennes 2) has been one of the leading scholars in critical sociolinguistics in France throughout the last decades. Forms of inequality and discrimination related to linguistic practice have been major interests and recurrent themes in his theoretical and empirical work. By elaborating the term 'glottophobia', which he employed for the first time twenty years ago (Blanchet 2016:43), he aims at giving a name to a bundle of discriminations based on linguistic practice.

He defines 'glottophobia' as 'contempt, hate, aggression, rejection and exclusion of persons, negative discrimination based on considering the

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linguistic forms [...] used by these persons as incorrect, inferior or bad' (Blanchet 2016:45). Such phenomena have been core topics in sociolinguistics. Both the need to invent and establish a name for these forms of discrimination and choosing 'glottophobia' as that name are explained by Blanchet and Clerc Conan as follows: 'inserting discrimination on the basis of language in one row with other forms of discrimination such as xenophobia, Judeophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia' (p. 8, p. 100; see also Blanchet 2016:44). This argument is also directed against alternative terms such as 'linguicism' (Archibald 2009; Bourhis *et al.* 2007), which has been coined by francophone Canadian scholars and which is also being used by many linguists who write in English. Blanchet's argument for 'glottophobia' has certain weaknesses: there are many well-established terms designating discriminations that end in *ism* (racism, sexism, ableism, lookism, anti-Semitism, antiziganism, anti-Muslimism – to name just a few in arbitrary order). Beyond this fact, the term 'xenophobia' is problematic because it presupposes that its victims are 'foreign' or 'foreigners', although it is often directed against people to whom this classification cannot be reasonably applied (see, for example, Sow 2009:132; Tafira 2018). As a consequence, it is not the conceptual strength that makes Blanchet's (2016) work so important, but rather its political agenda – and its large public reception.

Based on scientific works, but addressed to a wider (also non-academic) public, the book's aim was also a political intervention in a meta-, or better yet epilinguistic, public discourse. In this sense the book was more than successful: it has received a tremendous amount of media attention in France and all printed copies have been sold out. In the very year of its publication, discrimination on the basis of language was introduced as a crime for the first time into the French penal code and employment law. Admittedly, the law contains the somehow surprising formulation 'his or her capacity to express oneself in a language other than French' in order to circumscribe reasons for discrimination. Time will show how the law will interpret it (p. 100).

The absence of reactions to this work in the anglophone academic world stand in sharp contrast to the reception in France. The reasons for this are probably manifold – indeed, the book specifically concerns itself with the history and consequences of glottophobia in France, which Blanchet considers the linguistically most intolerant society in the world (p. 86). Either way, the phenomenon is also widespread in other societies, and one can only hope that the reception of Blanchet's thoughts will spread beyond France as well. Some discussion about the term has been provoked on Twitter, where linguists Esther Monzé and Joël Thiebault have used the Hashtag #Glottophobia since 2016 and 2018 respectively. Still, for anglophone users the Hashtag #Linguicism provokes a greater amount of reaction.

The reason for the publication of 'I did not dare to open my mouth any more ...' is this positive echo in France and the fact that it aroused a plethora of public statements from victims of 'glottophobia'. The discussion encouraged speakers of different variations of French and other ('named') languages to voice their experiences. Adding the term 'glottophobia' to their repertoire allowed them to name their experience as discrimination.

'I did not dare to open my mouth any more ...' compiles a selection of these testimonies articulated in the media in direct exchange with the authors or in previous research by themselves or their students. They are presented in both the second and main chapters of the book. A total of 129 short anonymised testimonies, mostly extracts from larger texts, have been organised according to situations in which they occurred. The main sub-chapters are education (pp. 13–32), work (pp. 32–8), health (pp. 38–40), daily life (pp. 40–5), institutions (pp. 45–9) and an extra subchapter that relates to instances of becoming aware of glottophobia. The experiences of discrimination range from being mocked and mimicked over advice to train standard French pronunciation or see a speech therapist, to the refusal of employment and restricted access to housing, health and public services. The refusal to examine and treat persons who do not (sufficiently) speak French in hospital emergencies are among the most striking examples: glottophobia stands in the way of physical health in these cases. These examples also point to the intersection of glottophobia with other experiences of discrimination: they sometimes go hand in hand with racism. When a Polynesian pupil is told by her classmates to 'go home' (p. 18), when a pupil of Italian origin is advised to rather become a hairdresser (p. 17), when doctors compare non-francophone patients with animals (p. 39) and when the police imprisons a person coming to report a crime because he does not speak French (p. 46), there is clearly more to it than glottophobia; it goes hand in hand with racism. And when an accent is considered to be unfeminine, it shows that glottophobic statements are unequally applied to persons of different genders. These are not only 'cumulations' of discrimination, as Blanchet suggests (p. 103), but complex multidimensional forms of discrimination that need to be analysed in more detail. Listing them all under the heading 'glottophobia' cannot do them justice.

Parents, teachers, schoolmates, jury members, employers, doctors, police officers and public servants all discriminate in the name of standard French. Victims are said to lack sufficient knowledge of French and they are forbidden to use regional languages like Corsican, Basque or Breton, all in the name of French; the 'sole' and 'unifying' language of the Republic. They are criticised for their accents, which stem from 'foreign' languages like Italian, Kabyle, Polish or Chinese, or from regional variations of French.

Most examples in this category refer to a 'Southern' or 'Meridional' accent, although these are the 'least rejected' (p. 107), as Blanchet explains in an interview about the absence of accents in presidential candidates' public speeches.

A paternalistic attitude often hides discrimination behind seemingly good advice or moral judgements. Some extracts also discuss attempts to defend oneself against glottophobic commentaries. Reactions to reproaches of discrimination include denial and playing it down (p. 41). These repeating patterns alone would constitute an interesting and urgent subject of research which could also lay the foundations for an approach to fighting glottophobia.

Chapter 3 contains two longer narrations of linguistic biographies which, according to Blanchet and Clerc Conan, allow for better understanding of the lifelong impact of linguistic discrimination on a developing personality. The first one relates to the history of a Catalan-speaking family living and growing up multilingually in Roussillon (southwest France) in the course of the twentieth century; the second is a biography of a plurilingual person growing up in a city in Alsace (eastern France) with different variations of French and Turkish. Both biographies encompass linguistic tensions between legitimate standard French on the one hand, and vernacular spoken variations of French, regional languages and their accents and 'foreign languages' on the other hand. Chapter 4 directly presents examples of glottophobia from the media and official documents, laws and reports. All of these very different examples in Chapters 2 to 4 are direct (and often short) quotations and they are not accompanied by commentaries or explanations by the authors – readers can neither learn about the context in which they have been produced, nor about possible ways of analysing them.

Under the promising heading 'Resources and arguments for defending oneself against glottophobia', the last chapter refers to international and national laws and regulations that forbid linguistic discrimination. While the international documents have been cited in Blanchet's previous work (2016:17–20), the French penal code and laws on labour and education have been added, since they contain new regulations that have been introduced into French legislation following the appearance of Blanchet's book in 2016. The authors admit that reporting linguistic discrimination to the police is a delicate and sometimes dangerous issue. Examples of police glottophobia (pp. 46–7) deliver proof of that. Notably, in cases of everyday linguistic discrimination, forms of empowerment via solidarity between discriminated speakers, along with positive examples, could encourage these persons to become confident speakers. Teaching 'linguistic hospitality', as Clerc

Conan points out in an interview (p. 88), is another promising approach about which readers might want to learn more. The annex contains one interview from the French press with both authors, four interviews with Philippe Blanchet on his 2016 book and six emails sent to him as reactions.

In conclusion, despite some points of critique, the book presents a valuable source of testimonies on the consequences of glottophobia, which will be very handy for discussions in classes and workshops on glottophobia or discrimination on the whole. It not only enforces the successful political agenda of intervening in epilinguistic public discourses, but can also contribute to the empowerment of marginalised speakers. Becoming aware of the systematic nature of discrimination is an important step in freeing oneself from feelings of guilt, incompetence and linguistic insecurity. Blanchet's and Clerc Conan's book provides a possible source for this kind of awareness-raising for francophone readers.

Notes

- 1 All translations from French to English are the author's.
- 2 In cases where only the page numbers are indicated, I refer to the book under review.

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