

Securing the borders of English and Whiteness

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In this seminar, we will discuss our recently published article “[Securing the borders of English and Whiteness](#).” This article examines how racial and linguistic identities are constructed on the Australian reality TV show *Border Security*. Based on an analysis of 108 episodes of the show involving 253 border force officers and 128 passengers, we explore how the hegemonic Australian identity of the White native speaker of English is constructed on the show. Officers are represented as a relatively uniform group of heroes devoted to protecting Australia’s national security. Simultaneously, most of them look white and sound like native speakers of Australian English. In contrast to the officers, passengers, as their antagonists, do not have a predominant racial or linguistic profile. They are represented as highly diverse. What unites them is not any racial or linguistic profile but that they represent a security risk. Threat thus comes to be mapped onto diversity. The show’s schema of heroes and antagonists invites the audience to identify with the heroes. By identifying with the White-English heroes, the audience also comes to take on their power of judgment over its diverse linguistic and racial Others. The analysis shows how the White-English identity bundle is constructed as the authoritative and legitimate position of the judging knower. The article’s main contribution is to show how the raciolinguistic construct of the White-English complex is made hegemonic in a diverse society officially committed to multiculturalism.

Recommended readings

If you can make the time, we recommend you read the article before the seminar:

Piller, I., Torsh, H., & Smith-Khan, L. (2021). Securing the borders of English and Whiteness. *Ethnicities*. [doi:10.1177/14687968211052610](https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968211052610)

If you don’t have that much time, there is also a short general-audience version available at:

Piller, I. (2021). Securing the borders of English and Whiteness. Retrieved from <https://www.languageonthemove.com/securing-the-borders-of-english-and-whiteness/>

If you are unfamiliar with the show, check out an episode on YouTube, e.g.,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRPKK3cNcto>