

If there is a 'native' language of Britain, Boris Johnson, it certainly isn't English

You reported Boris Johnson saying at a hustings event for the Conservative leadership race that he wanted "everybody who comes here and makes their lives here to be, and to feel, British – that's the most important thing – and to learn English" ([Johnson pledges to make immigrants learn English so that they 'feel British', 6 July](#)).

To acknowledge the fact that being British is historically, culturally and linguistically more nuanced than simply being or speaking English, perhaps Mr Johnson may wish to consider expanding his pledge by encouraging the English (Anglo-Saxon) immigrants to the British Isles to learn the languages of those who preceded them to these shores, the Cymry (language Cymraeg) and the Gaels (languages Gàidhlig and Gaeilge), and to better respect the languages of their fellow immigrants who have arrived subsequently (from British empire territories, British Commonwealth countries and elsewhere).

Perhaps if he demonstrated a fuller appreciation of the depth, breadth and dynamics of the human backstory to multi-indigenous, multi-ethnic, multicultural Britain, Mr Johnson might be able more convincingly to present himself to the peoples living in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland today as having prime ministerial potential.

Otherwise, he may well find himself presiding over the disintegration of a relatively short-lived (just over 300 years) constitutional consensus in the ongoing political journey of the British Isles.

David Metcalfe, Bath

Guardian, Letters, Monday 8 July 2019