

# The Entry-Level Workplace for Newcomers: An Intercultural Space of Workplace Community and Customer Communication

*Christine Doe, Scott R. Douglas, and Liying Cheng*

---

*This study explored intercultural communication in entry-level workplace settings through the stories told by 25 newcomers about their experiences working in the tourism, hospitality, food services, and office-related sectors, from three locations across Canada. Using theme and pattern analysis, we identified two broad categories: workplace community and customer communication. Based on the stories, employers/supervisors and co-workers were inclusionary or exclusionary in training and communicating with the participants. Stories including customers were primarily transactional, with communication focused on customer needs. Across all the stories, elements of power and positioning emerged as key features to control and shape the newcomers' entry and experience in the labour market through gendered deskilling and disempowerment in communication. Opportunities for equitable communication were with people who also had an immigrant background. The stories further showcased strategies the participants employed to achieve successful communication by practicing key phrases, learning vocabulary, and advocating for themselves when communicating with a difficult interlocutor. Implications are discussed, highlighting the need for language training for newcomers with a focus on practicing self-advocacy skills and how to navigate communicating with adverse interlocutors.*

*Cette étude a exploré la communication interculturelle sur le lieu de travail d'employés au niveau d'entrée à travers les récits de 25 nouveaux arrivants sur leurs expériences de travail dans les secteurs du tourisme, de l'hôtellerie, de la restauration et du travail de bureau, dans trois villes du Canada. L'analyse des thèmes et des modèles nous a permis d'identifier deux grandes catégories : la communauté sur le lieu de travail et la communication avec les clients. Selon les récits, les employeurs/superviseurs et les collègues étaient inclusifs ou discriminatoires dans la formation et la communication avec les participants. Les récits concernant les clients étaient principalement transactionnels, la communication étant axée sur les tâches à accomplir pour répondre aux besoins des clients. Dans tous les récits, des éléments de pouvoir et de positionnement ont émergé comme des éléments clés pour contrôler et façonner l'accès au marché du travail et l'expérience des nouveaux arrivants au sein de ce marché par le biais d'une*

*déqualification genrée et d'une perte d'autonomie dans la communication. Les opportunités de communication équitable se sont présentées avec des personnes également issues de l'immigration. Les récits mettent également en évidence les stratégies employées par les participants pour assurer une communication réussie : en pratiquant des phrases clés, en apprenant du vocabulaire et en s'affirmant lorsqu'ils communiquent avec un interlocuteur difficile. Les implications sont discutées, soulignant la nécessité d'une formation linguistique pour les nouveaux arrivants, axée sur la pratique des compétences d'affirmation de soi et sur la communication avec des interlocuteurs défavorables.*

---

**Keywords:** entry-level workplace, intercultural communication, power, workplace communication

---

Workplace communications are among the first experiences newcomers to Canada have to practice using English; these conversations may also be one of the first of many spaces where newcomers negotiate and navigate membership, power, and agency in their new country. This study focuses on the stories told by newcomers about their experiences communicating in an entry-level job with the goal of identifying the challenges and opportunities. By adopting intercultural communication (Jackson, 2019; Noels et al., 2020) as a theoretical framework, we intend to examine the communication challenges and opportunities for newcomers through their stories about their experiences navigating their first jobs in Canada. The focus on small stories (Bamberg, 2007) provided the opportunity for an insight into these moments of intercultural communication (Jackson, 2019) or, more specifically, the spaces where newcomers negotiate meaning with interlocutors, navigate power and positioning dynamics, and express agency. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of intercultural communication theory, followed by a description of the key elements of power and positioning and sociolinguistics adopted in the study.

## **Framing of Intercultural Communication**

For the purposes of this study, we adopt a critical perspective by defining intercultural communication as the conversations and dialogues that occur between individuals whose cultural and linguistic differences reflect their previous socialization experiences (Jackson, 2019). Intertwining socialization with culture and language highlights the flexible and decentred framing of the two concepts. Cultural group membership can include race, age, gender, nationality, and more, creating a dynamic, ever-shifting, and blurred understanding of the term (Holliday, 2020; Kramsch & Zhu, 2020). This perspective rejects the static and reductionist approach of attaching nationalist labels to culture. Similarly, if linguistic differences and communication practices are grounded in individuals' socialization experiences, their language use is another layer of their cultural identity. This intercultural communication tapestry of culture, language, and identity is woven together by the interlocutors' active role in co-constructing meaningful communication (Noels et al., 2020). It is through this shared practice that the negotiation of cultural and linguistic norms is further shaped by gender, race, and language background (Kramsch & Zhu; 2020; Piller, 2011). Newcomers to Canada are learning to navigate their role as interlocutors in these new cultural and linguistic contexts, in particular, the complex structural hierarchies and power issues embedded throughout their new home.

## *Power and Positionality*

Structural hierarchies and power issues are assumed aspects of any social communication (Hua & Kramsch, 2016), with the workplace as a main site for the manifestation of inequalities (Coleman et al., 2013). Conceptualization about power and positionality has shifted greatly with recent scholarship to recognize the damaging Eurocentric or Western North approaches to previous research and artificial dichotomies set up to position minorities as inferior (Martin & Nakayama, 2015). More recent scholarship has adopted a critical perspective to highlight the fluid and dynamic nature of culture, identity, and assumptions of power and positioning (e.g., Holliday, 2020; Liu & Guo, 2021). As part of this expansion of critical perspectives, Flores and Rosa (2015) proposed raciolinguistics as a lens to critique and provide counter-narratives to the dominant framing of racialized users of a language as insufficient by continually comparing them to a perceived standard variety of the language. This approach interrogates the damaging colonial legacies that continue to shape discourses and identities forced onto newcomers (Adams Lyngbäck & Paul, 2024; Ramjattan, 2023).

Additional layers to consider are the structural inequalities of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and many more aspects of identity that intersect in the workplace. Research that adopts a critical perspective with an intersectionality lens highlights the more nuanced but damaging forms of controlling power (e.g., Ramjattan, 2023). Liu and Guo (2021) documented how newcomers to Canada experience a multitude of structural barriers shaped by race, gender, and class, from refusing to accept previous qualifications to delays in paperwork. In their study, the authors noted that the newcomers they interviewed took volunteer roles to overcome the barriers of entering the labour market. As Liu and Guo emphasized, the act of needing to volunteer is representative of power and the global economic pressures driving newcomers to make such choices. More specifically, related to entry-level workplace positions, Ramjattan (2022) has showcased how focusing on accent, in the case of language training for call-centre workers in Canada, is a form of labour control that forces migrants into lower-paying work and ultimately distracts from the larger issue of institutional racism. Further, the role of gender is critical for understanding the entry-level workplace, with many studies highlighting the power imbalance and vulnerability placed on women to remain in low-paying, low-skilled, or what we are referring to as entry-level positions (e.g., Liu, 2019; Rezazadeh & Hoover, 2018; Senthanar et al., 2020). Using Statistics Canada data, Hou et al. (2020) have highlighted a troubling trend that racialized newcomer women in Canada are disproportionately represented in low-wage occupations, that is, entry-level positions.

Agency emerges as a key concept in how individuals navigate and negotiate meaning amidst entrenched structural inequalities. For this study, we look to Bourdieu's (1990) conceptualization of agency within a transnational social field to view a social position as determined by the economic, cultural social, and symbolic capital a newcomer may possess. In a study examining Latvian newcomers' agency in low-skilled jobs in the United Kingdom, Kaprāns (2023) noted that the newcomers in this study formed relationships with fellow migrant co-workers to create social capital and inter-ethnic solidarity, meanwhile limiting their opportunity for advancing their English skills. The newcomers in the study also drew on their previous cultural capital of workplace discrimination experiences in earlier host countries to foster a strong sense of self-confidence and trust in social justice when needing to advocate for themselves.

In this section, we have provided definitions to help frame the research and interpretations of the data; however, we feel it is important to acknowledge that concepts about intercultural communication are nuanced with vague boundaries, a vagueness that is needed to contrast against the stable and fixed variables of the large culture to then allow for the exploration and expansion of the definition from different vantage points in an ever-evolving society and fields of study.

## Communication in the Workplace

Relationships provide the foundation for workplace communication. The day-to-day human interactions in the workplace are influenced by the hierarchical structure and reflexivity of all present to engage in intercultural learning. Komisarof (2022) highlighted the extent to which newcomers feel welcome, and a sense of belonging may reflect the degree to which they feel like they are members of the core group of a workplace organization or as a member of the outgroup's cultural-linguistic community.

Sociopragmatic skills in English have been increasingly identified as a necessary skill for newcomers to learn in order to integrate into a workplace setting. Yates and Major (2015) identified how, in their study, newcomers perceived challenges with the skills of participating in small talk and needing to be flexible when communicating for social purposes. However, in her study on intercultural communication experiences for newcomers in a work placement program in New Zealand, Holmes (2015) identified small talk as a possibly exclusionary form of communication by co-workers. Through her analysis, Holmes identified that newcomers in a workplace setting experienced differences in discourse patterns of respect when compared to their previous experiences using English in another context or country. Canada's language policies are designed to facilitate acculturation and integration by providing free language classes in French or English to help newcomers (IRCC, 2023). While these language policies are promoting the promise of an inclusive and welcoming society for newcomers, they may fall short when newcomers try to obtain meaningful employment in the labour market (Slade, 2012). For instance, Creese and Wiebe (2009) interviewed newcomers from sub-Saharan Africa in Canada and found that despite the fact that the majority of the participants had post-secondary education, strong English skills, and previous work experience, they were underemployed and often in survival employment, or what Parutis (2014) considers the any job phase. The entry-level workplace represents this any job phase.

## The Entry-Level Workplace

We define entry-level workplaces as requiring few to no levels of formal education or specific training. This definition is in line with the government of Canada and the issuing of visas for workers entering low-wage jobs (IRCC, 2024). We chose to use the term *entry-level* as opposed to *low-skilled* or *non-professional*, which are contrasted to the higher-paying, high-skill professional sectors, as a way to move away from the classist and comparative language typically used for this population and industries. The term *entry-level* suggests a starting point for newcomers entering the Canadian workforce, providing them a space to practice their English skills. This usage deviates from the perspective of entry-level jobs as the starting point of a career with the potential for advancement in an organization. For some newcomers in this study, their roles were eligible for promotions, while others were not.

Newcomers to Canada face considerable challenges in gaining entry into the labour market and may need to work in entry-level jobs before being able to work in their area of expertise (Liu & Guo, 2021; Zietsma, 2010). To survive financially, they may need to work multiple jobs, paying only minimum wage, which leaves limited time and opportunity to engage in community and social activities (Zuberi & Ptashnick, 2012). For newcomers to Canada, these entry-level workplace positions may offer a place to practice English language skills and their only opportunity to connect to the community. Such a discourse space may include newcomers from a wide range of language backgrounds using English as a lingua franca during a lunch break or other opportunities to socialize. It is expected, then, that multiple discourses, communication styles, and purposes are used when speaking with employers, co-workers, and customers. The newcomers may also be trying to develop their English language skills to the level required by the government to apply for eventual citizenship. In Canada, newcomers must acquire a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 4 in Speaking and Listening through an approved language test or through a

government-sponsored language program (IRCC, 2023). As a result, the newcomers in this setting may perceive their immigration status as vulnerable, have emerging language skills, and need work for survival. We use the term *newcomers* to recognize that while some of the participants in this study had been in the country for more than 10 years, they may continue to be treated like newcomers and not as members of the core linguistic group (Komisarof, 2022). It is with this understanding that we explored the stories told to us by newcomers about their communication experiences in the entry-level workplace to consider the newcomer experience of this intercultural workplace context.

## **The Power of Small Stories Across Contexts**

The multiple realities of intercultural communication highlight the need for critical and reflexive approaches, such as ethnographic and narrative inquiry approaches to research (Holliday, 2020). Drawing on narrative inquiry principles through storytelling research (Lewis, 2011), we were interested in event-centred stories (Squire, 2013) or small stories (Bamberg, 2007) about newcomers' experiences of the phenomenon of communicating across entry-level workplace contexts. Small stories are ordinary conversations (Georgakopoulou, 2007) set in a particular time and place, highlighting the interactional features as told by the narrator. As a unit of analysis, the small story provides this personal vantage point of everyday sociocultural moments with the potential for exploring these small daily conversations and turn-taking. This focus on the small stories across multiple participants and contexts is a slight departure from narrative inquiry as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In narrative inquiry, the focus is often on the stories that form the larger fabric of a person's life narrative and require multiple data collection strategies over a period of time with few participants. The purpose attached to why and how the stories gathered are important for how many participants and contexts to include (Squire, 2013). As Squire (2013) explained, researchers focused on studying life narratives are interested in the whole human experience within a particular context compared to small story narrative research, as used in this study, which is focused on gathering a large number of stories to generate commonalities and differences across narrative themes.

## **Material and Methods**

The small stories collected for this study were part of a larger research project investigating newcomers' challenges and successes across a range of language-use situations, such as talking to a doctor, watching videos, or listening to a supervisor. When reviewing the larger set of stories, we noticed the rich intercultural exchanges described by the participants about a workplace context that is not usually considered in research. With the help of local immigration settlement organizations, participants were recruited through multiple means: emails, posters, and the research teams visiting language classes to introduce the study and answer any questions. Across the three research sites, there were 25 participants, with proficiency levels ranging from M (Minimum) to 11 for listening, and 3 to 8 for speaking based on the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPIP) – General Listening and Speaking (LS) Test levels, which equate to the same level in the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Paragon Testing Enterprises, 2022). We felt it was important to include the participants' proficiency levels to highlight the wide range representing newcomers working in an entry-level workplace setting. Participants' jobs were in food services, hospitality, retail, health care, office administration, janitorial services, general service, and volunteering. See the Appendix for the participant profiles.

Data were collected through two interviews, conducted by a research assistant at each research site, and the CELPIP – General LS Test. The interview protocols were developed together by the authors to maintain continuity across the three research sites. In the first interview, we gathered demographic

information and initial accounts of the participants' experiences in English at their workplace and life in general and concluded the interview by prompting the participants to think about the stories of success and challenges they had in the workplace. For the second interview, an episodic narrative interview (Mueller, 2019), we asked the participants to tell us stories about speaking and listening in their workplace contexts and provide as many details as possible. After the participants completed the interviews, they took the CELPIP – General LS test. Participants were also provided with a gift card to a local coffee shop or grocery store. While the incentives for participating in the research project may have biased the participants' responses, we believe they were necessary, as this participant group had busy schedules, and it was our small way of expressing gratitude.

As we were interested in understanding the larger phenomenon of intercultural communication in the entry-level workplace, we drew on a matrix coding approach (Miles et al., 2018) to consider the multiple small stories told across the many workplace contexts and by a range of participants, but also across the three research sites. The selection of the stories was a multi-phase process where the transcripts were reviewed to identify some initial stories to help define what constituted a story as a communication event. For this study, a communication story refers to an experience the participants described where they were speaking or listening with one or more people. In total, 182 stories were identified related to workplace communication with an employer, co-worker, or client/customer. Given the breadth of data, we chose to organize the stories as individual rows in Microsoft Excel, which allowed us to condense the data in a meaningful way while at the same time retaining key information attached to the stories in the columns, such as the research site or interlocutor. Using the filter and pivot table function in Excel, we first identified initial patterns across the stories, reflecting Braun and Clarke's (2022) theme and pattern analyses. Multiple rounds of coding were conducted to identify the commonalities and differences across the stories while also considering the contexts and interlocutors. When considering the communication contexts or the participants' personal backgrounds, we would review the interview transcripts to further situate the stories when needed.

## Findings and Discussion

We begin this findings and discussion section with a story from Jia, which for us features the openness and possibility within the intercultural communication space of the entry-level workplace for newcomers:

I worked at a downtown restaurant. It's a Cambodian and Thai restaurant. My co-worker[s], they come from different countries. She came from Thailand; I come from China. Our boss come from Cambodia. If we have the free time, we like ... talk about the food ... and talk about the countries, the different countries. For me, I like to talk about China. The chef likes to talk about Thailand. So for us, we come from different countries. We had different experiences. For me, I like to talk about my job. I was a nurse before. It was hospital, like the operations. For chef, he likes to talk about the kitchen. It's totally different issues .... For me ... I want to learn with my co-worker, my friend in Canada. I want to learn.

In this story, Jia describes the free-flowing dialogue between her and her colleagues about sharing about each other's backgrounds. While Jia references their previous home countries and the large essentialist cultural identities associated with those countries, Jia's words emphasize learning about her colleagues, her friends, and an openness to understanding her colleagues' previous lives. The story also mentions Jia being able to discuss her previous self as a nurse, or her hybridity of multiple identities, and not be seen

just as a waitress. The story also highlights her colleagues' and employer's important roles as actors in positioning as equals for an open dialogue focused on learning about each other.

In fact, the role of the interlocutor emerged as a key finding and way to organize the themes (see Figure 1). The entry-level workplace community was shaped largely by the relationships the participants were able to form with co-workers and supervisors or employers, the onboarding they received as new employees, and the ongoing communication they had with colleagues. In contrast, the stories with customers were predominantly focused on communication-related tasks, such as customer service, listening to a food order, or phone-based interactions. Across all of the stories, we identified elements of power and positioning, and agency.

Figure 1

### Coding Framework



### *Across the Stories*

#### Power and Positioning

Power for the newcomers played out at both macro and micro levels. At a macro level, it was clear most of the participants experienced some level of deskilling, were underemployed, or were not working in their trained profession. For instance, one of the participants, Benny, was a bookkeeper in China and in Canada worked as a line cook and delivery person. Then there was Shelby, who was a systems engineer in South

Korea but worked as a translator in Canada. We also observed that the participants were extremely busy, with limited opportunities to practice English because of needing to work many hours or multiple jobs. Khaled's job as a dishwasher offered limited opportunities to communicate with co-workers or his employer, in addition to working an additional two to three other jobs, often for cash, and therefore without access to benefits; Khalid's job as a dishwasher along with his "under-the-table" jobs are a step down from his previous position as a supervisor in Sudan. The participants' entry into the labour market reflects Creese and Wiebe's (2009) observations of deskilling and underemployment seen in their research. Further, the role of gender seems to be a possible factor in the degree to which deskilling occurs for newcomers. We noted that four of the male participants, Jason, Sam, Adil, and Victor, were working in similar jobs compared to their previous roles (e.g., student research assistant, pastor at a church, manager at an IT company/application developer, and a hairstylist). Comparatively, one female participant, Melissa, was in a job that required some computer skills doing data entry; it was a job much lower pay and skill set than she would have received as an accountant. Further, two other female participants, Victoria and Fadwe, volunteered as a strategy to gain entrance into the labour market, similar to Liu and Guo's (2021) research. Our findings, although based on a small number of participants, align with previous studies regarding the barriers newcomer women face when trying to enter or re-enter the Canadian workforce. For instance, Statistics Canada data show that not only do racialized newcomer women have greater representation in entry-level positions, but they also have experienced more difficulty obtaining employment or have had to take a lower median wage upon re-entry after the COVID-19 lockdowns (Hou et al., 2020). While taking on volunteer jobs highlights the participants' agency, it also indicates the larger issue of power through labour market pressures, particularly on women, and the potentially exploitative nature of Canadian employers benefitting from free labour (Slade, 2012). See the Appendix for the participant profiles to compare their current roles to previous jobs.

Throughout the stories, there was a clear element of power at the micro level. The participants commented that, at times, they were generally able to express their authentic selves in a communication situation or, at other times, felt they had to be silent and disempowered, through actions by an interlocutor or their own comfort level. In Jackson's case, he felt shy because his African English differed from the English in use around him: "our Africa English is not completely the same as their language, so when I came here I was try to contact with the people. I'm not shy, but sometimes I'm shy." It was interesting that Jackson referred to the English spoken in Canada as not the same language, indicating a sense of being different even though he speaks English, just a different variety. From a raciolinguistic perspective (Flores & Rosa, 2015, 2023), Jackson's shyness connected to speaking one of his languages as a multilingual speaker may relate to the colonial reproduction of shame attached to speaking an English variety. When considering all the stories, this sense of being different could lead to feelings of disempowerment, with some participants only expressing their full identity with others from a similar ethnic background, a finding that aligns with what Holmes (2015) observed in her research on newcomers in a workplace program.

Each story represented a communication event with an interlocutor, who often demonstrated their power through positioning. In some of the stories, there was a perceived willingness for the other person to meaningfully engage in intercultural communication. It was also clear when the interlocutor refused to participate in intercultural dialogue and demonstrated powerful positioning, by being "hurtful and rude" (Shelby). Other stories highlighted how the participants felt excluded by some interlocutors by talking faster, using unfamiliar vocabulary, or excluding the newcomer. For example, when Alison started talking with a co-worker about a tattoo, after her supervisor joined the conversation, Alison felt silenced:

I was working with my supervisor and um, other partner come to the kitchen and he need to work in um, my microwave, for example, and I saw he, he has a very big tattoo here, and I say oh, you have a tattoo. "Yes, I have one here and I have two more." My

supervisor started to talk with him about the tattoo and in a minute, I said okay, I need only listen.

Other stories highlighted the energy an interlocutor would appear to give off when communicating their willingness. For instance, Melissa described her interactions with the positive energy from the owner of the company she worked for: “the owner, she was you know, really good person .... I feel the people with a positive energy... so it’s like at the same time I really felt that this is a person, that’s positive.” Across the stories, it was clear that the interlocutor often holds the power for intercultural communication. This finding is not surprising or new (e.g., Douglas et al., 2020). Overall, this interlocutor power existed as a thread throughout the workplace communication dynamic, potentially forcing the newcomers into a position of vulnerability in which communication breaks down.

## Agency

Participants expressed agency by sharing cultural capital, improving their English skills to better advocate for themselves or to ensure communication success. As an example of sharing cultural capital, Joon welcomed the opportunity to share her knowledge of Korean music and food: “sometimes I turn on the Korean radio or music, and when customers hear that they asked me what that is exactly.” She also expressed her eagerness when she gets to talk about Korean cooking with others: “last week, [an] Asian customer asked me about Korean food, and I told her how to cook and what the ingredients should be, and she was happy with that.”

The participants highlighted the need to learn or improve English as necessary for being able to advocate for themselves, in other words, collecting cultural capital. For instance, Alison narrated a time when she needed to request some vacation days from her supervisor and recounted,

I practice with my mirror with [laugh], in a letter, with my volunteer ... in the library. I practice ... I use all different sentences ... something about my location because I need to take 10 days off in July, and can be possible I take those days for like vacation ... unpaid days, uh, because I really need to, to, to go to Europe. And she said me, okay, you need to write a letter because we need to speak with the general manager, but it’s not a guarantee, but probably you can take those days, and I say thank you so much, I appreciate it.

This practice of the discourse for making a request points to Alison taking it upon herself to practice what language she might need. The quote speaks to Alison’s perceived vulnerability as an English language learner and newcomer, perhaps contributing to her feelings of stress and need to practice the dialogue beforehand. While Alison worked at a hotel coffee shop and was entitled to vacation days, she still felt that she might be at risk of not receiving the days off. Kaplāns (2022) indicated that the participants in his study demonstrated agency through self-confidence and migration-specific cultural capital of knowledge about labour laws.

Some newcomers were faced with disrespectful interlocutors, as was the case for Beatrice, who took it upon herself to fulfil a customer’s request despite rude and inappropriate behavior:

I say, I’m going to take care of everything, so I went back I was successful. I take the order then I do the meal. So things like that, you are going to shut up. No, I don’t want her to behave the way she behaved with me.

Across multiple stories, Beatrice described how she needed to advocate for herself while at the same time making sure she completed room service orders for rude customers over the phone. Participants often highlighted that they would demonstrate their willingness for communication; Benny, for example, shared that it is important for him to be friendly and smile: "I think if you are friendly, if you smile, always smile and the people, same, yeah, same, I think almost people is very kind." Similar to Holmes's (2015) study, the participants in this study often took on the accountability for communication success through practice, learned the specific vocabulary, and demonstrated willingness to ensure success.

The findings highlight how newcomers in entry-level workplace settings experience power at macro and micro levels through gendered deskilling and underemployment, and positioning by willing or hostile interlocutors. The stories also demonstrated how the participants would take it upon themselves to ensure successful communication by practicing the language needed to achieve their communication goal or navigate difficult interactions with adverse interlocutors.

### *Workplace Community*

Based on the stories told, the workplace community was established through three components: the relationship dynamic created between the participants and the employer/supervisor and/or co-workers, the onboarding and training the participants received as new employees, and the ongoing communication efforts by fellow co-workers or employers/supervisors.

#### Relationship Dynamic

The participants generally had a different relationship dynamic with employers/supervisors than co-workers. The employers/supervisors were often small business owners of retail/convenience stores or restaurants or were supervisors for the shifts that the participants worked. Some of the small business owners were also newcomers themselves with a shared or different ethnic background and seemed to make efforts to support and foster an equitable relationship with the newcomers interviewed in this study. This created a more equitable relationship, as was the case for Sam when he went on a trip with an employer's family:

We went to amusement park with their family. In that point, at Detroit in the US, we could familiar with in their ... he understood me so much ... he can understand me ... he taught English in Korea. So, he understands many Korean cultures and expressions. So, he understand me.

When the stories described an equitable relationship or no observed hierarchy in the co-worker relationship, the data suggested interlocutors were supportive in facilitating understanding of the linguistic (primarily vocabulary) and cultural norms. Further, most of these supportive stories described the employers/supervisors and co-workers as being from immigrant backgrounds.

Not all interactions with employers/supervisors or co-workers were positive. For some participants, they represented unwilling interlocutors and clearly communicated a sense of hierarchy over the participants. For Jane, the hierarchical relationships of her workplace as a patient attendant were with supervising nurses at a long-term care home:

There's another boss [a nurse] who comes at night to check on us. If we are putting on our uniforms, if we have our bag, security pass, those things. If you don't have one of those things, she will report you to your bosses .... If she report you like, three times,

there's a big boss, she'll call you, ask what's the problem, why you not putting uniform, why you don't have a bag, why you late, you have to be on time, yeah, so have someone who come to control us.

It was clear that from Jane's perspective that the supervising nurses were there to control her. Jane noted in the interview that she quit her job as a patient attendant, demonstrating agency by sacrificing economic capital for her personal well-being.

## Onboarding

The employers/supervisors and co-workers had either an inclusionary or exclusionary approach to welcoming and training the newcomers. The employers/supervisors would often provide on-the-job training. For John, his on-the-job training was supported through visual aids. While his supervisor was explaining what he needed to do, John was given a piece of paper that outlined the job tasks: "he show me in the paper, you gonna and then after, you gonna work here ... he took some chemical and he spray here, and yeah he was showing me on the paper." This story highlighted that John was provided visual supports and described the supervisor picking up the spray bottle to ensure John understood what was being asked of him. What is interesting about this scenario is that John had a listening score of 3 on the CELPIP (or CLB 3), so he likely benefitted from the visual support to aid in his understanding of what to do .

Other stories depicted workplace training that was exclusionary, as was the case for Shelby, a Western Canada participant. Throughout her training, acronyms were used without any explanation, "for example, [acronym], right, [acronym] is [full name of college] .... And for example EI, that's employ insurance ... those things are not easy to understand from the context." These acronyms are a form of jargon specific to her workplace and the local community. Shelby had a high level of listening ability with a score of 7 for listening on the CELPIP (or CLB 7). If the acronyms were explained, it is likely she would have understood them. The training workshop might have been used previously with someone from the local community and an English-speaking dominant background. It shows that the employer did not have an awareness of the challenges the workshop might pose for newcomers or of how inclusive or exclusionary it was.

When there were supportive co-worker relationships, the participants alluded to a desire for helping each other learn the discourse norms during training. Adrian described how a co-worker helped him adjust to his new workplace by teaching him the work-specific terms he needed to know:

He was told me everything, the guy, and were working together like family, like friend, you know, and everything he was like teach me, now it's like this, this is the name is for, you know. Some things I don't know, it's completely different from when I know the English, he was told me like that ones the name of this one like that.

Some participants adopted a supportive role by helping their colleagues learn the tasks of the job or the vocabulary needed. For instance, Victor described his experience at a deli-style restaurant of helping a fellow co-worker with an order:

the lady (customer) tell to my [co-worker] that I want mayo as well, but [my co-worker] is not listening, she just trying to close (the sandwich) ... but the [customer] is trying to tell her again and again, then I have to tell her that she is telling you to put mayo on it.

The interviewer asked Victor if the co-worker was new. His response was “at that time she was new. When people are in a big line, they (employees) are trying to finish fast, but sometimes they miss something.”

### Ongoing Communication

Some stories highlighted how co-workers would support communication by modifying their speech, as was the case for Melissa. At her data-entry job, her co-workers, who also had an immigrant background, would slow down their speech or sometimes speak with the manager on Melissa’s behalf. Melissa also noted that her co-workers from linguistically diverse backgrounds did not have as strong an accent compared to co-workers whose primary language was English.

Other stories suggested that engaging in small talk and jargon was a way for co-workers to exclude the participants. For Benny, he wanted to engage more with his colleagues after work, but felt he could not because it was too difficult to understand:

Sometimes I go with my co-worker and ... go to a drink [laugh] .... Don’t too much, I don’t know ... but I don’t understand .... They talk too much topics .... Yeah, a lot of topics. They don’t speak with me, they, they, like to Canadian, uh, native speaker, they talk .... They talk each other, I just listening.

In these stories, the use of small talk by his colleagues was a linguistic tool to exclude Benny and other participants from the conversation, but also socially. For Michelle, a participant from western Canada, she felt uncomfortable when “some co-worker started talking about something random and then the words just aren’t coming, yet. Like the idea’s there. I was like, I wanna make this joke, but I don’t know how to say it in English.” In this story, it was not apparent if the interlocutors were aware that Michelle felt left out by not having the vocabulary to contribute to the joke. Holmes (2015) identified the small-talk context as creating uncomfortable situations for newcomers and noted that the language register use in small talk is privileged. In Holmes’s study, the participants questioned the function and role of the “tea breaks” (p. 115) as a part of their job. Similarly, for the participants in this study, small talk and breaks are opportunities for intercultural encounters if all interlocutors are open to communication. For this current study, the participants seemed to want to engage in social and informal intercultural communication, but through unequal power dynamics they were excluded. It appears that small talk may also serve as a way to disempower newcomers in an entry-level workplace position.

Overall, the entry-level workplace community was defined and shaped by how inclusionary or exclusionary the employers/supervisors and co-workers were through the relationships formed, but also the linguistic and communication tools used by interlocutors to engage the participants or exclude them.

### *Customer Communication*

Communication with customers/clients was quite different to the stories with other workplace interlocutors because there was a limited relationship between the participants and the customers. Ordering food and phone-based communication was primarily transactional. As part of offering customer service, the participants were obligated or expected to develop a rapport with the customer or ensure successful communication, even when customers were rude and disrespectful, as seen in the stories described earlier by Beatrice in the section on agency. These themes discussed here represent the different types of discourse spaces that might be expected of newcomers each with its own language and cultural norms, often with the customer as a perceived expert of the cultural of social norms.

## Customer Service

Customer service represents a specific discourse space the participants in this study needed to navigate as part of their jobs. For some it was the main discourse space, while for others it was a communication activity they needed to engage with once in a while. Not surprisingly, strong interpersonal skills were needed on the part of the newcomer to offer customer service and to ensure the customer was satisfied with the service.

To keep the customers happy, some participants would pre-emptively apologize, such as for a food order being late. Benny, a participant in eastern Canada, describes how he would phone a customer to apologize for being late with delivering an order, “usually I phone customer. If my delay the food, something, I call the customer first, restaurant busy, I’m so sorry.” Apologizing was a common tactic employed by the participants to mediate communication challenges, as was discussed previously in the section on newcomer responsibility. Jia navigated customer service through her openness and relied on visual cues for customer satisfaction: “It’s very simple. So you know sometimes you don’t have very good language. You can see the face. You can see everything you know. You know they like your service. You don’t say so much words. I know.”

## Ordering Food Discourse Expectations

Unique to the client/customer interactions were requests for ordering food. Many of the participants worked in the fast-food service industry, and it was clear that being able to take a food order quickly was an expectation from customers. Indeed, it often was a central component of the job. With the customer as a potential insider to this food-ordering discourse community, they were able to facilitate or obstruct communication. The customer might respond with impatience or offer support by rephrasing the question. An excerpt from one story below highlights how as an established insider of the perceived discourse community, the customer clearly communicated their displeasure and further amplified the stress of the situation by talking faster:

My customers [have been] coming in from childhood ... for about twenty years. So now that customer know that who is new, so they are trying to give the new person a hard time, they try to talk so awkwardly, they try to talk so fast. So our employee they are not able to get, and they try to upset on that thing they are not getting right ... they speak so fast, so obviously the new employee and who is new in Canada, they don’t get that thing very fast. So this kind of problem happen. The customer gives a hard time. (Victor

As part of the food-ordering discourse, customers will ask for details about the price of dishes or how meals are cooked. When there is a breakdown in communication, Jia indicates she is never embarrassed to use body language to facilitate understanding:

The price of the dish. Sometimes, the customer asks how to cook the dish ... there were challenges. For example, a nice lady asked for a table set and I didn’t understand that. I use body language. If I don’t understand, I’m never ashamed. I say, “can you repeat again?” I like talking face to face, you can use body language.

The majority of the client/customer stories represented a communication challenge about ordering food or listening to requests where the newcomer needed to respond and learn the discourse expectations quickly.

Some of the stories also indicated when the participants needed to take a food order over the phone, which, as is highlighted next, has its own challenges.

### Phone-Based Communication

Some of the participants needed to communicate with customers, clients, or contractors by phone. The limited context cues represented a definite communication challenge for the participants for understanding and communicating meaning, as well as for displaying respect. For Beatrice, she felt that customers are not as friendly over the phone compared to in-person, until she apologized for being an English language learner:

[Customers] are friendly when it is face-to-face, but when it's over the phone, you don't know maybe they are upset, something upset them before, or I don't know, you don't see them .... But, sometimes they are nice. I don't get them, so "sorry I didn't get it you can say it again. My first language isn't English, I'm sorry .... Can you talk slowly then," then we start laughing and then it is okay.

Phone-based communication also represented a source of considerable stress for some participants. During the interview, Michelle commented that phone-based communication compounded the tactics difficult customers would employ to impede communication:

I think it was all of it. Like the phone, of course the sound quality wasn't the best, and then he was mad so he was like, talking really fast and mad and then shouting at the same time, and then I was, and then you're really frustrated at the same time as well, but you don't really want to miss it [laugh].

Michelle laughed throughout the response, and while we did not follow up about the meaning in her laughter, it appeared to be her way of laughing off an uncomfortable aspect of her job. An upset customer was a common type of communication she experienced in her job as client support for an office, as was seen throughout her other stories.

When unsupportive interlocutors gave little to no contextual cues, the communication was impacted and led to considerable stress for the participants. Beatrice was able to mediate the communication by sharing with the customer that she was a language learner and still learning the discourse rules and norms, but for Michelle her potential strategy was through laughter. Holmes (2015) described how emails were a challenging form of communication because of the limited contextual and affective cues. For the participants in this study, phone-based communication represents the same challenge.

Overall, the customer/client stories represent a dynamic and complex space for intercultural communication. Given the nature of entry-level positions or the non-professional status of the jobs, the participants in this study might be in a perceived lower socio-cultural status when in a customer/employee communication situation, and it is quite likely that they experienced a loss of symbolic capital compared to the newcomers' previous jobs (Kapráns, 2023). This unequal power dynamic is amplified when the customer is from the dominant language and experienced with the cultural norms but is unwilling to engage in intercultural communication and negotiate meaning.

## Conclusion

While this hardworking, and often invisible, population of newcomers to Canada are key contributors to society and economic growth, their stories and perspectives are often absent in the research literature. Through storytelling research (Lewis, 2011; Squire, 2013), the participants were able to give voice to their experiences and provide insight into the complex intercultural communication within the entry-level workplace. Telling their perspective of workplace communication appeared to be rewarding for the participants. They were able to describe the events in their own words and focus on the details that mattered the most to them. This opportunity to share a personal story seemed to be particularly important for some participants, who, from their perspective, had frustrating workplace communication experiences.

The stories highlighted elements of intercultural communication in the entry-level workplace for newcomers. Holliday (2020) described intercultural communication as complex and expressed a need to examine the messiness of the relationships and multiple identities that form intercultural communication. The participants were skilled at adapting and morphing for the context needed, and when communicating with co-workers and employers who shared a newcomer background there was a desire to learn from one another, as Jia described. Thus, this space of intercultural communication is grounded in the relational aspect of the entry-level workplace community fostered through efforts of the employer/supervisors and co-workers to create a positive relationship dynamic. More research is needed to examine how newcomers navigate these spaces through narrative and ethnographic methods that can go deeper into the relationships and intercultural communities that are formed in the entry-level workplace.

The study showcased the different layers of power the newcomers experience in order to enter the labour market through deskilling, underemployment or, on a smaller scale, not being able to express their full identity. Furthermore, the newcomers in this study appeared to carry the burden of maintaining and facilitating successful communication. This responsibility existed alongside their vulnerability as being new to a country, trying to learn the dominant language, and often needing multiple entry-level jobs to survive financially. Some of the participants had up to four jobs to pay their monthly bills; they took whatever jobs they could—an example of survival employment (Creese & Wiebe, 2009). Additionally, the role of gender seems to be a factor in the degree of deskilling experienced by the participants.

Participants carried the burden of responsibility for facilitating and ensuring communication success, sometimes at the expense of their dignity, as was the case for Beatrice, who despite the customer being extremely rude, ensured they were able to get their order. As part of the service-related jobs, there were expectations about the social and cultural norms for customer service discourse, in which the customers were often the experts, insiders to the linguistic community (Komisarof, 2022), and through positioning they would facilitate or impede communication for the newcomer. Another form of positioning came from how the participants were excluded from social conversations with co-workers through small talk and jargon, as seen in Holmes (2015).

The findings of the study identify the need for more attention to the language training that newcomers receive. We identified communication situations that were specific to the entry-level workplace, such as taking food orders or customer service, while others reflect many employment sectors, such as asking for time off work. The stories further highlighted the dynamics of employer and co-worker relationships in the workplace and how they can shape communication. Moving beyond the findings from the stories collected, we see the participants as a rich resource for content. The participants articulated a range of stories about their workplace communication experiences. Drawing upon the newcomer students as a source of knowledge gives them agency in addition to decentring the power often afforded to the teachers in language classes.

Sociopragmatic skills have been highlighted as an important component of language training for newcomers (e.g., Yates & Major, 2015). Based on the findings of this study, the essential sociopragmatic

skills for newcomers in the entry-level workplace are navigating communication situations with adverse interlocutors, advocating for oneself, engaging in small talk, and customer-service discourse expectations. When considered from a raciolinguistic lens (Flores & Rosa, 2015, 2023), the examples provided showcasing sociopragmatic skills should draw from a range of English varieties to shift the focus from an idealized standard.

Workplaces need training for employers and co-workers about how to be inclusive in onboarding and ongoing communication. Some of the workplaces described by the participants had agreements with the local immigration organizations to connect newcomers with jobs. Through these partnerships, there may be opportunities for onboarding, such as providing a list of key vocabulary terms and acronyms, something that Shelby would have benefitted from. The partnerships may also be a barrier for newcomers to finding a job they are trained for; this is particularly true for women. Senthanar et al. (2020) reported that women with refugee experiences in Canada were directed to low-skill jobs based on established relationships between an immigration organization and businesses. For some of the participants, these positions were possible hubs for productive intercultural communication, depending on the location and willingness of the interlocutors to engage in intercultural communication, while others felt silenced or worked alone. Our study focused on commonalities across a range of entry-level workplace settings. For the purposes of this study, entry-level jobs included data-entry jobs, volunteer positions, church leadership, kitchen help, food delivery jobs, farm positions, and any job that was not formally regulated by a certification or governing agency and did not require formal training. More research is needed to see what unique features might exist within a particular type of position.

As with any study, there are limitations with both the methodology and the interpretations that can be made from the findings. The very nature of self-reported data is complex. We drew on storytelling research methodology (Lewis, 2011) with episodic narrative interviews (Mueller, 2019) to capture the small stories participants had about their experiences of communicating in the entry-level workplace. We believe that the details describing the events were important to the participants and representative of their perspective and how they viewed communication in the workplace. An additional limitation was that the stories were told to us in the participants' additional language. Some of the participants had emerging levels of English language ability, and they would have been more descriptive in their home language. Further research should allow for the stories to be told by newcomers in their home languages.

More research is needed to continue to understand this dynamic and rich discourse space for newcomers with both willing and averse interlocutors. With increased globalization and dissonance present in the world, it will be important to better understand how intercultural communication occurs across all workplaces. Further research into newcomers' experiences in the entry-level workplace adds to this understanding. These entry-level positions are likely newcomers' first job and workplace in a new country. It is also the space where newcomers are learning the language and navigating the complexities of intercultural communication.

### *The Authors*

Christine Doe is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her research examines language testing use across multiple contexts, including higher education and workplace settings.

Scott R. Douglas is a professor in the University of British Columbia's Okanagan School of Education. His work focuses on English as an additional language teaching and learning in adult and post-secondary contexts. He is also the editor of the *BC TEAL Journal*.

Liying Cheng is Professor and Dean, School of Education, City University of Macau. Her seminal research on washback illustrates the global impact of large-scale testing on instruction, the relationships between assessment and instruction, and the academic and professional acculturation of international and new immigrant students, workers, and professionals in Canada.

## References

- Adams Lyngbäck, L., & Paul, E. (2024). Are you white enough to understand Swedish?: A raciolinguistic exploration in parent encounters in a non-formal educational terrain. *Whiteness and Education*, 10(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2024.2376820>
- Bamberg, M. (2007). Stories: Big or small—Why do we care?. In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative: State of the art* (pp. 165–174). John Benjamins.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Coleman, P. T., Kugler, K. G., Mitchinson, A., & Foster, C. (2013). Navigating conflict and power at work: The effects of power and interdependence asymmetries on conflict in organizations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(10), 1963–1983. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12150>
- Creese, G., & Wiebe, B. (2009). “Survival employment”: Gender and deskilling among African immigrants in Canada. *International Migration*, 50(5), 56–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00531.x>
- Douglas, S. R., Doe, C., & Cheng, L. (2020). The role of the interlocutor: Factors impeding workplace communication with newcomers speaking English as an additional language. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 76(1), 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2018-0161>
- Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149–171. <https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>
- Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2023). Undoing raciolinguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 27(5), 421–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12643>
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative: State of the art* (pp. 145–154). John Benjamins.
- Holliday, A. (2020). Culture, communication, context, and power. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 39–54). Routledge.
- Holmes, P. (2015). “The cultural stuff around how to talk to people”: Immigrants’ intercultural communication during a pre-employment work-placement. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15(1), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.985309>
- Hou, F., Picot, G., & Zhang, J. (2020). Transitions into and out of employment by immigrants during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery (Catalogue no. 45280001). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00070-eng.pdf>
- Hua, Z., & Kramsch, C. (2016). Symbolic power and conversational inequality in intercultural communication: An introduction. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 7(4), 375–383. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2016-0016>
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). (2023). *Find out if you have the language proof for citizenship: Step 3*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-citizenship/become-canadian-citizen/eligibility/language-proof/step-3.html>

- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). (2024). *CIMM – Temporary Foreign Worker Program – November 25, 2024*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-nov-25-2024/temporary-foreign-worker-program.html>
- Jackson, J. (2019). *Introducing language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.
- Kaprāns, M. (2023). “They laughed at me, but I left that job”: Occupational agency of Latvian migrant workers in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(5), 1191–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2035702>
- Komisarof, A. (2022). A new framework of workplace belonging: Instrument validation and testing relationships to crucial acculturation outcomes. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 15(3), 311–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2021.1897152>
- Kramersch, C., & Zhu, H. (2020). Translating culture in global times: An introduction. *Applied Linguistics*, 41(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz020>
- Liu, J. (2019). The precarious nature of work in the context of Canadian immigration: An intersectional analysis. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 51(2), 169–185. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2019.0013>
- Liu, J., & Guo, S. (2021). Navigating transition to work: Recent immigrants’ experiences of lifelong learning in Canada. *International Review of Education*, 67(6), 733–750. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09931-9>
- Lewis, P. J. (2011). Storytelling as research/Research as storytelling. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 505–510. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409883>
- Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2015). Reconsidering intercultural (communication) competence in the workplace: A dialectical approach. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15(1), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.985303>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Sage.
- Mueller, R. A. (2019). Episodic narrative interview: Capturing stories of experience with a methods fusion. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919866044>
- Noels, K. A., Yashima, T., & Zhang, R. (2020). Language, identity, and intercultural communication. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 55–69). Routledge.
- Paragon Testing Enterprises. (2022). *CELPPIP–General LS*. <https://www.celpip.ca/celpip-general-ls/>
- Parutis, V. (2014). “Economic migrants” or “middling transnationals”? East European migrants’ experiences of work in the UK. *International Migration*, 52(1), 36–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2010.00677.x>
- Piller, I. (2011). *Intercultural communication: A critical introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Ramjattan, V. A. (2022). Accenting racism in labour migration. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 42, 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000143>
- Ramjattan, V. A. (2023). International students and their raciolinguistic sensemaking of aural employability in Canadian universities. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2023(282), 159–180. <http://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2022-0067>
- Rezazadeh, M. S., & Hoover, M. L. (2018). Women’s experiences of immigration to Canada: A review of the literature. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne*, 59(1), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000126>
- Senthanar, S., MacEachen, E., Premji, S., & Bigelow, P. (2020). “Can someone help me?” Refugee women’s experiences of using settlement agencies to find work in Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 21, 273–294. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00729-1>

- Slade, B. (2012). "From high skill to high school": Illustrating the process of deskilling immigrants through reader's theatre and institutional ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(5), 401–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800412439526>
- Squire, C. (2013). From experience-centred to socioculturally oriented approaches to narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (2nd ed., pp. 47–71). Sage.
- Yates, L., & Major, G. (2015). "Quick-chatting," "smart dogs," and how to "say without saying": Small talk and pragmatic learning in the community. *System*, 48, 141–152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.011>
- Zietsma, D. (2010). Immigrants working in regulated occupations. *Perspectives*, 13–28. Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 75-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75-001-x/2010102/pdf/11121-eng.pdf?st=84RuG9Zz>
- Zuberi, D., & Ptashnick, M. (2012). In search of a better life: The experiences of working poor immigrants in Vancouver, Canada. *International Migration*, 50, 60–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2010.00659.x>

### Appendix: Participant Profiles

Name	Country of origin	Language background	Gender	Years in Canada	Previous job	Current job	CELP IP L/S	Site
Melissa	Russia	Russian, Hebrew	Female	1	Accountant	Data entry	7/6	Eastern Canada
Alison	Uruguay	Spanish	Female	2	Human resources manager	Hotel industry	3/6	Eastern Canada
Sharon	India	Telugu	Female	3	Supervisor, welfare services	Patient attendant	4/4	Eastern Canada
Jane	Uganda	Kiganda	Female	3	Hotel receptionist	Patient attendant	3/4	Eastern Canada
Choukaje	Sudan	Arabic, Massalit, Dajou	Female	2	High school graduate	Kitchen	5/6	Eastern Canada
Victoria	South Korea	Korean, Japanese	Female	3	High school teacher	Community volunteer	5/4	Eastern Canada
Adrian	Eritrea	Tigrignai, Hebrew	Male	0	Trainer in the army in Eritrea; Kitchen helper in Israel	Restaurant (cook line) and cleaning	3/5	Eastern Canada
Khaled	Sudan	Arabic	Male	3	Market sales supervisor, cashier	Dishwasher	3/3	Eastern Canada
Mohamed	Sudan	Massalit, Arabic, Hebrew	Male	2	Farm worker	Kitchen helper	M/3	Eastern Canada
Jackson	Sudan	Massalit, Twi, English	Male	1	Farm worker	Janitor	3/5	Eastern Canada

Name	Country of origin	Language background	Gender	Years in Canada	Previous job	Current job	CELP IP L/S	Site
John	Congo	Swahili, Luganda	Male	2	Student	Recreation centre janitor	3/5	Eastern Canada
Benny	China	Mandarin	Male	8	Bookkeeper	Cook line/delivery	4/4	Eastern Canada
Fadwe	Lebanon	Arabic	Female	14	Student	Volunteer shopper	4/4	Eastern Canada
Shelby	South Korea	Korean	Female	5	Systems engineer	Translator	7/5	Western Canada
Juan	Mexico	Spanish	Male	1	Photographer	Farm worker/camera store	7/6	Western Canada
Lauren	Mexico	Spanish	Female	2	Dietician	Grocery store clerk	6/6	Western Canada
Jason	Tunisia	Arabic	Male	0	Student (engineering)	Research assistant	10/6	Western Canada
Michelle	Philippines	Tagalog	Female	4	Student (linguistics)	Office assistant	11/7	Western Canada
Beatrice	Cameroon	French	Female	3	Spanish teacher	Hotel industry	7/8	Western Canada
Li	China	Chinese	Female	9	Human resource manager	Server	4/3	Central Canada
Jia	China	Chinese	Female	3	Nurse	Server / kitchen helper	5/5	Central Canada
Joon	Korea	Korean	Female	1	English teacher	Server	6/6	Central Canada
Sam	Korea	Korean	Male	3	Pastor at a church	Pastor at a church	6/5	Central Canada
Victor	Syria	Arabic	Male	1	Hair stylist	Hair stylist	6/6	Central Canada
Adil	Egypt	Arabic	Male	6	Manager at an IT company	Application developer	11/7	Central Canada

Copyright © 2025 TESL Canada Journal

This work is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) 

The TESL Canada Journal retains copyright of this work. The TESL Canada Journal, as the original source of publication, along with the original author(s), must be acknowledged in any reuse or adaptation of published material. Reuse includes distribution, adaptation, and building upon the material in any medium or format. The license allows for commercial use. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.