

## Chapter 2

# Negotiating Language and Cultural Identity in Multicultural Contexts in Canada

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to explore and examine the role of language in the integration to the community of practice (CoP) of a culturally diverse group of participants, the Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) in Canada. Based on interpretive qualitative research and Bourdieu's theory as a lens, an in-depth interview, survey questionnaire and policy document data were analyzed using critical discourse analysis and the grounded theory. A selection of 30 IEP participants were divided into three categories according to their year of arrival. Findings reveal four different classes of IEPs and explain how they negotiate their language and cultural identity to integrate in their CoP post-migration. Results offer implications for reconceptualizing language norms, policies and practices in multicultural contexts.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role of language in negotiating the cultural identity of Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) in Canada, commonly known as “foreign-trained immigrants,” identify the emerging themes that explain their employment successes or failures, and describe how their professional status has changed post-migration. Considering the new immigration plan to meet the current labour market shortages (IRCC, 2022), there continues a need for research studies to inform policy-makers on how immigrants over the past decades negotiate to integrate in the Canadian society and the economy. Based on a research study (Quinio, 2015), the role of the researcher as an IEP was to systematically explore and examine the hidden relationships between employment practices and the wider social structures as determined by policies on language use and ability (CIC, 2012). This study sought to investigate how such practices, events or texts were developed and ideologically shaped by social relations of power. Within this analytical framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Fairclough, 1989, 1992),

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8761-7.ch002

the objective was to relate and corroborate the researcher's experiences with each study participant in comparable groups with whom they shared similar worldviews within the periphery of qualitative inquiry.

The study is situated in the context of a changing policy landscape, fluctuating economic conditions, and the increasing trends of globalization and migration. As a result of deteriorating conditions in periphery countries and a perceived advantage of living in more wealthy developed nations (Laquian & Laquian, 2008; McKay, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010), there has been an increasing trend in the migration of foreign-trained immigrants from the periphery nations to dominant countries with more developed economies (Apple, 2005). The influx of immigrants to the Global North with different knowledge and ways of seeing the world often results in contradictions within the dominant society (Gutmann, 2004), and can generate many forms of bias that serve as barriers for IEPs' socioeconomic integration and employment success. For the purpose of this book, this chapter is limited to answering two major research questions based on the study results: (1) How do different groups of IEPs negotiate their language backgrounds and cultural identities to integrate in their community of practice (CoP)? (2) What are the roles of language and the emerging themes that describe the integration experiences of IEPs, and explain the need to reconceptualize the existing language norms?

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Drawing from findings that the changing policies and macroeconomic conditions can impact the successful integration of immigrants in the socioeconomic arena of the host society (Alboim & MacIsaac, 2007; Boyd & Cao, 2009; Chiswick, Cohen, & Zach, 1997; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012), this study seeks to explain the negotiation experiences of IEPs in employment as determined by many factors particularly their language and cultural identities at the time of their arrival over the two-decade period from 1988 to 2008. Although a consistent pattern emerged in the literature that language proficiency (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2004; Derwing & Waugh, 2012; Esser, 2006; Green & Worswick, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2005) and the contextual factors of employment (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Picot & Hou, 2012; Reitz, 2001, 2007a, 2007b,) are among the dominant factors influencing the social and economic integration of immigrants in Canada, many of these related studies are purely quantitative and often positivistic in orientation. This study was designed to provide a rich narrative account of the IEPs' diverse cultural identities, language negotiation and integration experiences that seemed to be lacking in this area of interest.

The analytical approach used in this present study can be distinguished from the existing literature (Aydemir, 2003; McDonald & Worswick, 1997; Statistics Canada, 2005) in terms of the epistemological stance employed in previous studies with their positivist orientation such that the impact of macroeconomic conditions were controlled with the differences in the class composition of immigrant cohorts and their year of arrival. Although it is nearly impossible to determine the cohort effects of immigrants on their employment outcomes with the limited number of cases in this qualitative study, except with their level of income as an indicator of favourable or unfavourable economic conditions during their year of arrival, the rich narrative account of each individual participant according to their year of arrival can provide a meaningful basis for identifying the different employment barriers that different groups of immigrants may be confronting as they negotiate their different language backgrounds and cultural identities. Furthermore, the rich narrative account of each individual participant may not be captured adequately in the positivist approach, but such detail was made possible in this present study. These details may be useful in determining what particular policy will work for a particular group of immigrants.

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