

Racializing Immigrant Professionals in an Employment Preparation ESL Program

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Abstract

This article summarizes a case study of the ways in which a specific English as a Second Language (ESL) program prepares immigrant professionals for employment in an urban Canadian labour market. Data for the study were collected from interviews with immigrant professionals, administrators, ESL teachers, a career workshop facilitator, and from classroom observations of the ESL program in an immigrant-serving organization in western Canada. Using the perspectives of critical multiculturalism, critical multilingualism, and Foucault's "governmentality," the study reveals that the ESL program focuses on presentability and employability of immigrants through processes such as acquiring accentless proficiency in English, changing one's names, and adapting to Canadian linguistic and cultural norms. The ESL program puts the pressure on immigrants to assimilate, without promoting changes in the larger Canadian society. The roots of the dominance of English language and sociocultural norms are not questioned in the program. Finally, major educational implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

Canada has a tradition of actively recruiting immigrant professionals from abroad due to a significant skills shortage. Canada hopes to take in 300,000 immigrants a year between 2005-2010. In 2005, 49.67 percent out of the total 262,236 immigrants and refugees admitted to Canada were professionals (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Immigrant professionals have education, work experience, knowledge of English and/or French, and other abilities that will help them to establish themselves successfully as permanent residents in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). Many immigrants have worked in professional or managerial positions in their home countries. Following their arrival in Canada, however, many experience unemployment or work in low-paying jobs. They often encounter barriers in the Canadian labour market. Some barriers are systemic factors such as the non-recognition of immigrants' prior educational credentials and work experience (Basran & Zong, 1998; Guo, 2005) and some are individual factors such as a lack of Canadian experience, the length of residence in Canada, and inadequate command of English (Reitz, 2001).

Of these barriers, a lack of English language skills has been identified as a key issue facing immigrant professionals. Scholars and some immigrants appear to accept the lack of English language proficiency skills uncritically. What is implied when employers use the lack of English language skills as a major reason for not employing immigrant professionals (Environics Research Group, 2004)? What sociocultural issues are embedded in such reasoning? How does an ESL program prepare immigrant professionals to deal with these issues concerning employment in the Canadian labour market? These were the key questions that guided this study.

Theoretical Frameworks and Prior Research

Two theoretical frameworks shed light on these questions. The first is critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism; the second is Foucault's concept of "governmentality". Critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism facilitate an understanding of the philosophies and practices of the ESL program (Kubota, 2004; MacPherson & Beckett, in press; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). According to MacPherson and Beckett (in press), there are three prevailing philosophical positions that inform multicultural policies and practices: conservative, liberal, and critical. The conservative approach presumes the superiority of Eurocentric thought and education, devalues immigrants' native cultures, and places uneven expectations on immigrants to conform over time to the norms, values, and traditions of the receiving society (Li, 2003). The liberal position acknowledges diversity, but superficially focuses on characteristics of a universalized human "race," a sameness rhetoric that Kubota (2004) refers to as "political correctness with little substance" (p. 31). An alternative form of liberal multiculturalism is what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) call "pluralist multiculturalism", which sees differences in people and cultures. However, the cultural differences are often trivialized, exoticized, and essentialized as ends in themselves. Multicultural discussions and practices often involve othering, with lists of how "they are" different from "us". Such conservative and liberal approaches to multiculturalism erase systemic racism and power inequities by perpetuating superiority and promoting the superficial rhetoric of equality, diversity, and political correctness. Critical multiculturalism makes explicit those hidden or masked structures, discourses, and relations of inequity that discriminate against one group and enhance the privileges of another (MacPherson & Beckett, in press). Criticizing ideology is central to the critical enterprise and involves "the attempt to unearth and challenge dominant ideology and the power relations this ideology justifies" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 38).

Critical multilingualism calls for a critical examination of: the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995); the ways in which the dominance of English can be an instrument of cultural control (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995); and finally, the cultural construct known as colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). While several conversations focus on the historical effects of colonization on modern-day education in former English colonies (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992), attention also needs to be paid to the colonial policies and practices within present immigrant-serving organizations in the north. For instance, in many immigrant-serving organizations in Canada, multilingualism is often framed from a deficit perspective in terms of immigrants' inability to speak English and the devaluation of their native languages. The devaluation of immigrants' native languages manifests what Phillipson (1992) calls "linguistic imperialism," a process in which "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstruction of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (Ibid p. 47). Monolingually oriented programs seem to be blind to the linguistic richness that immigrants have brought with them and avoid recognition of the positive implications of these languages for integration and internationalization. As such, critical multilingualism calls for a critical treatment of the dominance of monolingual identity by helping immigrants develop critical consciousness in order to contest and change practices of domination (Fairclough, 1995).

This study also draws on concepts of philosopher Michel Foucault (1991) on specifically, notions of “governmentality” or the production of discursive regimes through linguistic, cultural, and educational practices. Here “governance” means “any attempt to control or manage any known object” (Hunt & Wickham, 1994, p. 78). This broad concept includes laws, policies, and practices of different levels of the state but also the efforts of private authorities and organizations. It is understood not only as the direct way of governing but also as invisible control, and through “encouragement” – through “technologies of the self” – that have been identified as signifying the advanced liberal society (Dean, 1999). One aspect of such governance is emphasis on language and forms of knowledge and technologies of self that make both state and self governing conduct possible. As will be shown, this study examines how immigrant professionals are governed both through direct control and through encouragement, and how they are socialized and normalized into becoming new Canadians through an immigrant-serving program.

Methodology

This study was conducted in an ESL program for employment preparation in a western Canadian, immigrant-serving organization, Milton Aid Society (MAS, a pseudonym). MAS is a nongovernment, independent organization which provides settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees. It provides a variety of services, including employment and language training. The ESL program involved 14 weeks of in-class instruction in English language and employment skills training, followed by a 4-week volunteer work placement in a business environment. The ESL curriculum focused on the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but not on the professional language that is required of immigrants in their chosen fields. The purpose of the program was to expand immigrants’ English language knowledge and to gain Canadian experience in order to prepare them for the Canadian workplace.

Fifteen immigrants participated in the study. Eight came from the People’s Republic of China, with two from Taiwan, and one each from Russia, India, Iran, Iraq, and Slovakia. Their ages ranged from 25 to 44 years; ten were male and five were female. Five held Master of Science degrees and ten had Bachelor of Science degrees from their home societies. Their Canadian Language Benchmarks ranked 5 to 6 out of 12, namely at intermediate levels. In their home societies they were engineers, finance analysts, or computer programmers, with work experience ranging from 3 to 19 years. Their current occupations in Canada included overseeing security in a parking lot, fast food delivery, and cleaning floors in a hotel.

Four administrators, two ESL teachers, and one workshop facilitator also participated in the study. The administrators were responsible for applying for funding, designing the ESL program, employing ESL teachers, and finding the voluntary work placements for the immigrants. The ESL teachers had been employed at the beginning of the program. The workshop facilitator offered workshops on job-search skills.

I was introduced to the teachers and ESL students as a researcher from a Canadian university. Born and raised in China, educated both in China and Canada, I share a similar linguistic and cultural background with the Chinese participants in the study. This

may allow me to obtain more and even different kinds of information than a researcher could from another linguistic and cultural background. My familiarity with Chinese culture, however, may also block my ability to recognize patterns which were more apparent to a non-Chinese people, unintentionally, thereby taking the cultural information for granted. I also share the experience of immigration with the ESL students, and have become interested in their particular employment issues. As an educator, I am aware that some graduate students who are teaching in various ESL programs for newcomers have misconceptions about native English speakers. I gained access to the students through the executive director of MAS and the coordinator of the ESL program. I played the role of a participant observer seeking to “maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation” (Spradley, 1980, p. 60).

Given the focus of this study, a qualitative, interpretive paradigm was employed (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). This paradigm permitted me to study people in their natural settings, to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people brought to them, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with the participants. Two interconnected techniques – interviews and naturalistic observations – were used for data collection over a two-year period from January 2005 to December 2006 inclusive. Each interview with immigrant ESL students lasted for one to one and a half hours and focused on their perceptions about how the program prepared them for the Canadian workplace. Each interview with the administrators, the ESL teachers, and the workshop facilitator lasted for about one hour and forty-five minutes. The purpose of the latter interviews was to understand the philosophy of the program. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A semi-structured interview was used with some guided questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Ten hours of observation of classroom teaching were recorded in field notes. The purpose of the observations was to understand how the ESL program is implemented, as well as to provide data for triangulation purposes.

The process of qualitative data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection period. Information from the interviews and observations were reviewed using a constant comparison method of “content analysis” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The interview data were reviewed initially to begin building a taxonomy of emerging themes and subthemes. New interview data were compared to this taxonomy, adding new content when required. In the subsequent review of the data, themes were reviewed and synthesized using interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Discussions focused on the core meaning of each theme. All themes and subthemes were then re-sorted to reduce duplication and to synthesize the data into the overarching themes.

Findings and Discussion

Data show that the ESL program focused on the presentability and employability of immigrants for the labour market through processes including the acquisition of accentless proficiency in English, name changes of the participants, and adaptation to Canadian linguistic and cultural norms.

Accent

Accent reduction was one focus of the ESL program. The administrators who were responsible for the work placement of immigrants in the private and public sectors were aware of some employers' negative perceptions of "foreign" accents, as follows:

Almost 9 out of 10 times a lack of English skills and more specifically a lack of communication skills for the Canadian workplace were the number one answers I heard from employers. When I dug for more information, it was listening and speaking skills, speaking with an accent. (MAS program administrator).

People really think that they're liberal in accepting diversity in the workplace but when it comes down to it, they have no idea why so many people are allowed to immigrate to Canada. So they want a background on the experience of immigrants and they want an immigrant who speaks English without a foreign accent. (MAS program administrator).

The above interview excerpts suggest that employers do not want to employ someone with a "foreign" accent. A non-native English accent is constructed as a marker of an unwanted "Other." Accordingly, racialized immigrants embody the others.

A native accent often serves as an invisible marker "for *White English*, with its ostensible neutrality suppressing the racialized nature of language discrimination" (Motha, 2006a, p. 511) whereas, a non-native accent is marked and devalued. Creese and Kambera (2003) assert that "accents signify more than local/'Canadian' and extra-local/'immigrant'; accents, embodied by racialized subjects, also shape perceptions of language proficiency" (p. 566). A native accent becomes the yardstick to measure immigrants' workplace competence. A non-native accent is not only different; its difference implies the speaker's incompetence. Creese and Kambera's study of 12 African immigrants in Vancouver, Canada shows that perceptions of 'African English' accents imply limited English skills and incompetence of the speakers, despite the fluency in English of most of the African immigrant study participants who had completed advanced post-secondary degrees from English language institutions. Accordingly, an 'African' accent is frequently provided as a rationale for not being employed. Creese and Kambera (2003, p. 566) conclude that "... accents may provide a rationale for (dis)entitlement in employment or full participation in civil society without troubling liberal discourses of equality".

Immigrants' "heavy accents" have been identified as a communication problem that needs to be rectified (Anderson, 2005). As a result, the ESL program administrators saw it as their responsibility to repair immigrants' accents, focusing on accent reduction in order to increase immigrants' presentability with prospective employers. Two ESL administrators explained:

We're now working with a girl. The tone of her voice makes her sound defensive. No matter what she's saying, it's like she's confronting someone all the time. So that is something we can correct...so that an instructor will be able to guide this person in a way of reducing their accent, bringing them to the proper, not proper, but more clearly understood language. (MAS program administrator).

Our program includes language because we deal with speech therapy, helping them to reduce their accent. We use a speech pathologist to do that. (MAS program administrator).

Immigrants are marked as “Other” through the intonations of their voices (Creese & Kambere, 2003). Their non-native voices sound defensive and confrontational, even to the service providers, and thus, need to be reduced, corrected and normalized. Such practices of accent reduction reveal a colonial mentality, an internalization of perceptions of the superiority of a native accent (Pennycook, 1998). The administrators support the view that a non-native accent signifies language incompetence, thus, by extension employability incompetence. Pressures to help immigrants enter the labour market take precedence over respect for linguistic diversity. Instead of challenging accent stereotypes, the program reinforces such stereotypes and focuses on “repairing” immigrants’ non-native accents.

The ESL program also focuses on accent reduction because many ESL learners prefer to model English native speakers’ accents from the UK or the USA (Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006; Timmis, 2002). One of the reasons for this replication is the perception that a native accent signifies intelligence, education and competence. Dalton-Puffer, et al (1997) studied English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Austria who listened to unidentified speech samples. The speaker with the native accent was rated consistently as being the most educated, organized, and courteous, among other positive descriptors. The tacit assumption is that a native accent is superior to a non-native accent.

The immigrants in this case study seemed to internalize such beliefs too. They reflected:

I speak English with a heavy accent. I need to reduce my accent so that I will sound like other Canadians. Then I can find a professional job. (ESL student, Italics indicate translation from Chinese).

My big goal is to improve my language skills. My dream is to speak English like a native speaker here. (ESL student).

Immigrants in this study seemed to have an idealized view of what Canadians or native speakers of English sound like. Scales et al. (2006), Timmis (2002) and Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) also found this trend among their participants. The immigrants were aware that they could face employment limitations with a non-native accent because a native accent may be seen as an implied job requirement. The ESL students realized immigrants with “heavy accents” are typically barred from professional employment and are willing to change their own accents in order to fit into the Canadian workplace. Immigrants seem to idealize the native accent, believing that acquiring a native accent or fluency in English, is the primary requirement for successful employment.

Several studies suggest that “a native-like accent is impossible unless first exposure is quite early, probably around the age six” (e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 158). The native accent is also unnecessary for intelligibility, even from the point of view of native speakers of English. Derwing and Munro’s (1997) study shows

that untrained Canadian raters were able to accurately transcribe much of the speech by non-native speakers of English they judged as accented, demonstrating that they found it intelligible. Munro (2003) concludes that “an objection to accents on the grounds that they are unintelligible may sometimes have more to do with an unwillingness to accommodate differences in one’s interlocutors than with a genuine concern about comprehension” (p. 3). The verbal/nonverbal characteristics of the native-speaking listener—his/her experiences of hearing non-native English speakers, his/her attitude toward, and possible prejudice against, speakers with certain accents—may be important factors impeding the listener’s comprehension.

The findings about accents in this study point to systemic processes of marginalizing immigrants. We can trace the systemic use of accent discrimination against immigrants to its roots in colonialism (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). A “heavy accent” renders a potential worker unacceptable in the Canadian labour market as he/she is perceived to have low English-language competency and thus, low employment competency. In other words, an immigrant without a White English accent is often perceived as lacking English skills, believed by many as the key employment barrier for immigrants in Canada. Such misconceptions often reveal linguistic and racist attitudes (Phillipson, 1992). Through direct control (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991), the ESL program teaches native-like English accents, which often involves contrasting analysis that shows how other languages are different from English, and what may be done by the immigrants to eradicate non-native accents. This approach masks systemic racism based on different accents and power inequities between the dominant and immigrant groups. As Davies (2003) reminds us, even native speakers’ communicative competence differs one from another, and the language of a speech community is perceived as a standard not because the language is the most perfect, but because the community has power.

Focusing on Names

Program designers were aware that “society is punishing people for the name given to them. There is an implicit bias against given names that is based on overall stereotypes” (Morris cited in Roberts, 2006, p. C3). For example, two administrators explained:

Right now we are seeing predominantly East Asian immigrants.... So I have had to talk to employers about it because I’ve heard people try to say East Asian and Mandarin names and make fun of them. (MAS program administrator)

I was talking to a friend who is East Indian and asked him if he had a job yet. And he said, “No, I can’t get any interviews. Maybe I should change my name.” His name was Mohammed, but I understood what he was saying and quite frankly I would suggest he change his name. Honestly, it’s not a perfect world. Change your name to Moe or Larry because people can’t read your name, right? (MAS program administrator).

The ESL program providers were aware that an Asian, ethnic name is another factor that might contribute to employment discrimination. This view is consistent with the findings of the studies by the Discrimination Research Center (2003) and Bertrand and

Mullainathan (2004). The Discrimination Research Center (DRC) (2003) sent approximately 6200 resumes to temporary employment agencies throughout California in 2003. The 20 different resume types were distributed equally among male and female job applicants with identifiable Arab American, South Asian American, Latina/o American, African American, East Asian American or Euro-American names. The DRC found that Arab American and South Asian American job applicants received significantly fewer responses than comparably qualified individuals of any other race or ethnicity. Similarly, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that applicants with European-sounding names such as Emily and Greg received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews than applicants with African-American sounding names such as Tamika and Tyrone. Unfortunately, the ethnic name, like the non-native accent, has become racialized.

Aware of the negative stereotypes associated with ethnic names in the employment process, the ESL teachers recommended that students change their names to an anglicized name. One ESL teacher reported:

We have spoken extensively in class about changing your name to an anglicized name. We've not pressured individuals to change their names in any way. We've talked about the pros and cons of doing that and their presentability ... and the pros and cons of the perceptions of those ethnic names. It's being able to give a realistic point of view to these individuals so they make decisions for themselves and then are aware of potential outcomes. (MAS, ESL teacher).

If immigrants use an anglicized name, it is assumed they are acculturated and integrated. For example, one administrator commented that: "There are people who like to integrate and they do everything to become part of [Canada]... People change their names" (MAS program administrator).

With two exceptions, all of the immigrants in the study chose English first names. The two who did not change their names are from Russia and Slovakia; one believed his name "is beautiful" and the other has found a temporary job. A possible reason that two participants did not change their names is that western Canada was settled by sizeable numbers of families from Eastern Europe. Accordingly, Russian and Ukrainian names have become acceptable in the region. In contrast, the thirteen study participants who chose English names did so in order to ensure their employability:

Our coordinator told us that employers sorted out names on resumes. I changed my name in order to get more interviews. (ESL student).

I have chosen an English first name so that it will be easier for me to find a job. I've got more phone calls after I have changed my name. (ESL student).

I have chosen an English name because it would be easier for my employers and colleagues. (ESL student).

An ethnic name implies immigrants' inability to integrate into Canadian society. Such names may "provide a rationale for discriminatory behaviour that would be

considered as unacceptable on the basis of skin colour” (Creese & Kambere, 2003, p. 570). All the immigrants in the MAS study were informed that employers react negatively to their names. An English name serves as symbolic capital, providing a linguistic marker in which potential employers and colleagues may recognize them as legitimate members within a Canadian workplace (Bourdieu, 1977; Thompson, 2006). Aware of the negative reactions of employers, the program governs professional immigrants through indirect controls. They are encouraged, not forced, to make the name change. “Encouragement” and “technologies of the self” have been identified as signifying the advanced liberal society (Dean, 1999). English names increase the immigrants’ “presentability”, lead to increased callback rates for job interviews and subsequently improves their opportunities to be employed. These practices fail to challenge systemic processes of marginalization based on names, indeed, another form of colonization (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Pennycook, 1998).

Native Language and Culture

Immigrants’ native languages are perceived to be problematic in the MAS program. For example, two administrators commented negatively:

The worst groups are Chinese clients. We teach them English during the day. Then they unlearn it in the evening because they switch back to Chinese. They are wasting our time here. (MAS program administrator).

We have two clients in this class, who have an accent and a first language transferring into a second language which impact their communication skills. (MAS program administrator).

These two excerpts reveal that immigrants’ native languages are perceived to interfere with learning English. Instructors hope to completely eliminate the use of the immigrant’s native language component in their program, as demonstrated explicitly by the “English Only” sign displayed on the classroom door. Such practices and comments reveal beliefs that the immigrants’ first languages interfere with learning English, however, this belief has been refuted by many scholars (e.g., Coelho, 2004; Cummins, 2003). There is no empirical evidence to support the claim that English is best taught monolingually. The ethos of monolingualism embraces the unquestioned dominance of English and rejects the merit of other languages, thus excluding the immigrant’s most intense existential experience (Phillipson, 1992). The discourse used by the dominant group (namely, the program administrators) embraces the supremacy of English over other languages (Motha, 2006b) and portrays use of nondominant languages, particularly Chinese in this case, as problematic to the program’s success.

Some employers expressed similar views to the program administrators. One immigrant, for example, reported the following negative event in her voluntary work placement:

One of the customers complained to my manager that I spoke my native language at work. Actually, I greeted the customer in my native language because she is my

acquaintance and her native language is the same as mine. My manager told me not to speak it or I would be fired. (ESL student).

This immigrant was threatened with losing her voluntary placement. Such incidents reveal the structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages (Phillipson, 1992). The immigrant's use of her native language is perceived as problematic and punishable. The dominance of English is maintained when the immigrant professional, who is different because she speaks a non-English language, is asked to "suppress that difference and assimilate to the linguistic norm of using English exclusively" (Dicker, 1998, p. 294). Here, "governmentality" manifests itself in policies and practices of the organizations through direct control of the use of the immigrant's native language.

Immigrants' native cultures were also considered to be not valuable. Immigrants in the study were socialized to think like a Canadian and to act like a Canadian. The decisive agent in this socialization process was the workshop facilitator who promoted assimilation to Anglo norms. For instance, the workshop facilitator said:

I tell them it is important for them to integrate to Canadian culture as quickly as possible, not to stay in their own community. I tell them, now that you're here, you should think like a Canadian. You don't think like a Chinese, an Indian or a Pakistani, or Iranian, or Iraqi, you should think like a Canadian. So you have to go out and take part in Canadian activities, in Canadian life. That's part and parcel of life in our city. (MAS workshop facilitator).

Immigrants are advised to "think like a Canadian". This advice assumes that all Canadians think in the same way. Two implications should be noted. First, this implies that being Canadian is incompatible with a non EuroCanadian ethnic identity such as being Chinese or Iranian. Governing practices take the form of normative judgments that a particular form of conduct or behaviour is essentially wrong or bad (Hunt, 1999); in this case, to think like a Chinese person. An immigrant himself, the facilitator has internalized a colonial mentality and is colonizing the mind and practice of new immigrants. Such internalization ensures white supremacy. Despite the official policy of multiculturalism, Canada is "dominated by the hegemonic British and French cultural norms" (Satzewich & Lioukakis, 2007, p. 123). The facilitator actively promotes conformity to these norms. This line of reasoning reveals a limited notion of culture on the part of the MAS staff.

Culture is usually understood as the traditional life styles, beliefs and value systems of one language community (Halliday, 1999). Discussing the culture of immigrant professionals, we need to move beyond the popular notion of culture as something defined solely by one's ethnic origins. I interpret culture as "a context for language, a system of meanings that is realized in language and hence can be construed in language" (Halliday, 1999, p. 18). Culture, in this sense, does not designate some amorphous object like "Chinese culture" or "western culture"; it refers to something much more specific. For example, for immigrant engineers, culture does not necessarily mean the traditional culture of Canada, it means the culture of modern engineering, whether practiced by Chinese or Canadian or any other nationality of engineers. The culture of modern engineering is not limited to national contexts, but is shared across

different national cultures, as a professional culture. Many immigrant professionals have a good knowledge of such a professional culture in their native languages. Immigrant engineers, for example, need to learn the discourse of engineering in English in order to find meaningful employment. The MAS ESL program, however, tends to focus on a traditional atomistic notion of culture and emphasizes conformity to and adaptation of Canadian norms and the value systems of the dominant groups within Canadian society.

Not all the immigrants are willing to conform to Canadian sociocultural and linguistic practices. In an interview, one immigrant explained her culturally-based discomfort in her voluntary work placement. She learned that:

The people here like to greet and praise each other more frequently than we did in our country. I have noticed those kinds of differences and try to use them in everyday life, *but I don't feel comfortable.*

Researcher: Can you tell me why?

ESL student: *I don't feel sincere when I'm doing that.* (ESL student. *Italics* indicate translation from Chinese)

Another immigrant expressed a similar view:

In terms of the Canadian workplace culture, we learned that it is not appropriate for us to talk about religion, age, salary and politics with our colleagues. But my supervisor likes to discuss politics with me... I like to express my opinions about politics. (ESL student).

These excerpts suggest that 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' language behaviours are not neutral techniques that immigrants can simply choose to adopt. Immigrants are not mere sponges; they bring their own values and interpretations to sociocultural discursive norms (Katz, 2000). One immigrant learned that praising her co-workers frequently was perceived as an 'appropriate' language behaviour in the workplace, valued by her co-workers and her Canadian employers, but she did not feel comfortable and sometimes chose not to do this because it violated her own cultural values, socio-linguistic norms, and sense of self (Norton, 2000). Another immigrant learned the inappropriateness of discussing taboo topics with his colleagues. He chose to challenge this inappropriateness. These examples demonstrate immigrants' resistance to governance (Brookfield, 2000; Foucault, 1991) even though they are encouraged to comply with the linguistic and cultural normative standards of the Canadian workplace, as understood and practised by ESL instructors and program facilitators.

Conclusions and Implications

The study suggests that employers are unwilling to employ immigrants with a "foreign" accent and a non European ethnic name. Rather, employers seem to use personal attributes as evidence of limited English language proficiency and limited employability. (Enviro-nics Research Group, 2004). To ensure immigrants' presentability and employability, the Milton Aid Society ESL program focused on erasing their accents and changing their names. The intent of these practices is to help immigrants cope with the

employer's discrimination against "foreign" accents and given names. None of the MAS administrators or ESL instructors, however, discussed racism in the program, nor mentioned it in their interviews. They appear willing to acknowledge racism in the labour market, but are not willing to challenge racist attitudes concerning "foreign" accents and names. Acquiring accentless proficiency in English and anglicizing one's names hide institutional racism that discriminates against people based on phenotypical features such as skin colour, eye shape, and facial features.

The MAS program is based on the deficit, subtraction model with regards to immigrants' native languages and cultures. Such a model aims to erase immigrants' native languages and cultures and to encourage them to adapt to the dominant English language and culture. Perspectives such as these often result in the formation of linguistic and racist attitudes (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). Through direct and indirect control (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1999), immigrants are advised to speak, act and think "like a Canadian," which is presumably a white, English-speaking person. In such programs, the colonial roots of the dominance of the English language and sociocultural norms are not questioned. Immigrant professionals know the professional concepts of their fields in their native languages. They may not, however, yet know how to express these concepts adequately in English. ESL programs for professionals could concentrate on such areas and focus on the professional language required in English. Furthermore, employment preparation programs should go beyond narrow linguistic training for immigrants. As pointed out earlier, service-providers need to understand that, the acquisition of native-like accents is quite an unrealistic goal for adult immigrants. Accents and names are part of professional immigrants' identities and should be proudly preserved (Guo, 2005; Thompson, 2006). Adult educators need to challenge the deficit perspective of cultural differences (Cummins, 2003; Guo, 2006). They can help immigrants develop critical language awareness in order to contest and change practices of domination and institutional racism (Fairclough, 1995) in order to begin to reclaim their professional knowledge and to eventually practice in Canada.

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