Language training for the workplace in a global perspective

Ingrid Piller
Zayed University, UAE and Macquarie University
www.languageonthemove.org

“We want to see a seamless transition for new arrivals from the airport to the workplace.”
“Policy should aim for people being self-sufficient and earning their own pay packets as soon as possible.”

Assumptions

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)
2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom
3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants
4. Employment equals social inclusion
Assumptions

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)
2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom
3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants
4. Employment equals social inclusion

Assumptions

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)

2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom

3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants

4. Employment equals social inclusion
Australians at Work: Hien Tran’s story

Key research findings

• “Naturalistic acquisition” has poor language outcomes (Purdue 1993; Schumann 1978)
• Entering the workforce does not in itself constitute an opportunity to learn English (Teutsch-Dwyer 2001)
• Lack of proficiency in English locks migrants into low-skilled, manual, short-term work (Villenas 2001) and/or ethnic workplaces (Holmes 1993) and/or the shadow economy (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002; Le Breton & Fiechter, 2005)
• Limited English proficiency upon entering the workforce can jeopardize social inclusion (Goldstein 1996; 2001) and reinforce existing gender inequalities (Schmalzbauer 2009)

Assumptions

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)
2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom
3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants
4. Employment equals social inclusion
### Table 4

Rates of Higher Qualifications and Unemployment for Selected Recent Refugee Communities in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Higher qualifications (%)</th>
<th>Unemployment rate(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 5

Work by Qualification (%; N = 150)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ex-Yugoslav</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Middle-Eastern</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above skill level</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below skill level</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*High percentages of 'no response', especially among Africans and Middle Easterners, reflect high levels of unemployment among these groups (32 and 38 per cent respectively in our sample). It may also reflect different ways in which bilingual assistants administered this question, so some of the unemployed chose the 'working below qualification level' answer, especially in the ex-Yugoslav sample, where only one person did not respond although seven people (14 per cent) reported being unemployed.
Misrecognition of language and culture

[T]he current allocation of certain ethnic groups and immigrant categories in certain industries and types of jobs in the secondary labour market does not necessarily reflect their specific skills or levels of human capital, but rather reflects […] structural marginalization and disadvantage. (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006: 222)

Assumptions

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)
2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom
3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants
4. Employment equals social inclusion
Low pay …

- jeopardizes individual well-being
- threatens family life and particularly the well-being of children
- undermines the social fabric
• Prosperity built on low pay and inequality
• Solutions
  – Living wage
  – Social wage

Discarding false assumptions …

1. There is such a thing as “workplace language” (and it’s different from “language for settlement”)
2. Language learning “in the real world” of the workplace is superior to language learning in the classroom
3. Limited proficiency in English is the main barrier to (adequate) employment faced by migrants
4. Employment equals social inclusion
… celebrate the achievements of the AMEP

“The Adult Migrant English Program […] remains one of the greatest human success stories in this nation’s history. The AMEP is one of the most important and effective language and settlement services, not only in Australia, but I would suggest, anywhere in the world.”


“Australia has built up over the last 30 years one of the most admired and carefully thought out migrant ESOL schemes in the world.”

(Scottish scoping study; http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/01/20537/50176; p. 102)
… reframe the challenges

- Nation building, civic engagement, social inclusion
- Teacher and learner autonomy
- Being guided by the aspirations of our students and the future of our society rather than the visa categories under which someone entered the country

Language training for the workplace in a global perspective

Ingrid Piller
Zayed University, UAE and Macquarie University
www.languageonthemove.org