



English: Language of opportunity

Speaking English in Canada

NARRATOR

Edmonton in Central Canada is a city which has seen strong economic growth. As a result it's become a magnet for migrants from around the world. A priority for all of them is learning to speak English.

TSEGAY TESFAY

Everything is in English. Everybody speaks English. Nobody can hear you if you speak your own language.

ANGELICA CASTANEDA

If you need to go to the doctor, to see the doctor, to go to the supermarket, if you are in need to know some information I has to speak English.

NARRATOR

The migrants in Edmonton come from many different countries. And have a range of motivations for coming to Canada.

ANGELICA CASTANEDA

I get married and I came to, to have a, a new life with my son and my husband.

TSEGAY TESFAY

My homeland is Eritrea. Because there is a lot of political problems in Eritrea. So that's why I came to Canada.

NARRATOR

For some migrants the fact that they already speak English is a factor that's influenced their decision to come to Canada.

ALBERT TAN

Since I'm comfortable with English I did not see it as a barrier or a hindrance in coming here because I can understand and I can talk to anybody whatever I want. So I think it, it, somehow it's a big factor. But not unlike the others who hardly speak English when they come here. So it's a little bit different with, with my situation I think. But it is really a big thing that I know how to communicate and I know how to express myself in English.

ANGELICA CASTANEDA

Really when I was in my country I didn't, I didn't have the opportunity to learn English because in my country when I was studying in my high school English was no obligation for the student. When I came here I realised immediately that I has to learn the language. Because it's important for everybody to learn English. If people want to be successful in this country.

TSEGAY TEFAY

I used to study in high school English. You know, my own country. So when I get, when I came to Canada it was not very tough to listen English for me. But it, it was a bit harder to speak for me.

NARRATOR

The Mennonite Centre in Edmonton runs a range of schemes to help migrants improve their English so they can integrate and find work. A key is not just learning to speak English but also adapting to the local culture.

JUDY SILLITO

Our topics are all around settlement, so some of that is very pragmatic. Things that newcomers need to know about this new society but some of it is also cultural and, and what we are actually learning more and more is about how embedded culture and language are. And how you can't pull them apart as, as easily as once thought.

NARRATOR

The Canadian government provides funding so that each new migrant can receive 1200 hours of instruction in English. The programme is known as LINC, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada.

KAREN BRADLEY

The main purpose of the LINC Programme is to give these students some English that they're going to be able to survive with outside this classroom.

KAREN BRADLEY

I thought it was a really good idea to have a great plan in place. Do you agree?

CLASS

Yes.

KAREN BRADLEY

OK can you tell me why you agree?

ANGELICA CASTANEDA

It's a way to learn how to work with another kind of difference people and with different opinion. Sometimes you can feel frustrating, sorry, but it's true, it's difficult to put all the people agree with our opinion.

KAREN BRADLEY

OK that's one of the things we want to look at today. We want to look at ways to express our opinion. And it's impossible to agree with somebody all the time.

NARRATOR

The LINC Programme starts with basic literacy and goes up to Level 7. This is a Level 4 class.

KAREN BRADLEY

Literacy is our first level and literacy are people that go in there have, are not literate in their own language and didn't have the opportunity to go to school and so on. So they're at a really basic level, they're learning alphabet and sounds and colours.

When you go to LINC 1 they're starting to work in to you know, putting a paragraph together.

Being able to say, in present tense, I am Karen Bradley, I teach at the MCN. So they're learning basic structure. And then in LINC 2 they start adding on more grammar. So now we're going into past tense. And LINC 3 will go into past tense, irregular verbs and LINC 4 goes into the past perfect tense. So everything's, you know, gradual.

When we want to agree with something it's very simple to say, I agree, I hear that from you all the time OK. You're right is another way of saying that.

I can't just give them a grammar point. It doesn't work that way because they, they want grammar, everybody wants the grammar but you have to integrate it so that it becomes more functional for them. And they see the use of it.

So after me please, I agree.

CLASS

I agree.

KAREN BRADLEY

You're right.

CLASS

You're right.

KAREN BRADLEY

I think so too.

CLASS

I think so too.

KAREN BRADLEY

That's true.

CLASS

That's true.

KAREN BRADLEY

That's a good point.

CLASS

That's a good point.

KAREN BRADLEY

Nice OK. It's all about just supporting that confidence. Giving them some language that's functional, encouraging them to go out into the community. Get involved in something where they can speak English.

TSEGAY TSEFAY

In my opinion, 30 years old is not enough to, to get married because before 30 you have a lot of things to do. If you get married you will be busy, you can't, you can't go to school.

TSEGAY TSEFAY

Before I don't, I didn't know how to, how to speak bravely, you know and now I can speak without any problem. I can, I can, I can explain my idea, I can explain my emotion freely.

NARRATOR

One of the distinctive features of the teaching here is its respect for the migrants own cultures.

JUDY SILLITO

There used to be some pretty firm ideas about what was Canadian and what wasn't and this is what you should learn if you want to be successful in Canada. And we're much less authoritarian about that now. About what are Canadian norms because of our, our, our real movement to intercultural understanding. And intercultural communication so that becomes more of a conversation between different cultures and, and a search for how we come together in a bigger richness than just you learn my culture, memorise it and move on.

NARRATOR

Another aspect of this, is acceptance of the migrant's first languages.

JUDY SILLITO

The rule was no other language but English in the classroom. You can't learn English well unless you drop your mother tongue. Now we understand very much that first language retention and growth helps with learning English, That it helps with the whole literacy piece. That it helps with healthy settlement and, and, and engagement with the whole society. And so we have a, a demonstrated respect of first language even within our very beginner English language classes.

NARRATOR

The strong economic growth in Edmonton built largely on the oil industry is drawing people in from other parts of Canada as well as abroad to fill the new professional jobs that have been created.

KAREN BRADLEY

Walking into Canada from somewhere else in the world is already different. But walking into an office building compared to an office building or whatever work you had in your home country is completely different. Companies are finding here in Alberta anyway is that there are many students from different countries who are very good skill-wise but they don't have the communication skills. So some of them aren't even allowed to answer a phone call from a client. They're never allowed to write a letter and so they won't move up the ladder.

FEMALE TEACHER

Now less, number 1A, how does the author of each email begin the letter? What kind of things do you notice about that?

NARRATOR

The Mennonite Centre also receives funding from the Provincial government for a Bridging Programme which is aimed at professionals like accountants to give them the communication skills they need to thrive in the workplace.

FEMALE PUPIL

It was indirect for her purpose, I mean she didn't mention the purpose at the beginning, you know.

FEMALE TEACHER

So she didn't strictly declare her purpose, she didn't really, and do you think that may have had something to do with the fact that she didn't get ...

NARRATOR

Albert Tan worked as a bank manager before he came to Canada. And he's hoping these lessons will help him to return to a professional job in the future.

ALBERT TAN

When I came here last November I landed a job immediately. But it was a blue collar job. I said this is not my kind of, my kind of job that I want to spend the rest of my life here.

FEMALE TEACHER

And what did we say on Thursday about Catherine's attitude when she was writing that? A little bit irritated. A little bit irritated because...

ALBERT TAN

She requested three times before she was, after applying. That's why probably she's a little bit irritated now.

VINCE KELLY

The concept is that we're aiming to bring the workplace into the classroom. And making people believe as much as humanly possible that they are actually in an accounting workplace or an engineering workplace.

NARRATOR

So that the materials in the lessons are accurate and replicate what's really happening in the workplace the centre sends out researchers to gather up-to-date data of workplace practices.

MALE PUPIL

I think everybody was quite polite but each one has his own style to communicate. And the difference is the style of the communication.

NARRATOR

A key element of these lessons is understanding the culture of the workplace and how language is used in different contexts which is challenging to teach.

VINCE KELLY

They know what pay role is. They know what double-entry bookkeeping is, they know, they know all these things. That's not really the issue for them. The issue is when, you know, they call somebody up in another department and, and they say, oh hello Lisa what are you going to waste my time with today? And they, you know, how do you going to respond to that? What does it mean? What's the cultural context of that? You know we understand that that is the person being friendly, being helpful, really relaxing with you and you know, you've, you've

made some progress in the organisation if people address you in that way rather than in a, in a formal manner. But it's very difficult if you're, if you're not from the culture to, to know what to do in, in that situation.

There's really no such thing as, as language in a, in a cultural vacuum. Because you know, it's, it's, it's a question of what you mean depends on the situation that you say it in. You know, if, if I say, oh that's interesting, or if I say, oh that's interesting, it's totally different. I mean that's, that's, that's a very clear cut example. I think the real world is, is much more subtle than that.

I think that the idea that you can learn language and then, you know, you, you put the, put the culture on the top like jam, doesn't really work. I think the more recent thinking on, on learning language is that you actually immerse yourself in, in that cultural context and that's, that's where you learn the language and that's how you learn the language.

ALBERT TAN

We learn how to make our talking more persuasive, the dictions, the pronunciations. It's, it really helped a lot. It gradually helps me to move on to that kind of standard where everybody's expecting when you work here.

I'm more with this side now in talking in English rather than talking with the Filipino again and then talking in that dialogue. No its, it's a lot better now. It's easier now.