



Research Report

Work Realities: Migrants Preparing for the Experience of Work

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Migrants entering cooperative work placements face layers of challenges that become apparent in scrutinizing workplace data. Drawing on authentic voice recordings of two worksites in Auckland, this paper traces three themes of workplaces: the exercise of power; the culture of the workplace; and work relations. It analyses the dynamics of a management meeting as it decides to require greater productivity from its workers. Then it describes the interactions of factory workers, focusing on its collaborative work culture and working relations. The paper derives implications for language education, especially in relation to migrant learners preparing for the workplace. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2006, 7(2), 24-32).

Keywords: Work experience; authentic texts; migrant; power; work culture; work relations; New Zealand.

I went to the day-care centre and knocked on the door and said, 'I'm a student at the polytechnic. I'm looking for unpaid work experience for three weeks. Can you take me?' She asked me to come in. Then she told me, 'We had someone from the polytechnic for work experience but it was bad. She was dishonest. And she couldn't speak English well. So I don't know. I have to speak to the owner. Do you have a letter from the polytechnic?' And she will call me later this week.

Anita was the first in the class to try for work experience in the course, English for Employment. And, as it happens, the first to get a position, one of the most successful placements in the class.

Inevitably, the migrant in work experience (or co-op) runs up against the norms of workplaces and New Zealand society, specifically the country's lack of preparedness for different cultures. Belief is one area that causes awkwardness. For many observant New Zealanders, religious belief is safely tucked away on Sunday morning. But for many Muslims, daily prayer is necessary, Friday prayer is more so, and should take place at the mosque. During Ramadan, fasting is the norm, making it difficult to function effectively through an eight-hour shift. Try requesting adjustments for all the above on behalf of migrants at your local workplace. "We have a business to run, sir, and there are other Muslims here who don't need time off or changes to the timetable." In point of fact, the supermarket is rather more accommodating to its workers than their verbal response would indicate. It has a custom of hiring a sizeable portion of Muslim workers, it allocated a shift that enabled migrants on work experience to visit the

mosque before work, and it has in recent times allocated a separate room for religious observance. Nevertheless, the incident does highlight a cultural barrier that can divide local New Zealanders from migrants. As Watts and Trlin (2005, p. 112) report, many employers view diversity in the workforce "as a problem rather than an opportunity." A separate analysis comments laconically: "The unknown is seen as a risk; difference is seen as deficit" (Henderson, Trlin & Watts, 2001, p. 119).

Together, these two brief reports from co-op experiences illustrate three themes that run through the following discussion. The first story tells of a basic use of power – the power to hire – just one of a number of forms of power, as we shall see below. Henderson (2003, p. 160) refers to the "ongoing unemployment, under-employment and attrition through return migration to China." As she puts it, migrants "are required to start again or 'prove' themselves anew." Similarly, Watts and Trlin (2005, p. 144) point to "barriers that hinder the ability of immigrants to access employment in keeping with their qualifications and experience." The second story gives a glimpse into the work culture of the site, including tension between efficient functioning of its organisation, allowance of diversity in hiring policies, and a slightly halting but evolving recognition of inclusive multicultural practices. That same work culture also hints at working relations on the site – how management and workers relate, in this case, requiring productivity but being willing to listen to its workers on cultural matters. Work culture and work relations relate importantly to the conditions of work, a subject treated in a variety of ways in Spoonley, Dupuis and de Bruin (2004).

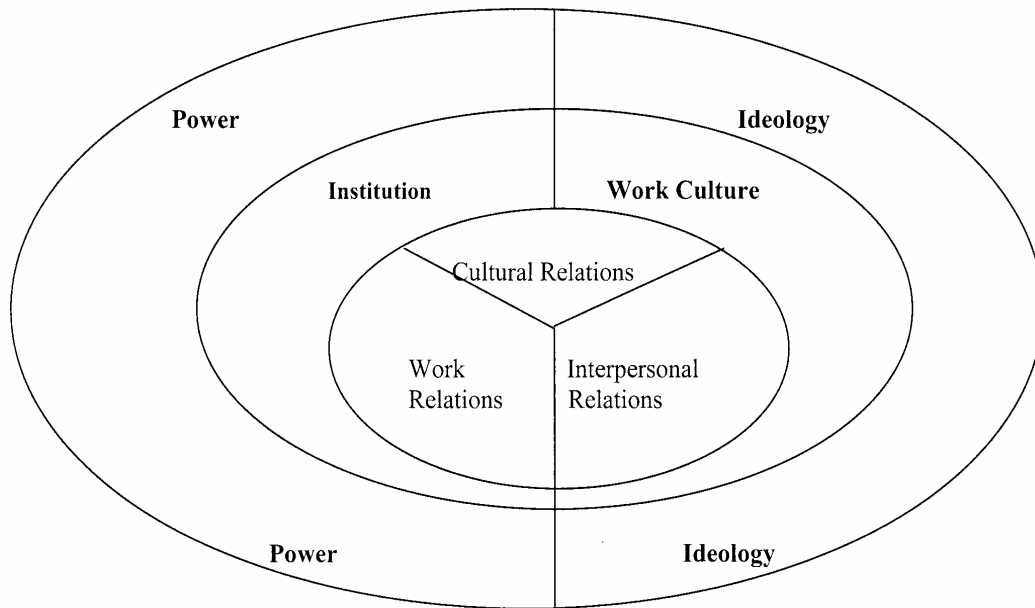


FIGURE 1

A workplace frame

The “conditions of employment,” say Spoonley and Davidson in a discussion of “good” and “bad” jobs in the same volume, “have deteriorated as labour flexibility and cost minimisation have prevailed” (p. 30).

This article considers two research questions: *What are possible meanings of the recorded data from workplace interactions?* and *What are the implications of the data analysis for language education in co-op settings?* It analyses the themes of power, work culture and work relations in the light of data analysis. The paper builds on two previous articles that explore excerpts from the same data-base: Cooke, Brown and Zhu (2007) look at language and discourse in their social setting; and Cooke and Brown (in press) focus on the meaning of workplace interactions, in the process developing a frame for analyzing workplace data (Figure 1). In looking at the data reported below, we found our three themes were strongly represented.

Literature of Workplace Issues

Preparing for the experience of work at educational institutes has been labelled “work integrated learning (WIL)” (Abeysekera, 2006) and “co-operative education placements” (Coll & Eames, 2004). Such “work experience” has expectation as well as complication for the migrant, since students may come from societies and workplace cultural contexts (e.g., the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia or South America), which can be very different from workplaces in “Western” countries (e.g., New Zealand, Britain, Canada, Australia). Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997, p. 5) recognise the implications for work culture in such a situation when they point to an Anglo-Saxon paradigm of “doing business,” which, they hold, “embodies a whole system of beliefs, a vision of the world which may be quite remote from the indigenous one of non-native English speakers.”

At the same time, understanding how power is used, manifested and at times abused in the workplace gives migrant students an opportunity to compare the power and cultural systems that they have experienced in their own countries with those in their new country (e.g. New Zealand). When defining power and its links to language at work, Holmes and Stubbe (2003, p. 3) write that “from a sociological or psychological perspective, power is treated as a relative concept which includes both the ability to control others and the ability to accomplish one’s goal.” They also point to the key role of language: “Language is clearly a crucial means of enacting power, and equally a very important component in the construction of social reality.” In similar vein, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) also stress the importance of language (p. 4): “Organisations are talked into being and maintained by means of the talk of the people within and around them.” And in the educational scene, Vygotsky (1978) offers a concept of language as a sociocultural tool in learning. “*The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development,*” he asserts “*occurs when speech and practical activity . . . converge*” (p. 24 original emphasis). As the editors of the volume comment in the Afterword, “Vygotsky, because he views learning as a profoundly social process, emphasizes dialogue and the varied roles that language plays in instruction and in mediated cognitive growth” (p. 131).

The exercise of power raises issues of the relationship between managers and workers (see Holmes, Stubbe & Vine, 1999). From a social constructivist viewpoint, Watson (1997, p. 219) observes the operation of management in a British corporation. He argues that management needs to *control* human activity and at the same time gain the *consent* of the workers involved. As a result, management needs to create a balance between direct control over workers and what he calls “responsible

autonomy.” Watson contrasts two discourse models in action, one of which stresses “empowerment, skills and growth,” while the other emphasizes “control, jobs and costs” (pp. 220-221). In Watson’s analysis, such models (arguably of work culture) involve both people’s outlooks (thinking and attitudes) and behaviour.

Some of Watson’s themes echo in other literature, often within critical theory. Staff briefings to workers for instance, illustrate the exercise of control and can bring home the insecurity of work, even if presented in positive terms. Graham (1995, p. 94), for example, records the Vice President of Human Relations at Subaru-Isuzu Automotive (SIA) saying in the first week of employment: “Job security . . . at SIA it means gaining market share and making a profit. This will lead to stable employment.” Not to put too fine a point on it, it’s a straightforward warning about future employment and an implicit command to workers to be productive.

Watson also talks of workers’ consent in management requirements, discussed elsewhere as commitment to the organisation. In a “lean and mean organization,” comment Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996, p. 31), “the full ‘over the top’ commitment and loyalty of each worker to the team, to the project, and to the organization is absolutely crucial.” In similar vein, du Gay (1996, p. 130) analyses the concept of “culture” as a “vital tool in attempts to restructure the internal world of organizations.” The right culture enables the “capacities of individuals to become aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization for which they work.”

Work culture is a product of the values, attitudes and beliefs of a company. At an individual level it becomes evident in the way people communicate with each other. As Neece (n.d., ¶2) writes:

Organizational culture is composed of the values, behaviours, beliefs, and norms that permeate the group. Culture is expressed through words and behaviours of each employee. Culture is like a recipe where each person is an ingredient. Company or department leadership set the overall tone.

The culture of work can also shape work relations, of which one component takes on more significance than its label would suggest. “Small talk” is an area that Holmes has analysed extensively in the data within the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) based in Wellington. Holmes (2000, p. 35) writes:

In every social encounter we are unavoidably involved in maintaining and modifying the interpersonal relationship between ourselves and our addressee(s). Adopting this perspective, ‘small talk’ cannot be dismissed as peripheral, marginal or minor discourse mode. Small talk is one means by which we negotiate interpersonal relationships, a crucial function of talk with significant implications for on-going and future interaction.

Small talk and interpersonal relations are two aspects of “fitting in” to the preferred ways of operating in the “existing social practices” of workplaces, as Simon, Dippo and Schenke (1991, p. 75) put it. Simon et al. (1991, p. 76)

argue that social relations at work are shaped by the way work is organised in given contexts and by the relations of power that apply in work.

Interestingly, Holmes (2004) also adopts the notion of fitting in, during an address that covers topics such as small talk, humour, complaints and “whinges” in the workplace. With illuminating quotation from the LWP data-bank, Holmes emphasises the importance of social and work relations in enabling workers to integrate into the site.

Methodology

The workplace interactions included in this paper have been recorded as part of the Language in the Workplace Project based at Victoria University of Wellington (Brown, 2000; Holmes, 2001; Stubbe, 1998). Interactions below, recorded in two large manufacturing workplaces in Auckland (one a tanning factory and one a producer of shoes), come respectively from the management offices and from the shop-floor. In both of the workplaces there was a high proportion of Pacific Islanders on the shop-floor as production employees and as team leaders.

From each of the workplaces there was approximately 10 hours of recordings (some on audio and some on video). There were three key participants at one of the workplaces and five key participants at the other location. For the audio recordings, the key participants agreed to wear lapel microphones for up to two hours per day for five days. The video recordings were completed over five hours on one day at one of the workplaces.

Each of the key participants talked to a range of people while completing their daily tasks, ranging between five and 10 members. It is these interactions that form the basis for the analysis in this paper. Following the ethics requirements of this research project (approved from Victoria University of Wellington), both the key participants and the people they talked with in the recordings were asked to sign an information/permission sheet that set out the purposes of the project’s research. This form also gathered some biographical details and gave the researchers permission to analyse their recordings for research purposes.

The transcription protocols (Appendix) follow the Wellington Corpus of New Zealand English Transcriber’s Manual (Vine, Johnson, O’Brien & Robertson, 1998). All names in the interactions are pseudonyms and we print all transcription symbols in their entirety in conformity with LWP practice. The LWP bases its analysis around pragmatics (see Tannen 1994, Thomas, 1995) with the goal to “to identify distinctive features of workplace talk” (LWP website). Analysis focuses particularly, but not exclusively, on the influence of contextual factors (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, location, length of relationship) on work talk. In the researchers’ analysis for this paper, we scrutinised themes in the interactions in the light of the significance of “situated meanings” which are “local, grounded in actual practices and experiences” (Gee, 1999, p. 40). One such experience took place in the management office and by way of comparison and contrast is followed by a set of interactions from the shop-floor. Both sets of data illustrate the three main themes identified above, viz., power, work culture and work relations.

Data and Discussion

Re-shaping Work Culture: The Voice of Management

In the first factory, the senior managers are rehearsing a presentation to staff on the current situation of the company and management expectations of factory workers. The company uses the expression, “a state of the nation” report, which is about current progress and future plans. The extract below shows that management are looking for better productivity and performance, according to their definition of the terms, in the interests of cutting costs:

Giles: Well I mean the thing is () we still need to explain why we want improved productivity and why we want better performance and why we need to make more pairs to reduce the cost um.

As well as an exercise of their obvious power to establish priorities, the management discussion is a preliminary to building a stronger work culture that is productivity-driven. But the office is having difficulty formulating the pitch to the workers on the floor, as the subsequent extract shows:

Giles: Well I can explain that to a degree a- a degree of this is caused by the lower production level mean that the cost of supervision has to be spread across less pairs but is that too complicated.

Their planning discussion is part of the chain of exercising power, in which they establish their rationale for moving to cut costs. They want savings supposedly throughout the company (“right across the whole spectrum of the company,” to come quite explicitly from the workers (“it’s got to come from the labour . . . from the factory”):

Giles: I think I think those things are saying look we are looking right across the whole spectrum of the company to make savings //+ but when it comes down to it the fact of the matter is that when it comes to cost per pair it's got to come from the labor and it's got to come from the factory and I mean and really I mean what it's really saying is that yes it makes a good progress and there are there are some good things we can report on but apparently we still we still need that that that the (system could help).

Management are aware of heightened sensitivities because there have been talks around the workplace that the company may have to restructure in some ways if more production is taken off-shore. Hence they know that there are questions from the factory floor about the next five years’ plans, with the strong indication that some work relations are suffering from a lower morale than previously:

Giles: so- I mean the message we're trying to deliver because I thi- I thought we had the impression that people downstairs were generally feeling they should just give up now is that right.

Giles: There were there were people like that that sort of thought oh lets give up and () for the redundancy cheque we did have people really concerned that you were going

to be closing down because Jackie gave a speech of gloom and doom in //(report).

Management continue their discussion of work relations in the build-up to enacting their relationship with the workforce. Their planning is at the same time an indication of their conception of the work culture and of the exercise of power in the company. It is clear that some members of management think their workers aren’t capable of fully understanding the situation (“you only need to tell them at a very low level” / “because regrettably the other stuff all becomes too complicated for most of them”). Their approach is to warn of a perceived external threat (“times are tough”), invoke survival (“if you really want to have a future here”), and insist on serious work (“you have to give your best everyday”):

Giles: well I I I personally think you just need to you only need to tell them at a very low level but I mean the message they have to get is times are tough and if you really want to have a future here you have to give your best everyday you've got to be you know you just can't afford to be frivolous or mucking around ++

Giles: a- a- and 1/I think that's the\1 right speech too myself be//cause\because regrettably the other stuff all becomes too complicated for most of them doesn't it.

To this point, then, management shows that its will must prevail and it reveals its notion of the workers, of work culture, work relations and power. The tenor of the discussion is reminiscent of Wright’s (1994, p. 27) conclusion that “a discourse which defines words, ideas, things, or groups becomes authoritative” (cited in Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris (1997, p. 4).

Subsequently, a different manager makes a distinctly edgy statement, which at first sight seems to understand and even empathise with workers’ lack of control of the situation. As he points out, “they've got no way of changing decisions.” He almost hints that management will listen to the workers (“what I’m saying to them is that they do have an influence”). But then he makes his case quite apparent by declaring that the workers’ “influence” lies in commitment to their jobs (“that’s the way they work . . . positive attitude”). Overall, this manager is engaged in creating a work culture in tough times. In terms of the ongoing management and managerial discussion, the speaker is continuing the theme of institutional tough love:

Jack: what I keep on trying to say is (is it) you know some of the people from the factory think they haven't got the - they haven't got (low sway) and they haven't got they've got no way of changing decisions that you know that that we make um and really what I’m saying to them is that they do have an influence and that's the way they work you know it's the way they come to work regularly the way they get into their jobs positive attitude um those are the things that can help +

Migrants in cooperative education placements (or regular employment for that matter) might not ever hear or overhear the discussions in the management office, but the decisions

flowing from those offices would be made apparent in various different ways, and would always need some interpretation. Hence, classes in cooperative courses could spend time on revealing data such as the above to work on meanings, messages and possible responses. To widen the perspective and move closer to the lived experience of employees, the management speak could then be balanced by data from the shop-floor, to which we now turn.

Voices on the Shop-Floor

By contrast with the conflict that the managers are setting up in their planning meeting, interactions among workers on the shop floor of another workplace turn out to be markedly collaborative and supportive. In an extended sequence, for instance, two supervisors rally round a worker who has suffered ill-health, in order to ensure equitable access to ACC benefits. They go to some lengths to detail the exact nature of their colleague's entitlements, meticulously investigating the conditions of disablement and the provisions of the compensation scheme. In so doing, they reveal some of the nature of their culture of work and how they relate to each other.

An edited selection of the transcript, in three brief excerpts, gives a flavour of this empathetic discussion:

Phil: Well I think what we have to do is establish + (phone rings) a doctor

Leola: yep

Phil: is saying that he's sick

Leola: and umm (think) he should be on the sickness benefit straight away but I don't know why they are sending him to and fro

Phil: yeah yeah

Leola: nah and I think that the medic the last medical certificate that he's got there ++ he should be back on the twenty third + that means his benefit is going to stop straight away I mean oh next week

Phil: you see I think the truth the truth if we're going to be honest about this is we're under the impression that + I thought he had a heart attack and thank goodness he didn't.

Phil: that would be the period after that and all these certificates that would be in the clear and (scratching) that would be the ACC would be the three days and these sick documents here would be for the balance of the time

Phil: that means he should be getting some sort of payment

Leola: would you be kind enough to pay (Jessica)

Phil: is he short of money?

Leola: yep

Phil: okay

Leola: he hasn't had they haven't had any / money for \ two weeks

Phil: //would you like\ would you like to fix up your holidays so you get the four days leave is that what you're saying.

A further dimension of their work culture is a measure of group spirit, often rooted in banter, building a sense of

solidarity and camaraderie. There's a certain amount of light-heartedness on the factory floor, for example, as the supervisor spontaneously mixes it up with various employees:

Leola: shut up Palagi (laughs)

Phil: Palagi

Leola: oh please + not you too + shut the door and put earplugs in your ears ++++ shove your head between your legs and stay there.

This incident then reverberates with other workers later in the day, in the same spirit of easy-going, shared fun:

Leola: Martin +++ have you got some ++ labels you (have to) use

Martin: for you anything

Leola: hmm + see + I get special treatment

Martin: so you should after the way you've been (...) you've got everyone scared senseless (Leola laughs)

Martin: I have some I'm sure should have heard what she told Phil to do today too

Leola: (laughs)

Martin: it was very rude

Leola: no it wasn't + // ++ it was Phil \

Martin: /it was Phil you told \ Phil you told to go and stick his head between his legs.

But the same topic can also figure as part of a rather more serious discussion of work relations. Here it serves as a springboard for a running commentary on how the employees relate to each other:

Jacob: . . . this morning when you told Phil what to do with himself

Leola: no I shouldn't say that eh ++ that was stupid of me

Jacob: (I'll go tell my boss) go and stick your head between your knees

Leola: well sometimes they need to be put into their + places + otherwise they get carried away

Jacob: I notice you don't say much to Sam in that sort of way

Leola: oh because Sam doesn't make me mad + he keeps his distance I keep mine =/

Jacob: he doesn't make me mad either he very rarely has a real (tiff) at me

Leola: last night he came into the office I was working late and he goes 'you're working late Leola' 'yes Sam he goes 'oh hello' and I say 'goodbye' and he just says yeah hello and goodbye and he just walked away so + sorry =/

Jacob: he just has certain people he likes ripping into doesn't he.

In these exchanges, then, there is a robust yet sensitive interaction that is capable of different moods and directions. The workers are able to express their emotions, ideas and attitudes to each other; they can plan together and joke together; and they can get on with the work of the factory. On another level, it is clear that work culture and work relations interact to construct each other. As they are "talked into being," (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997, p. 4), the work culture opens up easy and flexible ways for employees to relate to each other. And the working

relations create and confirm a culture of acceptance and inclusion.

Teachers Internalizing Management Viewpoints

Finally, a reflection on the place of migrants in the workplace setting. Disturbingly, work experience can evoke a kind of tough love response from those involved in it. Some teachers, administrators and employers, who claim a “realistic” view of the needs of migrants seeking work, declare flatly that “if they want to get on, then they’ve simply got to knuckle down and take on these work experience jobs.” Unfortunately such a view can also cast migrants as people with deficits – as lacking English, relevant employment experience and an understanding of the host country’s values and procedures. There is often an accompanying viewpoint, that “migrants have to be ready to start at the bottom.”

Katz (2000, p. 145) comments caustically on this outlook:

Behind such deficit-oriented views of workers often lie overly simplistic, skills-based definitions of language and literacy, and conjectures about workers who are portrayed as under-educated, and as lacking appropriate linguistic tools and other basic workplace knowledge.

What the frame misses out is the migrants’ previous life experience, their abilities in their home culture, their developing bilingualism and awareness of more than one culture. The frame simply reinforces local attitudes that dismiss the hapless foreigner. Part of it promotes the idea of a second-class migrant – the deficient newcomer with a handicap. By contrast, the first-class migrant in people’s eyes is the one who flows through immigration straight into a job and a secure, possibly integrated future – often white professionals, who speak English fluently, whose qualifications and experience are accepted. And just to add a little salt to the wound, some of the fortunates are South-East Asians like the majority of migrants taking the English language course, but with qualifications and background that the new host country takes seriously, such as Hong Kong Chinese with IT credentials.

The frame also illustrates a certain assumption of power on the part of the local society to construct the migrant in a particular image. From outside the work setting, the host community forms a notion of the migrant in the workplace that implicitly creates or accepts a work culture that is vertical and hierarchical, and thereby includes a distinction between competent workers on the one hand and deficient workers on the other. It further accepts a conception of work relations in which the migrant worker is directed and constrained by those locals who are in positions of authority.

Such a viewpoint does not necessarily assume that the reverse would happen if the tables were turned. Even though Westerners often say they would expect the same conditions, “if they worked abroad,” in fact it does not tend to happen routinely. Educated Western professionals with varying qualifications and experience may get very reasonable appointments overseas and often in positions of responsibility. A particular case in point is English language

teaching around the world, by which the fluent or native speaker can get near-prestige positions by virtue of their command of the language and the advantage of Western education qualifications.

Implications for Education

Focusing on workplace data reveals a number of dimensions that are relevant to cooperative education and to the education of migrants heading for work. Here we will look at work realities, meaning, language-in-context, and constructs that enable us to categorise work. Authentic texts (Brown 2005; Riddiford & Joe 2006) give us a selection of work realities, as distinct from what we think goes on at work.

Kilickaya (2004, p. 4) writes that authentic texts “enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom.” Newton (2004, p. 10) also very much supports analyzing authentic texts in classes for migrants:

First, if indeed new migrant workers are to meet talk of this nature (i.e. face threatening speech acts such as one finds in authentic spoken texts) outside the classroom, they will benefit from opportunities to meet it in training materials. The goal is not language production, but awareness-raising and rehearsing the skill of interpreting discourse in context.

One team of academics in the field of adult literacy in summarising their research on resources for adults argues:

The results document that it is indeed beneficial, relative to the purposes of adult literacy instruction, to incorporate materials and literacy activities in the instructional program that reflect real-life texts and purposes for reading and writing them to the greatest degree possible (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jakobson & Soler, 2002, p. 18).

Interactions as found in this paper record the kinds of events, situations, conditions, processes and interactions that other workers have previously faced and which migrants may well face. They cannot of course cover the whole gamut of work, but they can at least indicate kinds of incidents that occur in workplaces and thereby give learners and teachers material to use for analysis, exploration and response.

The data provide a selection of the language used in different situations, to which we then ascribe meaning. Meaning and interpretation were obviously crucial in analysing the texts above from both worksites: that is, the language was significant for what it might mean, not just for existing in its own right. To an important extent, we are able to construct meaning because language is embedded in context, which can be represented schematically in the following way (Figure 2). The context is made up of a number of elements: for example, the work culture; the institution of the workplace, including the relationship between the management and workers; the culture of the wider society (see Figure 3).

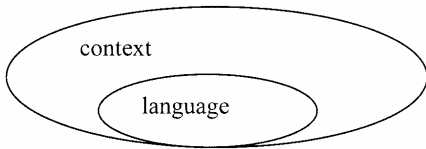


FIGURE 2
Situated language

In education, a lot of English language courses concentrate on providing language form and function that are deemed necessary for workplace preparation. However, the data analysed here suggest that it is vital to explore meaning, because the events of the workplace are significant in the working lives of employees. Doing so involves focusing on language and communication in context, because it is that context that helps make language meaningful.

These data suggest areas or constructs of workplace life that are talked into being by language, but also lie beyond it, e.g., power, ideology, the institution of the workplace, work culture, work relations. In this way, we can look at the nature of social realities in workplaces (e.g., who exercises power and how; the ways in which employees relate to each other and to employers; how the culture of the workplace functions). We can then explore the substance of interactions among workers, the differing roles of workers in workplaces, and the dynamics of interactions.

Language courses could focus on selections of the language from workplace data to inquire how different constructs are expressed and constructed, what they might mean, and how employees might respond to them.

There is a related consideration. English language courses to prepare migrants for workplaces are full of directives and guidelines, for example, strict guides for doing CVs, for approaching potential employers, for submitting applications for a job, for conducting oneself in an interview, for undertaking work, for following directions on the job. Such workplace courses provide answers to questions like, how to get and hold a job, how to behave in a job, how to be a good worker.

By contrast, we believe the kind of data cited here poses a question rather than the answers (see Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004). Analysing the data suggests that courses

for migrants should ask what the transcripts might mean, how they might be interpreted, what the contexts are, what the transcripts imply, what forces are at work in the sites studied, how workers might respond – in short, a problem-posing task, for which there are no fixed answers, but instead a set of positions that are open to debate

Conclusions

Migrants bound for cooperative education placements and for employment can benefit from analysis of authentic workplace interactions. Transcriptions of both management discussions and shop-floor conversations reveal some of the realities of themes such as power, work culture and work relations. Education programs could focus on interpretation and meaning, taking socially-grounded context into account to explore the sense and implications of exchanges among workers, and possible or necessary responses. Such a focus potentially offers “co-op migrants” an enhanced sense of reality and an opportunity to investigate dynamics and interactions of sample workplaces.

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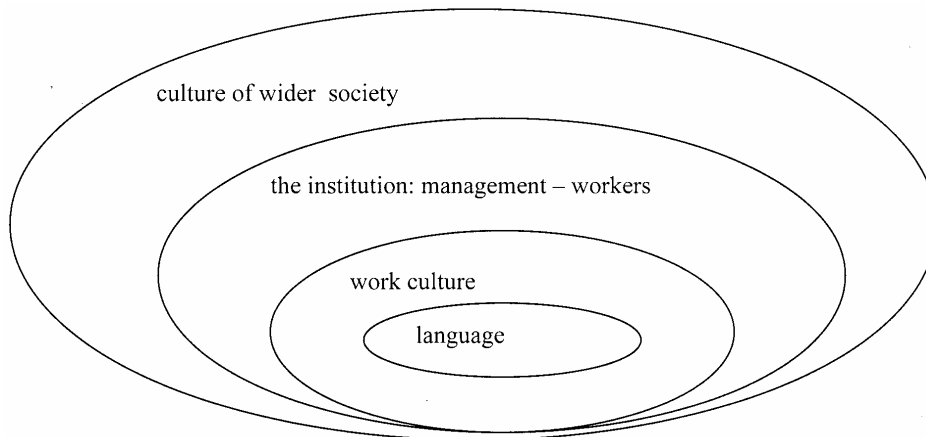


FIGURE 3
Features of context

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APPENDIX
Transcription Conventions

All names are pseudonyms

Standard Character Set

Alphabetic Roman characters are used in lexical transcription and editorial comments. No diacritics or non-Roman characters are permitted. No punctuation is used (except for apostrophes) and upper case is reserved for marking emphatic stress (e.g. CRAZY).

Discourse Features

Non-alphabetic characters (e.g. square brackets) are used to mark discourse features, editorial comments and their scope.

Comprehension Problems and Transcriber Doubt

Parentheses enclose doubtful transcription.

() Untranscribable or incomprehensible speech

(well) Transcriber's best guess at unclear speech

Pauses

The plus signs show a pause.

++ One to two second pause.

+++ Two to three second pause.

Simultaneous Speech and Continuous Utterances

// Indicates start of simultaneous or overlapping speech in utterance of "current" or "first" speaker.

\ Indicates end of simultaneous or overlapping speech in utterance of "current" or "first" speaker.