

**CCERBAL 2023**  
**BILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM: TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES,  
MOBILITY, AND WELL-BEING**  
**MAY 4-6, 2023**



**SYMPOSIUM**

**Language Assessment and Migration in Canada: Surveying the Landscape**

**Organisers:** Angel Arias, *Carleton University*  
Beverly Baker, *University of Ottawa*

**Discussant:** Rachelle Vessey, *Carleton University*

This symposium addresses issues associated with migration in Canada, including immigration to Canada through the province of Quebec, language support for newcomers, federal government language policy analysis, and challenges related specifically to refugee populations. Mobility is driven by diverse factors that may include but are not limited to internationalized education, economic migration, family reunification, and conflict and instability. The ability to communicate in the dominant language of the host society is considered an essential asset that helps with integration (Nakhaie, 2020). Governments have widely used language assessment as a selection tool for controlling migration (Frost & McNamara, 2018; Fulcher & Davidson, 2009; Van Avermaet, 2009). In other words, language assessment in the policy domain not only functions as a measurement tool for test takers' language proficiency but also as a mechanism to regulate the flow of desirable immigrants (Blackledge, 2009; Dickie, 2016; Frost, 2019; Shohamy, 2001; 2006; 2009). The presentations below hone in on critical aspects of language learning and assessment as they relate to migration and investigate from a critical perspective the explicit and implicit narratives related to the valuing and measurement of migrant language abilities.

## **SYMPOSIUM OUTLINE**

Introduction (10 minutes)

Presentations (20 minutes each: 80 minutes total)

Discussant (15 minutes)

Q&A (15 minutes)

### **PRESENTATION 1: CANADIAN MIGRATION THROUGH QUEBEC**

Angel Arias, Carleton University

This presentation provides a brief background to Quebec immigration and identifies language-related issues in this context. It examines the political discourse on language and assessment practices for immigration to Canada through the province of Quebec, outlining political tensions around the protection of French and examining the language policy around government-designated French proficiency tests across immigration classes.

Research in the context of immigration has suggested that language proficiency is an important predictor of sociocultural integration (Nakhaie, 2020). As a result, language testing for immigration purposes is a ubiquitous practice in the society of the 21st century, and test scores from language measures are often used to make important decisions on behalf of prospective immigrants. This practice is not free from scholarly debates as language tests have been highly criticized as being gatekeeping tools to promote the agenda of governments (McNamara, 2009; Shohamy, 2001, 2006).

Immigration to Canada through the province of Quebec is an exceptional case in the immigration system because Quebec administers its own immigration programs, and preserving French is a core value. Despite the use of language measures to control the influx of prospective immigrants, the use of designated language tests can have negative consequences in the integration of minoritized groups whose functional language proficiency is not French. Results from this work can shed light on language policy in Quebec and include a call for a transdisciplinary collaboration (Saville, 2009) where key stakeholders come together to address issues associated with the integration of newcomers.

### **PRESENTATION 2: FRANCIZATION IN QUEBEC**

Louis-David Bibeau, Université de Montréal

Ce segment de la discussion rend compte d'une analyse des relations de pouvoir et de collaboration entre une équipe universitaire et une équipe ministérielle dans l'élaboration d'une tâche d'évaluation sommative pour les personnes immigrantes adultes dans les cours de «

francisation » (des cours de français gratuits pour les nouvelles personnes arrivantes) au Québec. En 2020, le ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration (MIFI) de la province du Québec a donné un mandat de 4 ans à une équipe de personnes expertes en évaluation et en didactique des langues de l'Université de Montréal et à une équipe du MIFI (des personnes enseignantes ayant une connaissance approfondie du contexte) pour renouveler les ressources et outils d'évaluation utilisés dans leurs cours. Cela crée une situation souvent observée où les opinions des personnes expertes sont confrontées à des limitations politiques (McNamara & Shohamy, 2008), qui peuvent rendre difficile (ou carrément empêcher) la mise de l'avant des enjeux critiques par les personnes expertes.

Pour explorer les relations entre les personnes impliquées dans le projet, une analyse critique du discours (Fairclough, 2010), avec l'approche du cadrage et du positionnement (Gordon, 2015) a été menée sur les transcriptions de quatre entretiens avec des membres de l'équipe universitaire et sur des documents écrits, notamment un journal de bord du projet, mettant de l'avant la manière dont l'identité de toute personne concernée par la tâche a été discursivement produite et positionnée. L'analyse des identités, multiples et diverses, qui se rencontrent dans ce projet a permis d'explicitier trois facteurs qui seront discuter en détails : l'importance de la définition du rôle de chaque individu, de l'équité dans la collaboration pour faire rayonner l'expertise de chaque membre et d'un groupe presque oublié, les personnes évaluées.

### **PRESENTATION 3: POLICY ARCHEOLOGY**

Coral Qin, University of Ottawa

This work explores discourses of language assessment and immigration in Canadian immigration policy using policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) and includes plans to explore the impact of these policies on Chinese immigrants to Canada. While numerous studies have pointed out the inconsistency between test purpose and test use in the immigration policy context, Canada--as a country with a unique multiculturalism policy and point system--has attracted limited attention. It is beneficial to examine the rationale for setting language requirements for immigrants from a policy perspective and scrutinise the consequences for a specific group in Canada.

In this presentation, I will report on the first phase of my Ph.D. research, a document analysis result guided by policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994). Policy archeology is a research framework as well as a research tool that forces a reconsideration of how any policy problem emerges or is constructed in the first place (Haque, 2019). My research questions are the following: a) What are the conditions, rules, or regularities in the history and current policy of using language assessment (IELTS and CELPIP) for immigration purposes in Canada? b) How do these conditions, rules or regularities shape policy choice and social construction of policy solutions?

Discoveries from this analysis will inform subsequent focus groups with Chinese immigrants to Canada in order to explore the impact of these policies on Chinese immigrants, which will suggest connections between policy statements and immigrants' actual experience.

## **PRESENTATION 4: REFUGEE IMMIGRATION**

Li-Shih Huang, University of Victoria

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by mid-2022, 103 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced, among whom refugees accounted for 32.5 million. Since the start of the Syrian civil war, more than 6.8 million Syrians have fled the country, making the Syrian refugee crisis one of the largest humanitarian crises of our time. From January 2014 to February 2020, Syria was the top country of origin for refugees resettled to Canada (Macklin & Blum, 2021). Drawing on interviews from recent work identifying the language-learning needs of refugees in Canada (e.g., Benseman, 2014; Ghadi et al., 2019; Huang, 2021, 2022; Jackson, 2013; Kirova, 2019; Linder et al., 2020; Martani, 2020) and how these relate to their integration into Canadian society, this talk reflects on key issues related to the appropriateness of using standardized language test scores for purposes they were never designed to serve.

The follow-up interviews (Huang, 2021b) in this talk featured the frustrating experiences of learners and instructors in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program in their efforts to reach a required standardized test score for purposes of study, immigration and citizenship, and professional certification. By examining language testing issues when standardized tests are used for purposes other than their original intent (Fulcher, 2018; Huang, 2021a; Muller, 2017), and by sharing the perceptions and insights of instructors and learners alike, the presentation seeks to provoke critical discussion of language testing policy and practices in order to find creative and collaborative solutions to the issues it raises.

## **DISCUSSANT (Vessey)**

Language assessment in the context of migration is an ideological practice because host societies ‘idealize’ through hidden and explicit agendas the kind of desired newcomers they want to welcome. The discussant of this symposium will pull together the presentations by considering them from an ideology perspective — exploring how language ideologies may help us understand the discourses of migration and point us toward a path forward to improve our current systems.