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NEWS RELEASE

Pragmatic skills, not just language, vital to immigrant integration



Montreal – Language skills have an impact on the social integration of immigrants in their workplaces and communities, but learning pragmatic skills and having opportunities to interact with native-born Canadians are also important, according to a new study published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

“Research has shown that groups from different language backgrounds developed official language skills at different rates,” say authors Tracey Derwing and Erin Waugh. “This suggests that exposure to official language outside the language classroom makes a huge difference to a learner’s progress, even when controlling for education and time of arrival in Canada.”

In *Language Skills and the Social Integration of Canada’s Adult Immigrants*, the authors review a range of research findings on the relationship between official language knowledge and social integration. For example, a seven-year longitudinal study of two groups of newcomers, one composed of Mandarin speakers and the other of Slavic speakers, found that Mandarin speakers faced greater linguistic and cultural challenges than did Slavic language speakers.

The authors conclude that current approaches to language training do not adequately equip immigrants to develop the “soft” skills, such as the ability to pick up communication cues, that they need in order to find employment and integrate successfully into the workplace and society. Workplace programs for newcomers aimed at improving these skills could facilitate building relationships with native-born Canadians, they suggest.

Derwing and Waugh also call for native-born Canadians to play their part – for example, through the Cultural Connections program, administered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which they believe should be expanded.

“More linguistic supports and additional opportunities to interact with Canadians are needed,” they argue. “But Canadians also need to be proactive in welcoming newcomers and helping them to understand the informal aspects of language and life in Canada.”

Language Skills and the Social Integration of Canada’s Adult Immigrants, by Tracey M. Derwing and Erin Waugh, can be downloaded free of charge from the Institute’s Web site (www.irpp.org).

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