

# ACCULTURATION AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOR NEWCOMERS IN CANADA

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*Acculturation and language barriers*

*for newcomers in Canada*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration has been an ever-present phenomenon throughout the history of our civilization. During the 20th century, it increased as a widespread trend which continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. People have been migrating to different and usually more developed countries for various reasons. The most common types of migrants are: “students and workers, economic refugees, political refugees, immigrants or executives and businessmen” (Petrova, 2016: 72). More developed countries have created immigration programs<sup>1</sup> because they recognize the opportunity to benefit their economy “through the skills they bring to the market (cognitive skills such as abstract thinking, non-cognitive skills such as motivation and initiative, and specific skills such as the ability to operate machinery) and through the small business they own” (Larrotta, 2019: 53). Regardless of the motive for migrating to a new country, all immigrants go through an acculturation process. The outcome of the acculturation process can be either positive or negative, depending on various criteria. Some of the most important criteria are the extent of social contact with the target culture, target language proficiency, and motivation throughout the process.

This thesis will present different theoretical views and research studies that explore the topic of acculturation and language barriers from a sociolinguistic point of view. The theoretical part consists of 3 subchapters. In the first subchapter, the author discusses different acculturation categories based on immigrants’ lifestyles in the target culture. The ratio of primary culture and language usage to secondary culture and language usage determines how well an immigrant is acculturated into a new country. The second subchapter discusses second language learning motivation. Different applied linguists presented various theories and categorizations for motivation types which describe immigrants’ motivational influences and expectations for second language learning. The third subchapter presents and discusses different language barriers immigrants face and how it affects their language learning. The theoretical part is followed by a practical part which describes a qualitative research study into language barriers faced by newcomers to Canada and the acculturation categories to which immigrants belong. This part consists of a methodology section, research results, and discussion. The main conclusions are summarized at the end of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Immigration programs stand for various opportunities a country offers to non-residents. For Commonwealth countries, Immigration center collects applications for different programs with different criteria which, if approved, allow non-residents to get a temporary visa or a permanent resident visa. An approved visa allows the visa holder to stay and work in the country for a specific amount of time.



## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

All immigrants come with their own culture, language, ethnicity, and other factors when immigrating to a new country that can collide with those from the new environment they decide to settle in (Petrova, 2016). Yeh (2005) states that immigrants face “entirely new values” that may differ from those they acquired in their home country. Some of those are: “social norms, and even role expectations” (Flores, 2017: 28). Immigrants find themselves in a situation where they have to choose which way of living they will accept as their main one, including culture, language and friends. Immigrants may struggle with adapting to their new environment with different cultures to decide between.

In the next three subchapters, the author will present the main studies and theories on:

- (1) immigrants’ acculturation process with target culture and second language usage as important variables,
- (2) motivation categories for second language learning, and
- (3) most common language barriers immigrants face in their new country.

### **2.1. Acculturation**

The notion of acculturation is related to immigrants’ cultural struggles when switching cultures. Acculturation is defined as “the extent to which individuals have maintained their culture of origin or adapted to the larger society” after they immigrated (Farver et al., 2002 in Flores, 2017: 28). It can be viewed as a scale where immigrants can, on one end, opt to keep practicing activities from their primary culture or, on the other end, immerse themselves fully in the new culture, with a wide range of cultural variety when it comes to different areas of immigrants’ lives.

There are three main factors that may make acculturation easier for immigrants. According to Flores (2017), these are:

- social support,
- language usage and
- selection of integration as an acculturation strategy.

These categories determine the level to which immigrants adapt to their new culture. Deciding to integrate into their new society leads to frequent contact with people from the host culture, during which immigrants can experience social support while using the second language. This makes a positive impact on their process of acculturation. However, if immigrants resist integration and refuse to adapt to their new culture, their acculturation process will be negative.

According to Flores (2017), the first factor that affects acculturation is social support. There are two options when it comes to social support. Immigrants can decide to integrate into their new environment by making new friends with the natives and start practicing activities from the target culture or, on the other hand, immigrants can opt for settling into ethnic enclaves to obtain more benefits from people coming from the same culture and speaking the same language. Ethnic enclaves provide safety and support for new immigrants by providing work within their community which is a coping strategy for people who have not acquired the second language on a fluent level or do not feel safe enough to explore the target culture. However, this strategy does not require immigrants to have contact with the target culture and language, which might result in an insufficient level of acculturation (Isphording, 2015).

Immigrants who join their ethnic enclaves do not reach high second language proficiency since speaking the second language is not necessary for their everyday lives. However, immigrants who integrate into a new society are “forced” to practice second language skills because it is inevitable to communicate with their environment by going to the grocery store, visiting the doctor, or any other governmental facility and to work. According to Isphording (2015) it is beneficial for immigrants to participate in foreign language learning classes in school, learn the second language through TV, books, or other media, or with educational sojourns, i.e., short trips to the target society, as a part of pre-migration exposure. Reaching higher levels of second language proficiency helps immigrants in dealing with cultural issues that might arise.

Closely connected to social support, the second factor that affects acculturation is language proficiency. It is extremely important since it is a major part of understanding, exploring, and acquiring new cultural norms. Some researchers believe that having limited proficiency in verbal and written communication in L2 makes immigrants more likely to encounter social, cultural, and linguistic problems (Petrova, 2016). Each language has its own culture within which it develops. Petrova (2016: 73) states that “there are differences in patterns of thinking

from one culture to another,” and when an individual changes cultures, that “person’s ideology, self-identity, and persuasion, actions, feelings, and communication process may be destroyed” due to not being able to “express themselves and their identity, ethnicity, occupational status, gender, and age.” Consequently, immigrants either assimilate to a new culture and do not follow their primary cultural values and language norms, stay in their community, or as their last option, form another one where they can express themselves freely with no obstacles (Petrova, 2016). Whichever option immigrants go with, it is still important to note that language issues affect immigrants’ day-to-day lives and hence their acculturation level.

Adapting to a new environment can be stressful for immigrants. They cannot avoid contact with their environment, which, due to their usually limited verbal and written communication, could lead to feelings of social isolation, uncertainty, and helplessness (Petrova, 2016). Apart from the need to reach fluency in L2, Morales and Hanson (2005) stated that immigrants could feel “pressured to become familiar with beliefs, values, and customs of a new culture and educational system”, which might be the reason why they struggle or eventually withdraw to their ethnic enclaves (Morales and Hanson, 2005 in Flint et al., 2019).

### **2.1.1. Berry’s acculturation theory**

Besides language and social support as major factors, Flores (2017) named the acculturation category as an important factor that influences people after immigrating. This factor depends on how immigrants feel about engaging in the new environment or withdrawing into a familiar community as their integration strategy. Considering these variables, Berry et al. (1987) described an acculturation model that shows relations between immigrants’ attitudes towards the individually influenced significance of keeping contact with primary and target cultures and the levels of acculturation an immigrant exhibited. According to Berry et al. (1987), immigrants either show interest in their first culture or attempt to integrate into a new culture. These two factors determine which of the following four categories of acculturation they belong to: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry et al., 1987). The four categories of acculturation highlight the vast differences in experiences that immigrants can have when they arrive in a new country.

In the first acculturation category, integration, immigrants desire to participate in their cultural community; however, they also maintain and expand social relationships outside their community. Immigrants demonstrate the second category, assimilation, as their acculturation category when they put more emphasis on adjusting and integrating into the new culture rather than maintaining their first culture. Immigrants classified in the separation category focus on their own culture and have little to no regard for the host culture. The final category, marginalization, is on the opposite side of integration because immigrants from this group are not interested in their culture or the host culture.

When comparing these categories, integration and assimilation would be considered positive categories of acculturation due to the immigrants' desire to participate in the target culture. On the other hand, separation and marginalization would stand on the negative end of the acculturation process since the immigrants in these situations refuse to accept the target culture. Ward and Kennedy (1994) conducted a study where they found that immigrants who communicated with others from the same culture had lower levels of psychological distress, while immigrants having contact with others from a host culture had lower levels of sociocultural difficulties (Ward and Kennedy, 1994 in Culhane, 2004). Lakey claimed that the better option for an immigrant between these two is to "acquire the host cultural patterns and develop working relationships with the environment" to achieve a higher acculturation level (Lakey, 2003: 104).

### **2.1.2. Schumann's acculturation theory**

Schumann (1986) viewed acculturation from the perspective of another two variables, social and psychological factors, which depended on immigrants' approach to language acquisition. Assuming that a learner could learn L2 better and faster by being surrounded by other L2 speakers, Schumann emphasized social distance, which he defined as "cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures which came into contact within an individual" (Schumann, 1978, in Brown, 1980: 160). Schumann (1978, in Brown, 1980: 160) claimed that "the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language". Hence, learners who spent more time in situations where they could hear or speak L2 improved their chance of acquiring L2 to a fluent level compared to learners who were anxious and avoided conversing in L2. Research in English-speaking countries showed that immigrants believed that having a higher proficiency in English, also considered

a lingua franca, could help them integrate into their new culture and achieve the desired acculturation level (Zaker, 2016). Zaker (2016) stated that language proficiency allows immigrants to communicate with different cultures more easily. Reduced social distance enables a learner to interact more with native speakers daily. Therefore, these interactions become positive experiences that increase the learner's self-confidence in future interactions with native speakers (Norton, 1995). It is believed that the learner's proximity to the target group (reducing social and psychological distance) results in a higher level of language acquisition (Schumann, 1986).

Schumann explained that psychological distance was related to the level of discomfort a learner felt while surrounded by L2 speakers and/or culture (Schumann, 1986). Immigrants who had just arrived in a new country often experienced the feeling of psychological distance. The new environment could make them uneasy and closed off to new opportunities. Schumann (1986) determined four factors that influence the level of psychological distance. The first factor, language shock, is caused by using a different linguistic system than the learner's primary one. This causes the learner to make many mistakes, switching between languages (code-switching), or using communication strategies to get the point across while being misunderstood more often than not. If immigrants do not often interact with L2 speakers and do not immerse themselves into the new culture properly, they might create a new language system that combines their first language and the target language, which is also known as pidginization (Zaker, 2016). Schumann also claimed that culture shock is another obstacle where an immigrant is immersed into a new environment that consequently asks for a new routine, causing stress and anxiety. It can last a short time until immigrants are better adapted to their new environment, or it can last longer if they feel homesick or cannot adapt well enough, leading to a state of cultural stress. According to Schumann, the next factor that determines psychological distance is motivation (this concept will be presented in more detail in the chapter below). Lastly, ego permeability shows which value or belief a learner would accept, his primary one or the one presented by a target language group (Zaker, 2016). Schumann's theory explained how one could not consider social factors without psychological factors and vice versa, when discussing second language acquisition in a target culture.

Two important variables often mentioned by researchers in this field, also found in Schumann's theory, concern immigrants' social activity and attitude towards their cultural identity. Immigrants who successfully integrate into a new society tend to form relationships with L2 speakers and make frequent and consistent contact with them. When it comes to their

cultural identity, immigrants usually reevaluate which culture suits them better in a new environment, due to the societal pressure to accept the new culture or not having enough sources and opportunities to keep practicing their primary culture in case of not joining one's ethnic community. Different options are possible for immigrants: keeping primary values and beliefs, accepting new ones, or integrating parts from both cultures. Each option can lead immigrants to a different integration path and a different level of acculturation. Sam recommended that immigrants should consider two factors, cultural maintenance and contact participation, when choosing the optimal acculturation category (Sam, 2000, in Flores et al., 2017). Cultural maintenance encompasses all cultural values and habits immigrants bring from the primary culture they wish to keep practicing. At the same time, contact participation represents immigrants' high motivation to participate and create relationships in the host culture. Sam (2000, in Flores et al., 2017) believed that by combining these two seemingly different outlooks in immigrants' daily lives, immigrants have a better chance of having a higher level of acculturation since the acculturation category they are practicing is integration.

Bluestone (2009) pointed out the difference between the theories of acculturation provided by Berry et al. (1987) and Schumann (1986). Schumann's theory assumes that there is "social contact between the learner and the members of the target culture," while Berry's theory leaves space for learners with little to zero contact with L2 and the host culture (Bluestone, 2009: 139).

### **2.1.3. Other theories of acculturation**

In 2004, Culhane came forward with his acculturation theory. He believed there were two categories of acculturation. In the first type, the learner forms and maintains relationships with L2 speakers while those speakers offer L2 input and their culture. In his free time, the learner also enjoys his own language and culture (Culhane, 2004). In the second acculturation category, the learner forms and maintains relationships with L2 speakers while adopting their culture and lifestyle (Culhane, 2004). Both acculturation categories can be connected to Berry's integration and assimilation from his four-type acculturation system (Zaker, 2016).

Brown, on the other hand, described acculturation as a strict process with four stages. According to him, immigrants experience a feeling of euphoria as the first step towards acculturation. However, having changed their environment, immigrants get overwhelmed by

their new surroundings (Brown, 1980). After some time, when the euphoria wears off, immigrants realize the differences between the two cultures, which leads to culture shock. At this stage, immigrants begin to question their self-image and security (Brown, 1980). While adapting to their new environment by learning the language and new social norms, immigrants experience cultural stress since they must redesign their new cultural identity. This gradual recovery is necessary for immigrants to reach full recovery and overcome the feeling of not belonging to any culture (Brown, 1980). The final step shows similarities with Culhane's model mentioned above. Brown believed full recovery happens when an immigrant adapts, assimilates, or accepts the new culture (Brown, 1980).

Acculturation, like any other complex phenomenon, has positive and negative sides. Isphording (2015) presented other factors related to acculturation as a consequence of the change immigrants undergo. Named below are the benefits immigrants get with acculturating to a new culture and the obstacles they face in that new environment. As one of the positive sides, Isphording names immigrants' arrival time. It has been proved that the earlier in their life immigrants arrive in the host country, the easier they acquire the target language and adjust to the target culture. This creates more opportunities for contact with L2 speakers, which in turn increases language skills through exposure and learning by doing (Isphording, 2015). Learning L2 and becoming fluent in it offers better employment options and higher salaries, which is an additional motivating factor. Another benefit is point-based immigration selection, where immigrants are granted permanent citizenship based on the number of points they achieve according to their skills and knowledge, such as L2 fluency. The government and not-for-profit organizations or other NGOs (non-government organizations) who provide language learning services aim to help immigrants by organizing language courses to improve their language skills. However, there are as many obstacles as there are benefits. Isphording believes if the first language and the target language are linguistically different to a certain extent, it may be harder and more expensive for immigrants to acquire the new language system. This obstacle relates to immigrants who withdraw to their ethnic enclaves because they have not acquired L2, which limits their exposure to L2 and reduces their chance to practice and acquire the target language. Another negative aspect that Isphording named is circular migration<sup>2</sup> and short expected durations of stay because an individual needs more time and practice to acquire a language. The final obstacle to language fluency is a learner's

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<sup>2</sup> Migration where a person travels back and forth to and from his home country and plans on returning to the host country after a period of time (Isphording, 2015:9)

personal characteristics that cannot be easily measured, such as cognitive abilities or motivation (Isphording, 2015).



## 2.2. Motivation

Motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) is considered a subjective phenomenon affecting learners' L2 acquisition. According to Ellis (2015), "motivation is a complex construct that involves the reasons, or goals learners have for learning a second language, the effort they put into learning, and the attributes they form as a result of their attempts to learn" (Ellis, 2015: 51). Gardner studied motivation for learning L2 in the second half of the last century. According to Gardner, motivation is "self-confidence derived from prior experience with language" which is also affected by attitudes towards the L2 society (Gardner et al., 1977). Gardner also provided an updated definition of learner's motivation where he stated that "the motivated individual is goal-directed, expends effort, is persistent, is attentive, has desires (wants), exhibits positive affect, is aroused, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy), and has reasons (motives)" (2006: 2).

Motivation for second language learning is a concept many SLA researchers started exploring only in the last century as the idea of migrating to better-developed countries became popular. Gardner explored the idea that motivation could be divided into two categories: integrative and instrumental motivation. Gardner partnered with Lambert in 1972 to expand on this idea named the socio-educational model where they explored how motivation worked and if it could be divided into categories to understand its' complexity better. They found that motivation for language learning could be divided into two general categories. The first of these two categories was integrative motivation, described as learners' desire to get to know the language society and meet more people to fulfill their social needs (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). This type of motivation could be compared to intrinsic motivation since the learner is focused on social and emotional elements that derive from the learner's private thoughts and ideas. Learners with integrative motivation interact more often with L2 speakers in the new culture to create meaningful relationships (Culhane, 2004). Norton (1995) stated that learners with integrative motivation have a primary goal to learn L2 and integrate into the new society and their culture. According to Richardson (2003), learners with integrative motivation use L2 to interact with L2 speakers and enjoy and value their culture and community (Richardson, 2003, in Ali & Pathan, 2017: 82). They go out of their way to make contact with L2 speakers to create meaningful relationships and get to know the culture so they can acculturate and become a part of it as well. Integrative motivation is a product of the learner's desire to be like other members of the target community (Mirici et al., 2013). Contact with L2 speakers provide the learners with enough input to acquire conversational L2 that is used in everyday

interactions (Culhane, 2004). Learners with integrative motivation, therefore, reach a higher level of acculturation due to initiating interaction with L2 speakers and accepting their culture, unlike learners with instrumental motivation who only learn L2 for linguistic or professional needs.

According to Gardner and Lambert (1959), the second motivation type is instrumental motivation, which encompasses the learner's reasons for learning the second language and has a utilitarian value for the learner. This type of motivation is similar to the extrinsic type of motivation since the learner's motivation depends on the outcomes and rewards from the outside world. Instrumental motivation is present when a student is learning L2 for linguistic purposes, for example, "developing grammatical or lexical comprehension" (Culhane, 2004: 54). This category of motivation serves to satisfy a learner's professional, educational and everyday needs to function properly in society but does not serve acculturation. Norton stated that learners with instrumental motivation acquired L2 for "utilitarian purposes, such as employment" (Norton, 1995: 17). Learners use L2 for practical benefit only; hence they feel "the educational setting is sufficient to meet their language learning goals" (Culhane, 2004: 52). Instrumental motivation does not require a learner to integrate into the target culture. Therefore, learners often stay within their communities that share their language and culture (Culhane, 2004). Learners who do not spend time within a target community might feel uncomfortable facing contact situations with L2 speakers. Consequently, Culhane (2004) believed this attitude resulted in lower levels of acculturation which could be categorized as separated or marginalized acculturation. Using a formal environment to draw their language knowledge from, deliberate interaction with L2 speakers to learn the culture and acquire the language was considered unnecessary (Culhane, 2004).

Culhane (2004) developed one of the well-known theories which had many similarities with Gardner's original hypothesis on second language learning motivation from 1959. Culhane differentiated three functioning levels of a second language learner, which showed the level of acculturation based on a learner's motivation and language usage. The main construct of Culhane's model is functioning, which he defined as an "inter-relationship between the native and acquired spheres of cultural and linguistic expression that reflected attitudes toward when and how to use the L2, the degree to which the C2 was internalized and general attitudes toward members of the culture being acquired" (Culhane, 2004: 56). Following this definition, Culhane's model dealt with the way an immigrant balances his primary language and culture with his target language and culture which determines the level of the acquired target language

(L2) and culture (C2). Functioning levels contain all factors necessary to determine learner's acculturation level. This model starts with instrumental and integrative functioning as the first two levels. These levels correlate to instrumental and integrative motivation explained above. Instrumental functioning includes instrumental motivation since learners only acquire L2 for their pragmatic goals (Culhane, 2004). Learners on this level use L2 to improve their current career situation or for their necessary daily interactions, which exclude socialization within the L2 community and meaningful relationships with L2 speakers (Culhane, 2004). Integrative functioning, on the other hand, displays learners' investment into the L2 community by acquiring L2 and their culture to integrate and gradually stop using their primary language and culture with those of the target community (Culhane, 2004). The last level of functioning displays a complete positive acculturation process. Psycho-social functioning refers to the target language and culture being present in the learner's everyday life on a psychological and social level, where he<sup>3</sup> replaces his primary culture and language with his target culture and language to the full extent (Culhane, 2004). This hypothesis states that the learner's high motivation to participate in the target culture and use of the target language is connected to a positive acculturation level, and low motivation to participate in the target culture and use of the target language correlates to a negative acculturation level.

Research showed that both instrumental and integrative motivation play a role in language learning and, eventually, acculturation. Immigrants believe language proficiency is an important factor that helps them integrate economically and socially by "improving access to higher paying jobs and facilitating interactions with the native-born population" (Isphording, 2015: 8). A study conducted by Abdilah (2012) showed a correlation between language proficiency and social and economic factors. In this study, immigrants from Iraq expressed a strong desire to integrate into an Australian community by communicating in L2, forming relationships with native speakers, getting familiar with their culture, and participating in their job market with a chance of upgrading their job position. Many employers were ready to reward a language proficient worker's effort and achieved results as a motivation for future productivity (Isphording, 2015). Other than their internal motivation to integrate into their new community, immigrants received external motivation through "higher earnings, better employment probabilities, access to better jobs, and achievement of non-market gains through social and political participation" (Isphording, 2015: 3).

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<sup>3</sup> This pronoun is used in a general sense for all genders in the theoretical part of this thesis.

On the other hand, to reach language proficiency to integrate into their new community, immigrants invested their resources, for example, the cost of language classes, time spent learning and practicing the language, effort put into reaching proficiency, and unrealized opportunities and earning that could have taken place instead of learning a language (Isphording, 2015). Abdilah (2012) concluded that integrative motivation served immigrants better for acculturating in the target community than instrumental motivation since immigrants with integrative motivation spent more purposeful time in the target culture and practiced the target language more often than immigrants with instrumental motivation. However, the results from the research showed that both types of motivation served a purpose for integrating into a target community since learning L2 helped immigrants identify with the target community (Abdilah, 2012).

### **2.3.1. Demotivation**

For children and adults, it is not expected that the learner's motivation level will always be high, and the learner will be willing to continue with his L2 learning process. Therefore, on the other side of the motivation spectrum, SLA researchers (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011) mention demotivation as it affects second language learners differently than motivation. Demotivation does not exist without motivation, according to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who define a demotivated learner as "someone who was once motivated but has lost his or her commitment/interest for some reason" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 138). Dörnyei states that demotivation happens due to "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behavior intention or an ongoing action." However, it must be noted that not all negative external forces cause a learner to increase his levels of demotivation (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). L2 native speakers show social superiority compared to non-native speakers, which results in language learning stress that potentially creates negative attitudes toward L2 language and culture. Demotivation, in those cases, blocks or interferes with the language learning process, which causes the learner to form negative experiences and attitudes and intervenes with the actions learners take to achieve their goals (Ali and Pathan, 2017: 81). Research conducted by Dörnyei described the influence on demotivation caused by external factors, however, Cankaya (2018) presented multiple studies where internal factors like "lack of confidence and negative attitude within learners" affected demotivation as well (Cankaya, 2018: 4). Research conducted by Ikeno (2002) showed that learners who did not have a feeling

of control over their learning and who felt inferior compared to other's language proficiency level felt less motivated (in Cankaya, 2018). In the research Abdilah (2012) conducted with Iraqi immigrants in Australian society, there were three main demotives that affected immigrants' language learning. The first demotive was illiteracy among the immigrants. Immigrants were left with poorly developed language skills like reading and writing in their first language if they left school early for various reasons. (Abdilah, 2012). This provided little to no base for second language learning. The second demotive was related to sociocultural obligations for each individual. Iraqi women had to take care of housework and respect rules set by mixed gender classes since Iraqis practice a patriarchal culture (Abdilah, 2012: 10). Since Iraqi women had to tend to domestic duties at all times, it was hard for them to find opportunities to communicate in the target language which was considered a third demotive (Abdilah, 2012).

Motivation and demotivation are influenced by society in the sense that learners are a part of their external environment. However, internal factors and individual values like social identity and relations of power are what affect motivation or demotivation in a learner (Norton, 1995: 12). Norton believes learners can be marked within different categories, e.g., motivation level and introversion or extroversion, which are ever-changing factors affected by the society and learners' experiences within it (Norton, 1995: 12). This cycle depends on an individual's subjective characteristics that support "the changing quality of a person's social identity" (Norton, 1995: 15).

Culhane presented a different theory on the causes of demotivation. He believes that learners come with formed expectations of social contact with the L2 community, which can affect their motivation. When a learner's experience matches his expectations, the learner develops positive motivation (Culhane, 2004). If a learner's experience does not match his expectations, the learner can feel isolated or frustrated (Culhane, 2004). These negative situations may act as demotives and trigger the learner's demotivation, which is usually followed by acculturation stress and language learning anxiety. Flores (2017) believes stress and negative attitude toward the L2 community are formed when learners feel the contact between them and the L2 community is beyond their coping skills.

An example is if a learner feels pressured to integrate into the host community or feels inferior to L2 speakers due to the lack of intercultural skills or negative experiences within the L2 society. Stress, anxiety, uncomfortable situations, and generally negative experiences put the

learner in limbo between two cultures and two languages. The learner has not reached the desired level of acculturation, so he does not “belong” fully to his first culture or his target culture. If the learner has not reached the desired level of language proficiency, he will be unable to completely depend on his knowledge and usage of his primary language and his target language. These situations lead to the developing of multiple language barriers for a learner in an L2 social context. In the next chapter, the most common language barriers for immigrants as L2 language learners will be named and discussed.

## **2.3 Language barriers**

Low language proficiency is often a very important issue for all immigrants trying to integrate into a new society. Misaki (2017) defines language barriers as an occurrence “when two people who speak different languages cannot understand one another, and there is a breakdown in language and communication”. It is a serious disadvantage for immigrants due to their inability to achieve their goals in the new culture effortlessly. Fadaam ([https://www.academia.edu/37905309/The\\_language\\_barrier\\_hindering\\_refugees\\_lives](https://www.academia.edu/37905309/The_language_barrier_hindering_refugees_lives))

believes that insufficient language levels may prevent immigrants from integrating into the host community, which is a cause of a lower level of acculturation among immigrants. A possible outcome is that the immigrant has more contact with his ethnic community, which uses his primary language instead of communicating with native speakers. Their ethnic community can provide them with jobs, housing, social life, and much more without learning and using L2. This scenario enables separation as an acculturation direction. Another possible outcome presented by Isphording (2015) is that immigrants who struggle with language learning do not integrate economically and socially, but their motivation steadily grows, and their language proficiency improves over time. This issue is reflected in the academic field for immigrant students as well. According to OECD<sup>4</sup> (2018) “socio-economic disadvantage and language learning” are two main issues for immigrant students which cause them to be less “academically resilient” compared to immigrant students who speak the native language (OECD, 2018: 6). Immigrants of all ages experience language barriers in different parts of their lives, e.g., their job, at the hospital, in their free time while running errands.

### **2.3.1 Age and linguistic distance related barriers**

It is believed that learners’ age is a crucial factor that determines their language learning process (Isphording, 2015: 3). The term “critical period” was introduced into SLA studies because researchers believed that there was a “period during which learners can acquire a second language easily and implicitly and achieve native-speaker competence, but after which L2 acquisition becomes more difficult and is rarely entirely successful” (Ellis, 2015: 37). Lenneberg (1967) researched language development in children. A comparison of language development and physiological development in children of similar ages led Lenneberg to the conclusion that children successfully acquire their L1 by the age of 10, whereas, in their late

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<sup>4</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

teens, language acquisition becomes very challenging (Lenneberg, 1967). This notion is also applicable to SLA. Alongside the critical period, applied linguists explored linguistic distance as another criterion influencing language learning.

Linguistic distance stands for all the differences between the two languages, including “vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.” (Isphording, 2015: 3). Isphording and Otten conducted research in 2014 which examined how linguistic distance affected language learning. The researchers concluded that the bigger the difference between the primary and secondary language, the more negative the outcome for language learning and fluency for immigrants. Isphording and Otten (2014) presented results that showed higher costs of language learning classes for participants that reported greater linguistic distance between their primary and secondary language. The results of this study supported the hypothesis that greater linguistic distance negatively affected second language learning. However, the results applied to adults only since this research study did not collect data from a younger age group.

Other studies examined critical period and linguistic distance and established a new hypothesis that younger immigrants effortlessly acquired a second language since they had not reached the critical period and they were young enough to have learning systems in place which allowed them to acquire a different language with ease regardless of the linguistic distance (Isphording, 2015). On the other hand, immigrants that were exposed to the second language after the critical period had more issues acquiring the language which was amplified with the linguistic distance that disrupted their learning process (Isphording, 2015).

On the other hand, researchers like Bialystok (1997) believed that influence from the critical period did not play a crucial role in language learning for children or adults due to the existence of linguistic structures acquired in their primary language. It could be assumed that if a learner was learning a second language, he had already acquired knowledge of his primary language. Bialystok (1997) developed a theory with two different options on how primary language knowledge influenced second language learning. The first option explained how second language learners could “extend the existing categories, widening the boundaries” so that linguistic structures and rules from the primary language generally matched and applied to the linguistic structures and rules from the second language (Bialystok, 1997: 131). If the linguistic structures and rules could not apply similarly to the second language as they did in the primary language, the learner had a second option where it was only logical to create a new category and set of rules. New linguistic structures and rules were used independently of any



previously learned primary or second language structures. This theory provided a new perspective on language acquisition and did not support the critical period theory since children and adult learners had equal opportunities to achieve second language fluency based on learned linguistic structures and rules.

For immigrant children, Bialystok (1997) believed that critical period did not pose an obstacle, but other barriers affected their acculturation and language learning. Wells (2010) believed immigrant children dealt with obstacles that might help develop negative attitudes toward the English language, for example, “limited prior educational experiences, limited parental involvement, psychological adjustments to a new culture, etc.” (in Mirici et al., 2013: 138). Immigrant children could come with a poor educational background where they did not develop language literacy in their L1, which consequently affected their acquisition of a second language. Low-quality education, followed up by a lack of materials and technology or multimedia sources were factors that might cause an immigrant child to be isolated from his peers (Wilbur, 2016: 3). Parental involvement was important for immigrant children because it offered them support and guidance to integrate into a new community. Adjusting to a completely new culture was difficult for everyone, so immigrants should have an open mind to accept and appreciate the old and the new culture.

Adult immigrants had a somewhat different position in their language proficiency struggles. A study conducted by Reyes (2015) explored the reasons why adult learners struggled while learning a second language. The research showed that adult immigrants focused on specific language skills for their practical purpose, which showed their instrumental motivation. This factor left out curiosity which was a contributing characteristic of younger learners. The lack of curiosity limited a learner’s ability to produce his own sentences and expand his vocabulary. As mentioned above, for adult learners, the critical period had already passed, which was why it could be more difficult to acquire a new language if they had not been exposed to it before. With age, other obstacles started showing, like “stagnant intelligence and memory decrease,” “reduced sensory and perceptive reaction,” and more unsuccessful attempts at improvisation and adapting to new situations (Reyes, 2015: 13). The most common obstacle for adult learners was having low energy levels and being tired which took away spare time to learn and practice (Reyes, 2015: 13).

Dustmann and Fabbri’s research study (2000) showed that, regardless of energy levels and spare time, adult immigrants participated in everyday activities. To adjust and integrate into a

new culture, immigrants formed daily routines that exposed them to the host community. Immigrants were exposed to language practice in the form of speaking the L2 without actively looking to engage in a conversation for the purpose of learning the language. Running errands and going shopping were some examples of situations where immigrants use L2 and were inevitably prompted to learn different words and phrases that would help them in their daily lives. Speaking was the most important language skill for immigrants since they used it daily. It could be developed by initiating interaction with native speakers over a longer period and in educational institutions through a language learning program, unlike reading and writing, which were more difficult to develop.

### **2.3.2 Career related language barriers**

One of the most time-consuming activities for an adult immigrant is his job. Working hours generally consume at least half of the day. A job is also necessary because it enables immigrants to sustain their lifestyle and cover their living expenses. It has been reported that immigrants generally have a higher chance of struggling to find meaningful employment. Immigrants with a basic level of second language knowledge can communicate with others when running errands and other day-to-day duties, but their language level comes in the way of finding work in their desired field due to not being able to showcase their field knowledge and correctly express their train of thoughts when in an interview (Lekic, 2016).

Another immediate barrier for immigrants is discrimination based on stereotypes concerning the language skills of non-native speakers. A study showed that applicants with names of English origin were 35% more likely to be invited to an interview than any other nationality (Lekic, 2016). Lekic (2016) found that 95 percent of employers in Ontario recognized communication skills as a serious barrier to employment aspiration, while only 27 percent of immigrants believed language skills greatly impacted their careers. These percentages showed that immigrants might not be aware of how important second language proficiency was in their professional career and might not be using official or free time opportunities to improve their language knowledge (Lekic, 2016).

Low second language proficiency creates other difficulties due to the inability to secure a high-paying job. Immigrants might believe they have no real equality compared to native speakers. Missing information and poor translation also influence their employment options

and choices (Leong and Tang, 2016). Even though there are three times more immigrants with an undergraduate degree than there are Canadian-born professionals (Lekic, 2016), immigrants still have a hard time displaying their knowledge and experience in the field because of language barriers (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2000: 25). Lekic (2016) suggested mentorship programs for immigrants trying to advance in their field of expertise. Native speakers who already work in the field could be a great language model for immigrants to learn from.

Lo (2011) stated that Canadian immigrants who used English or French at work received higher compensation than immigrants who used their primary language (English and French excluded) during working hours. Immigrants could find employment in their ethnic enclaves, which did not compromise their compensation if they used their native language at work. Portes and Schauflier (1994) conducted a study that showed how language barriers were almost completely nonexistent in the 3rd generation of an immigrant family (in Lo, 2011). The first generation of the family experienced language barriers and only a few members reached second language fluency to take care of the linguistic needs of the whole family, e.g., serving as a translator (Lo, 2011). The second generation was usually bilingual since the children used English outside the home and their primary language with their parents. The third generation, however, did not have to use the primary language as their knowledge of the English language satisfied their linguistic needs in their daily life.

### **2.3.2.1 Professional communication anxiety**

Language anxiety in the workplace is a common occurrence among immigrants. The definition of language anxiety is: “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” in a second language context (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986: 125). When immigrants start their employment in a new country, their target language level can affect how confident they feel about speaking to their coworkers or clients. The lack of linguistic familiarity and language anxiety combined lead to a language barrier for an immigrant.

Aichhorn’s study (2016) showed that immigrants with lower levels of language proficiency experienced higher language anxiety at their workplace, which consequently affected their mental and physical health. These situations prompted immigrants to find ways of dealing with them because it affected their work performance and socializing at their workplace. The

same study showed how immigrants displayed communication withdrawal and avoidance in international business communication, as well as code-switching (Aichhorn, 2016). This could be interpreted as an attempt at taking back control of the situation or excluding oneself from it. Code-switching brought back familiarity in communication, and withdrawal helped immigrants tone down the feeling of anxiety at that moment. Because of these actions, immigrants experienced less frequent and less engaging communication with their coworkers and lower performance quality (Aichhorn, 2016).

### **2.3.3 Health care related language barriers**

Healthcare is an important service for every individual to have access to. Even though studies showed that new immigrants to Canada are usually in better shape and less often visit the doctor than native Canadians, that service is not always easy to get (Ng, 2011). Language barriers are more than likely to “affect major aspects of treatments, such as patient’s record at admission, description of symptoms, description of the disease, the presentation of personal data, marital status, and discussion of diagnosis or compliance with the treatment” because English-speaking countries have a diverse population which brings in different cultures and languages with it (Ekaterina and Kamo, 2018: 1). Healthcare professionals are worried that people with poor language proficiency do not always receive medication and treatment correctly (Ekaterina and Kamo, 2018).

Healthcare professionals in Canada have started working with language interpreters at public hospitals to provide better access and service to immigrants with poor language proficiency (Ekaterina and Kamo, 2018). It is important to note that direct translation is insufficient in the health field, which is why interpreters must be familiar with the immigrant’s language and culture. Ekaterina and Kamo (2018) explained that the reason for that is that every language is a means to express reality, and different cultures perceive reality differently. It must be taken into account that some languages do not have a word for certain diseases or symptoms, or certain illnesses might be taboo topics. For example, in South Africa, the concept of cancer care does not exist (Peled, 2017).

The solution to the language barrier for health care service is usually to find a doctor that speaks the primary language of the immigrant, to bring a person to interpret for the immigrant in question (e.g., family, friends, hospital volunteers, international organizations’ employees,

etc.), to use slow speech and simple words, pictures, symbols, sign language or written materials translated into different languages (Ekaterina and Kamo, 2018).

Good health leads to a better quality of life. Easy access to health care ensures good health, economic well-being, and rich social engagement (Ng, 2011). Overcoming language barriers sets immigrants on a path of “obtaining a better-paying job, becoming self-sufficient, having access to services and culture, having a wider access to information and knowledge, developing a sense of belonging, and finding the courage to apply for citizenship” (Larotta, 2019: 55).

After explaining theories on acculturation, language learning motivation and language barriers, the next chapter will present a qualitative study on how those issues affected immigrants in Canada.

### **3. THE PRESENT STUDY**

This study aimed to analyze acculturation categories for newcomers in Canada and to investigate which language barriers newcomers faced due to their previous and current experiences. Language barriers for L2 learners constitute a new topic for researchers that still needs to be explored in more depth. The researchers that published valuable papers and research studies on acculturation, and language barriers include Berry (1987, 2017) and Gardner (1959, 1977, 2006).

This part of the thesis describes the aim, participants, instruments, procedures and study results in more detail.

#### **3.1 The research questions**

As mentioned previously, the study aimed to investigate acculturation categories the participants could be placed into and to explore which language barriers were common among newcomers to Canada. The research questions that were set for this study are:

- 1) Which acculturation categories (Berry et al., 1987) did newcomers to Canada fall into considering their use of target language and culture exposure?
- 2) Which language barriers did newcomers to Canada deal with?

### 3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were newcomers to Canada. They all learned English as a second language in their native countries. A total of 13 newcomers, consisting of 10 female and three male participants, agreed to answer interview questions regarding the researched topic voluntarily.

Participants were chosen based on how long they have been living in Canada (from 2 to 5 years). Another criterion was that their first language was not English. According to the official website of Statistics Canada,<sup>5</sup> the widely accepted definition of newcomers (recent immigrants) is “landed immigrant who came to Canada up to five years prior to a given census year”. There are four types of immigrants listed on Statistics Canada’s official website<sup>6</sup>. The first type includes economic immigrants, that is, all immigrants coming to contribute to Canada’s economy. Out of 13 participants, nine newcomers can be categorized as economic immigrants. The next category is for all immigrants sponsored by family. The main caregivers/parents were the ones who decided to immigrate to Canada, and their children immigrated with them. Two participants fit in this category. The third category of immigrant classification in Canada concerns refugees. None of the participants of the study fit in this category. The last category acknowledges all other types of immigrants. Two participants belong to this category based on their study visa and the educational purposes of their stay in Canada.

The chosen participants are considered a non-probability sample (subcategory: purposive sample). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2005), the non-probability sample is optimal for researchers that do not intend to generalize their findings but focus only on a specific group of people with specific characteristics.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/note-eng.cfm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=323293&CVD=323294&CLV=0&MLV=4&D=1>

### 3.3 Instruments and procedures

The qualitative research method, i.e., an interview, was chosen as the method for collecting data. It consisted of four parts (Appendix 1). The interview questions used as a research instrument in this study were developed based on a dissertation written by C. Phan (2009)<sup>7</sup> and a thesis written by K. Bryzh (2019)<sup>8</sup>. The first set of questions included six demographic questions about participants' backgrounds and general information. The second set of eight questions focused on acculturation categories, while the third set of eleven questions looked for answers on language usage and issues. The last set of 5 questions investigated the influence of language barriers on cultural integration.

The interviews were conducted over two months (November and December) in 2020. The author used different social media platforms to find participants who fit the criteria and were willing to answer questions about their experiences. There were thirteen participants with a matching profile. The author organized a video/audio call to conduct the interview with these participants. The author asked previously prepared questions while trying not to be biased or suggest answers to participants. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour. It was explained to participants that this was a research study on language barriers for newcomers in Canada, that their identity would be protected and that all their answers would be used only for research purposes. All participants were aware of the fact that the interviews were recorded. Nine participants were interviewed in English, one was interviewed in Croatian, and three combined English and Croatian while answering the questions. All interviews were transcribed. No specific transcription conventions were used. The author opted for a simple qualitative analysis method as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), where the author presents interview data question by question. The author analyzed the findings from the interviews by grouping the questions into four groups (demographic, integration on arrival, language barriers and integration after settling questions). The most frequent responses for each group of questions were mentioned first, followed by less frequent responses. Where necessary, participants' responses were quoted verbatim. The author followed Cohen et al.'s (2007) recommendation that "a brief summary comment is provided after each table." (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 462). Participant's private

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<sup>7</sup> Phuoc-Lanh Phan, Christian. (2009). *Recognizing effects of comprehension language barriers and adaptability cultural barriers on selected first-generation undergraduate Vietnamese students*. Faculty of Seattle.

<sup>8</sup> Brzyh, Kateryna. (2019). *English proficiency and adaptation issues among Ukrainian immigrant children and youth in Saskatchewan*. University of Saskatchewan.



information were used; hence the author presented participants' responses using abbreviations P1, P2, P3 etc. (P stands for participant).

**3.4 Results and discussion**

**3.4.1 Demographic questions**

The first part of the interview gathered data on participants’ background. The information was presented numerically and visually to show the characteristics of the participating group.

Out of 13 participants in this study, 10 were female and 3 were male, meaning that the majority of participants was female based on gender as a demographic segment. For age, there were no specific categories listed so it will be set in categories based on a 10-year period, for example, 20-29 years old, 30-39 and 40 or more. According to this division, the number of participants belonging to the first group of 20- to 29-year-old was 8. There were 3 participants in the 30- to 39-year-old group and 2 participants in the 40 or more-year-old group.

The next two questions relate to participants’ origin and time of arrival. The research required participants to be newcomers, i.e., people who immigrated to Canada not less than 2 years ago and not more than 5 years ago while also making sure that their mother tongue was not English language. Immigrants who are still in transition from their previous culture to the Canadian culture have recent experiences which were valuable for this research topic. The participants were asked which year they arrived into Canada. Three participants arrived in 2015, five participants arrived in 2016, two participants arrived in 2017 and three participants arrived in 2018 to Canada (Figure 1). Considering that the interview was conducted in 2020, that confirms that all participants have lived in Canada for at least two years at the time of data collection.

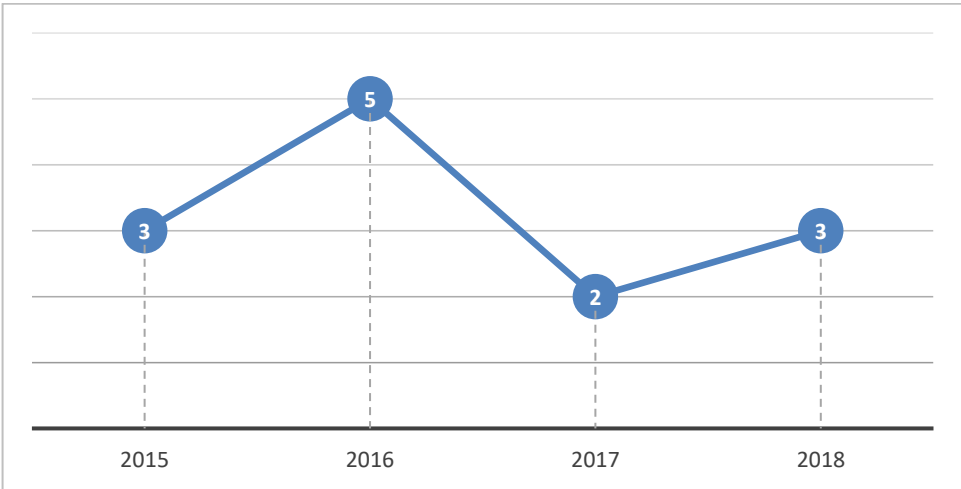


Figure 1 Segmentation of participants by the year of arrival into Canada

Concerning participants' background, they were asked which country they were from. Eight participants stated that their primary citizenship was Croatian, two participants were Lebanese, one was Moroccan, one participant was from Afghanistan and one from Hong Kong.

These countries have official language different from English (Croatian, Lebanese, Arabic/French, Persian/Farsi and Cantonese). Immigrants coming to Canada differ when it comes to their previous second language (e.g., English) knowledge. As mentioned in subchapter 2.3.1., Isphording and Otten (2014) stated that linguistic distance was an important variable when learning a new language. Linguistic distance was taken into consideration when determining acculturation categories for each participant later in the data analysis. Depending on participants' second language exposure during their childhood and teenage years by means of TV shows, social media, an extended immigrant family that lives in an English-speaking country, second language classes at school or any other source of second language exposure, immigrants can create a basis for their future level of second language knowledge and different level of acculturation.

The last two demographic questions concerned participants' education level and work experience. Their educational level was believed to make a difference when it comes to their language barrier issues in Canada. Abdilah (2012) mentioned illiteracy as a demotive for second language learning (see chapter 2.2). There is a small chance a language learner with a high level of education will be illiterate in his primary language. Their education level could be connected to their job interview success and career advancement. Participants were asked what their level of education was, choosing from high school, bachelor's degree or master's degree. There were two participants with a high school diploma, seven participants with a bachelor's degree and four participants with a master's degree (Figure 2).

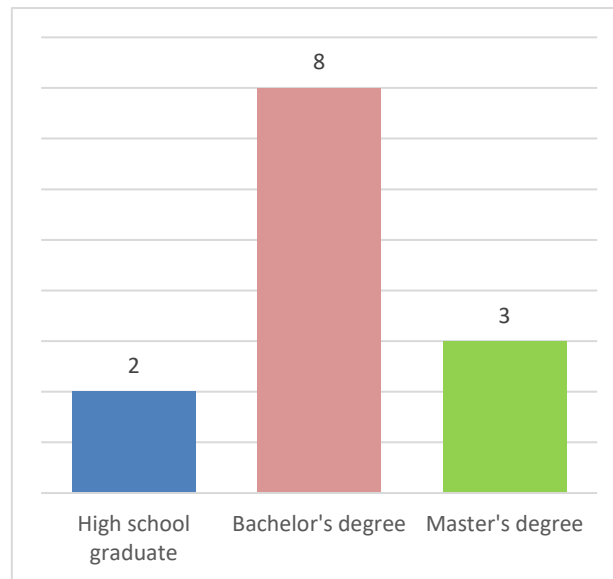


Figure 2 *Segmentation of participants by level of education*

The field of expertise for participants with higher education was diverse. It ranged from computer science and education to law, political science and public relations and media.

Participants were also asked about their work experience before and after immigrating to Canada to determine if they kept pursuing a career in their field of expertise or if they changed their working preferences. About half of the participants worked at student job positions before immigrating to Canada, more specifically seven participants. Two participants worked as construction workers in their home country and four participants worked as computer science teacher, administrative professional and Oracle consultant respectively.

Since most participants were students before moving to Canada, their career choices after arriving could be connected to their education level and field of expertise as an academic individual more than their work experience prior to immigrating. Immigrants can pursue the same field of expertise which they were a part of in their home country as well. If they choose to change their career in a new country, that adds an additional category they must adjust to and learn. When the work positions are compared to participants' academic fields of expertise, there is a divided result since some participants stayed within their academic background and some drifted away from it.

Two participants with a high school diploma (P12 and P13) opted for a job position of a swimming pool renovator (construction worker previously) and a waitress (short student jobs previously). It looked more diverse for participants with a bachelor's degree. There were participants who changed their field of work: for example, participant P1 worked as a

construction worker with a bachelor's degree and now owns a restaurant. Participant P2 worked as a waitress in Canada after acquiring political science, sociology, and finance diploma and P11 worked as an office administrator assistant with the same degree as P2. Participants P3 and P4 had acquired their bachelor's degree but were unemployed at the time of the interview. Participants P5 and P6 had generally stayed within their field of expertise by working at job positions within the government and in HR department of a company. Participants with master's degree were just as diverse as participants with bachelor's degree. Participants P7 and P8 worked in a customer service sector and administrative sector after acquiring diploma in law and education. Participants P9 and P10 obtained a master's degree in law and business administration and worked as a paralegal and business systems analyst respectively.

To sum up, participants P1, P2, P7, P8, P11, P12 and P13 changed their career field while P5, P6, P9 and P10 stayed within their career field. P3 and P4 were unemployed at the time of the interview. The aim of the collected information was to check if acculturation issues and language barrier problems were connected to the change of field of work/expertise for 8 out of 13 participants and to discover if the rest of the participants thought their language proficiency helped them to keep working in the same field of work or find work in their desired field.

### 3.4.2. Integration questions

The next part of the interview consisted of a set of questions that asked for participants' motivation and different acculturation experiences. The first question for this section aimed to determine the motivation for participants' decision to move to Canada. As already mentioned in subchapter 3.2., there are 4 main types of immigrants<sup>9</sup>; economic immigrants, immigrants sponsored by family, refugees and academic immigrants. The participants belong to a specific type based on the reason for their immigration to Canada.

There were nine participants who said that they were economic immigrants. Their motivation to move to Canada was primarily to find "better work opportunities" (P10, P8, P7) and to "improve their living standard" (P11, P12, P13, P1). The next category was "parent's choice" as participants were not of age at the time of moving to Canada. Participants P6 and P3 were both 17 at that time and followed the parents with this decision.

There were two more participants who each had their own category considering the reason they moved to Canada. Participant P2 moved to Canada for academic reasons. P2 acquired a study visa for the duration of her education journey in Canada. P9, however, did not have a specific reason for her decision. Her primary motivation for this decision was a change of lifestyle and "to try something new".

After the logistical part of moving to a new country, newcomers usually find themselves in a new and somewhat unfamiliar culture and way of living. It is up to them to decide if they want to fully or partially assimilate or not at all. The next question asked the participants for their first impression and biggest challenges of the Canadian culture. Participants P8, P5, P13, P7 and P2 named cultural shock as the primary concern. P8 stated that "everything is new and you need to learn a lot of new things" and things like "bank accounts, health care, jobs, transportation" are different than what she was used to. The biggest problem for P5 was finding friends: "It wasn't about my English proficiency but about their ways of socializing which are so different than ours. They don't prioritize hanging out with friends as much as they do work." Brown (1980) and Schumann (1986) named culture shock as a normal occurrence when people migrate to a new country (see subchapter 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). They described it as a feeling of being overwhelmed and a high level of anxiety/stress because of this change.

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<sup>9</sup><https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=323293&CVD=323294&CLV=0&MLV=4&D=1>

The differences between cultures could lead to immigrants feeling as if they have a “dual identity”, i.e., how they behave when within their original culture and the Canadian culture. P6 mentioned that “it was hard integrating because I was always not completely Canadian and not completely Lebanese. I was always in between with no certain identity”. P3 agreed with this thought, saying how he had a hard time “knowing what resources/opportunities I have available to me” which in turn created a palpable division for P3 and native Canadians of his age.

Another issue participants faced when they immigrated to Canada was using English as a second language. P1, P8, P12, P13 and P11 had similar thoughts on using English in Canada. P8 experienced difficulties when using English language when she “constantly talks and listens, it was challenging, the brain constantly translates to Croatian”. P13 thought she had good conversational English, but her issue was more about different intentions in language utterances:

“Everyone always greets you with ‘Hey. How are you?’. It’s more of a rhetorical question and you just respond with ‘Good. How are you?’. It’s just about being polite and having basic manners like holding the doors for you etc. It was funny to me at first because I was just asking myself why everyone wants to know how I am, until I realized it’s just how they greet themselves. That is something we don’t have in Croatia.” – P13

Another issue that participants thought was a considerable obstacle is the role of the English language in job interviews and general work environment. P9 and P12 believed it was hard to “find a first job without Canadian experience” and “professional English knowledge, e.g., the name for a tool, how everything works”.

These personal experiences can be a point which makes or breaks participants’ impression of their experience of Canadian culture. Their acculturation process can continue in different ways depending on how they choose to approach the new rules and culture or if they feel more comfortable participating in their primary culture. As discussed in the theoretical part, Berry et al. (1987) distinguished between 4 acculturation categories: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. One of the two main criteria for deciding which category of this process an immigrant belongs to is the amount of exposure an immigrant has to his primary and the new culture. The next two questions in the interview asked about the aspects

of the old culture the participants kept practicing and if they joined their ethnic community in Canada to better understand idea on how the participants' acculturation process developed.

One of the most frequent customs participants said to have kept practicing from their primary culture was food. Twelve out of thirteen participants mentioned food and culinary traditions as a habit they kept practicing after moving to Canada. The next most mentioned answer was holidays and/or culture. Six out of thirteen participants mentioned celebrating major holidays from their primary culture which are usually connected to religion, e.g., Christmas. As an additional part of their cultures, some participants named forming friendships with people in Canada that speak their language. Three participants listed using their primary language as a means of keeping practicing their culture.

Three participants (P1, P4 and P9) said they had officially joined their ethnic communities and were active members in them. Six participants (P8, P12, P5, P13, P2, P11) stated they had never attempted to find or join their ethnic community. Schumann (1986) claimed immigrants who spent more time conversing with L2 speakers rather than L1 speakers showed a lower level of social distance and hence acquired a second language more successfully (see subchapter 2.1.2).

It is important to note that P12 stated that he did not practice any form of his old culture, including joining his ethnic community. This would be an example of separation as an acculturation process. P12's opinion is that he doesn't "try to push my culture in somebody else's country". P6 and P7 had not officially joined their ethnic community, but they had a couple of friends who spoke the same primary language as them. Two participants (P3 and P10) participated only temporarily in their ethnic community. The reason for leaving their communities was different with these two participants. P3 moved to a different location and was physically too far away to be able to actively participate. P10 joined her ethnic community to help with her nostalgia but she realized "the community was too politically charged" which she did not prefer and consequently left the group.

We can assume that these newcomers, having considered moving to a new country, had certain expectations about whether that decision would impact their lives in a way that was important to them. These expectations could have influenced their motivation for this move. The participants were asked to explain their expectations prior to moving to Canada and if those expectations were met. About half of the participants (P6, P1, P9, P8, P5, P13, P7 and P10) named economic reasons like career advancement and financial goals as their expectations



after coming to Canada. P13 stated that she moved to Canada to improve her life standard by advancing her career, which would bring her higher financial income. Her expectations at the beginning of her journey in Canada as a newcomer were:

“I was scared that I would not be able to find a job because my English wasn’t that good. My vocabulary wasn’t that good since I was only working with kids at that time. That’s why I wanted to find another type of a job so I expected it would be harder since I didn’t have much experience and my language skills were not that good.” - P13

She thought her language skills would be an obstacle to her goals in Canada, but later on, she reported, her language skills improved. On the other hand, P5’s goal was career advancement, but she did not stress herself a lot about it: “I expected to work much longer on a low paid, irrelevant jobs before actually finding a job in my field. Luckily, my career advanced quickly after I immigrated here.”

All participants reported their economic expectations had been met. Further on, the rest of the expectations listed by participants of this research were their social life to be active and interesting, their academic goals, citizenship/visa approval and safety/freedom.

P9 and P5 named socializing as one of their primary expectations in Canada. For P9, those expectations were met and it helped her to integrate more easily into the society, but for P5, they have not. P5 was used to a different lifestyle in her primary culture: “When it comes to day-to-day life, my expectations were not met. The focus is on work and career more than on enjoying life and having fun which is what I was used to.” P2 and P4’s expectation was to get international school exposure which was successfully achieved. P12 was generally dissatisfied with his life and opportunities in his primary country, which motivated him to acquire permanent residence in Canada to improve his life standard. P1 and P6 fled from their country where they did not feel safe to continue living because of the political situation. P3 and P11 did not have any specific expectations which they wanted to actively work on. P3 stated how his expectations were to “be rich and live in a big house”. These expectations were not achieved at the time of the interview. However, he was indifferent whether he achieved them or not.

The questions answered so far were meant to help the author determine to what extent the participants had integrated into the Canadian culture. The participants could be sorted into acculturation categories in the order presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Participants by acculturation category*

<b>Acculturation category</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Integration	P6, P9, P8, P5, P3, P13, P7, P2, P10, P11, P4
Assimilation	P12
Separation	P1
Marginalization	-

The categorization of participants according to acculturation categories was based solely on the criteria Berry et al. (1987) mentioned as the most important besides second language acquisition, which would be how the participants felt about their primary culture and the Canadian culture and how actively they participated in each of them.

P1 had probably experienced a greater linguistic distance because Arabic was his L1 (Arabic has a different alphabet than English). Another valid reason why P1 could not integrate was that he was 47 at the time of immigration. Both reasons partially influenced the level of social distance. P1 showed a stronger need for social support from his ethnic enclave (see Flores, 2017 in subchapter 2.1). This meant that ‘separation’ was his acculturation category. However, P2, P3, P4 and P6 experienced the same level of linguistic distance since P2 and P6 had Arabic as their primary language, P3 had Russian as his primary language and P4 had Cantonese as her primary language. Their acculturation category was ‘integration’ since they had a healthy balance between their primary and second culture, according to their interviews.

P12 finished high school as his last level of education and his acculturation category was ‘assimilation’. However, the other participant, P13, that had finished high school was in an acculturation category of ‘integration’. Hence, education level could influence acculturation if combined with others variables, but by itself it did not make a difference in this research.

The rest of the interview was based on language aspect of newcomers’ experience. Before moving onto a more language specific part, the author wanted to discuss participants’ general experiences regarding language struggles they had, the frequency of L1 and L2 usage in their daily lives and to analyze what motivated them to achieve L2 fluency and integrate successfully into the Canadian culture.

What participants reported as appearing most often as a language issue was switching between two languages, especially if the participants used their L1 at home and L2 everywhere else. P6, P1, P5, P3 and P7 reported having troubles using more than one language at once. All

participants also reported using code-switching in their normal day, meaning that they would use English and their primary language multiple times throughout the day. P5 mentioned situations when she would momentarily forget words and would have to use alternatives: “I would sometimes forget words in Croatian, and I end up using an English word as an equivalent to what I’m trying to say.” Another participant reported a case where she would alternate between three languages: “I live in the province of Quebec which is mainly a French province, but Ontario is close enough so I also speak English. When I talk to my parents, I tend to mix the 3 languages together like Lebanese (Arabic), English and French all at once” (P6). This consequently had an impact on her grammar and sentence structures as they are formed differently in each language.

Other participants reported having vocabulary problems:

“I had a bad experience with a customer on my first day of work, she asked me in which row was Mash. I never heard that word before, I asked her to explain the use of that product and then I will know in what direction to send her. She attacked me, yelling that we have 500 mashes in the store, and I don’t know where they are. I asked my colleague for help and found out that mash is a net for bugs. I learned a lot of street language at the beginning as well.” – P8

Situations like these can affect participants’ motivation in a positive or negative manner when it comes to integrating and learning English as an L2. An experience where a participant reported having a stressful situation that motivated her to learn to speak English better happened to P2: “The first struggle was in the airport where I didn’t understand what the customs officer was saying and they were getting frustrated, and I was getting more nervous which made me look sketchy. I had to adapt fast.”

The rest of the participants (P9, P4, P5, P3, P13, P10, P11) reported having minor insignificant language issues like pronunciation and word order. The most common idea they all had to deal with those issues was to keep practicing whenever possible. All participants kept using their primary language either at home or when calling their family in their primary country, alongside English at work or when socializing in Canada.

Participants also shared their personal take on the motivation they had for achieving English fluency and integration into the new culture. Eight participants stated that they strived for better English language knowledge so they could find better jobs or advance in their career: “If

you want to move forward in your career you must speak English at a professional level. Also, to sound more like a Canadian you need to remember a lot of different phrases and use them more often in conversation” (P9). Gardner and Lambert (1959) and Culhane (2004) recognized this as instrumental motivation (see subchapter 2.2).

Five participants stated that they wanted to improve their English to perform better socially. In situations where P3 struggled to communicate with his peers, he felt uncomfortable:

“I wasn’t able to communicate which was a motivator in itself. Also, I didn’t like being taken away from my main class to go to ESL. Even though the games we played there were fun, I didn’t like that I was the only student being separated from the rest of the class. So, I only used English to speak and write and slowly forgot the other languages that I knew (Uzbek and Russian).”

He reported improvements over time which made his motivation change to a more personal one. Gardner and Lambert (1959) and Culhane (2004) described this as integrative motivation which, in their opinion, boosts learners’ chances for success in language learning and consequently acculturation (see subchapter 2.2). P3 wants “to be able to communicate and express myself clearly, powerfully, and eloquently without pauses or forgetting words and searching for the certain word I want to use”. Showing that he was struggling with the language others are fluent in gave him lower confidence in social situations. Other participants thought that English fluency would help with being resourceful in the community (P13), or to show respect towards the new culture (P10) or to avoid misunderstandings (P11).

### 3.4.3. Language barriers questions

For this set of questions, the author aimed to determine which problems were the most frequent in second language acquisition amongst Canadian newcomers. The first question checked participants' subjective estimation of their English language knowledge at the time of the immigration process. The participants placed their English knowledge on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 signified a low knowledge level and 5 signified a high knowledge level. The results are shown in Figure 3.

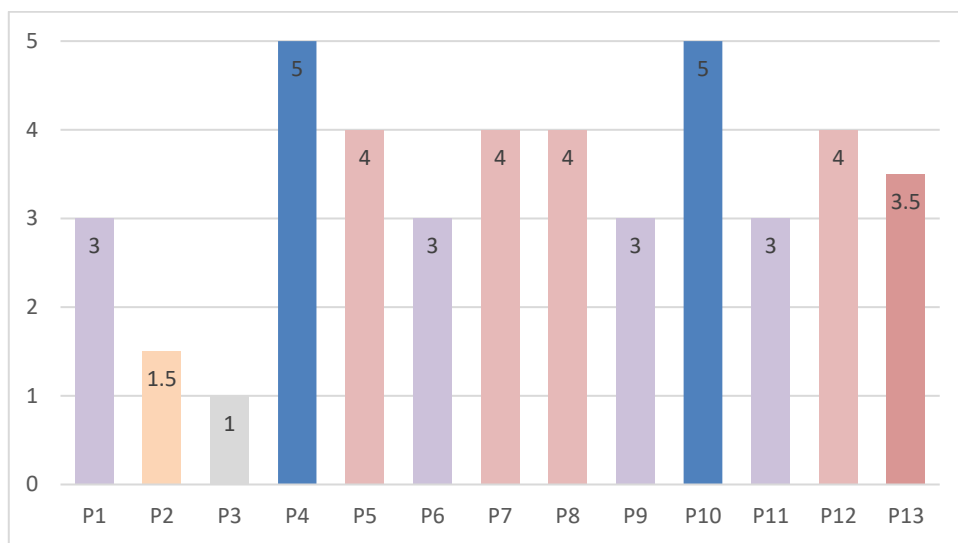


Figure 3 *English knowledge self-assessment*

Most common answers were 3 and 4 with four answers each, while two participants answered 5. One participant described their English knowledge as low (1). Other participants ranked their knowledge with answers such as 1.5 and 3.5 on the scale. It can be concluded that the majority placed their English language knowledge in the middle of the scale or just above the middle. This shows that participants were mainly prepared to use English at a basic moderate level with space for improvement. The improvement could be facilitated in many ways, one of which was English language courses.

The next question for participants gathered information on whether or not the participants took an English language course after immigrating. In case of a positive answer, participants were asked to state their level of satisfaction with the course and to confirm if the course was provided by the government or a private organization. Nine participants stated that they had

not taken official English language courses after immigrating to Canada, but rather used different unofficial ways to improve their English language knowledge:

“The best way to improve language for me was to speak more often. I did not attend any language courses outside English language as a foreign language in school in Croatia. In my opinion that does not prepare us enough. Our education is good to give you foundations, but you need the actual communication to get the fluency in speaking.” - P9

P8 tried to improve her English by “reading books in English and talking as much as I can”. P1 conversed with friends in English and read books as well. P4 did not have a need to take any courses since she went to an international school. The rest of the participants were required to take ESL classes since they enrolled in Canada’s education system. P6 and P3 had classes were integrated into their everyday schedule: “I was in ESL for only 2 years. After that, I was at the same level of proficiency as everyone else, but this is due to my own drive and commitment and less because of the ESL classes” (P3). In addition, P3 thought there were more factors that played a role in his English language improvement. P13 had a similar opinion when it came to her English language knowledge during an ESL course.

“Those classes were mostly organized for extreme beginners. Since it was a public, government prescribed requirement for all newcomers, it was expected for everyone to have a lower level of English language knowledge. In every class a different amount of people would be attending. Usually, there would be 15-20 people in a class. We would learn through interactive games, songs and with different materials. In class we would actively talk to each other to practice our spoken English and we would also have homework where we would practice our written English.”

P1 and P3 took ESL classes in high school as immigrants so they could adjust to the new academic system and learn English which was necessary for them to finish their education. P13 took ESL as a visa requirement even though she rated her English level at 3.5 and thought she did not need it. However, P2 was also required to take “two courses for my program at the University. It was just basic language learning where they would give us assignments and we would have to work with our partners and practice conversation”. P2 thought it was beneficial for her and set good foundation for her future English language studies.

Even with ESL courses, participants could not say their English was at a native speaker level. Language barriers can be expected to happen in everyday conversations. The author wanted to determine which language category was more problematic for the participants and why. The next five questions determined what kind of language barriers participants experienced and how they dealt with them.

In the next question, participants were asked to identify which language skill, i.e., listening, speaking, reading or writing, was the most problematic for them.

Ten out of 13 participants stated that writing was the most difficult. This was followed by speaking with 7 out of 13 participants claiming that it was the most difficult skill for them. It is not surprising that these skills were ranked highest since they concern language production. As P3 states, creating utterances is the most challenging: “I could understand what people were saying but couldn’t respond clearly or form sentences without pausing first. I needed time to learn how to transfer my thoughts to English.” Other issues are linked with grammar and spelling: “Most common spelling issues I have are double letters in words because I never know if it’s a single or a double letter, as well as articles a, an and the-” - P13

None of the participants identified reading as the most difficult language skill. Furthermore, only 2 participants (P9 and P10) pointed out listening as the most difficult skill due to different accents.

The following question focused on the type of alphabet participants used in their first language and which issues they faced when learning to write in English. Participants were asked what kind of alphabet they used in their first language and what issues they faced while learning how to write English. Majority used the Latin alphabet which is the same alphabet used in the English language. However, 4 participants used different alphabets such as the Arabic alphabet (P1 and P6), Russian (P3) and Chinese (P4) which are vastly different, hence these participants struggled most with the alphabet and writing in general. P1 solved this issue by reading texts in English which improved his spelling.

On the other hand, P3 stopped using his mother tongue completely since it was interfering with his language learning: “This made learning English a little harder as I would confuse them for the Russian sounds. I stopped speaking and practicing Russian all together to solve the problem. Looking back, that wasn’t the right approach, but I had a strong desire to learn English as fast as possible.”

In the following question participants were asked about problems with speaking skill, namely if they were confident enough to speak English with native speakers. The question “Which problems did you encounter while speaking English language after immigrating to Canada?” was followed up by sub-questions like “Were you confident enough to speak English with native speakers at first? How did you solve problems with speaking?”

Eight out of 13 participants had no problems with speaking English to native speakers as they saw it as an only way to improve their skill: “I knew I sounded horrible, but I just had to, I stopped feeling shy about it pretty fast because there is no other way to learn.” (P2) The rest of participants stated they were shy at the beginning but with practice they built their confidence:

“At the beginning I was too shy to speak English because I thought people would think ‘What is this one doing here?’. I realized they are so used to having immigrants here that it was normal for them to hear different accents and broken English on a daily basis. They would also be amazed that I speak two languages since most of them speak only English.” - P13

However, the problems participants had with speaking was not being able to use the right words and inability to follow conversations if the speaker talked fast. The first was solved by using hand gestures and the other through practice.

For the question “Did you have any problems with listening and reading in English?”, 9 out of 13 participants provided a negative answer. The problems with reading were minimal and easily solved: “I only had smaller issues with listening and reading. My pronunciation was off when I was reading. But when I was listening it was easy to understand, and the words I didn’t know I either asked for their meaning or I got the meaning from the context” (P6). For listening, the problem of accents was again pointed out.

Participants were asked if they had any problems with grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, followed by additional questions: “How did you cope with situations when a native speaker mentioned an unfamiliar word?”, “How did you acquire new words?”. Eight out of 13 said yes, while five said no to the main question. However, one of these five claimed he/she had minor problems with grammar. The majority had problems with grammar rather than vocabulary and pronunciation: “Grammar is hard for me because I never know which tense is correct to use. When I was in a situation when I didn’t understand a word, I asked



them to say it again and explain it in a different way or even write it down because I might recognize the word without them pronouncing it” (P12). Only one participant (P3) indicated that vocabulary was the most problematic. Participants were also asked how they coped with situations when a native speaker would mention an unfamiliar word and the results showed that they would simply ask for further explanation.

In the next question participants needed to identify what was most helpful for the development of their language proficiency. The results are shown in Table 2. The answers were grouped in 4 categories: free time activities, exposure in childhood, ESL classes and work environment. For each category there is also a participant’s answer which serves as a description of the category.

Table 2 *Beneficial activities/sources for language development*

	Participant	Explanation
Free time activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P1</li> <li>• P2</li> <li>• P3</li> <li>• P5</li> <li>• P8</li> <li>• P9</li> <li>• P11</li> <li>• P12</li> <li>• P13</li> </ul>	<p>P1: “Movies, friends, and books. I like to read biography books, newspaper and magazines. I also listen to radio every day. My English-speaking friends from work help me practice”</p> <p>P2: “Movies, books, media, conversations with native speakers and music.”</p> <p>P5: “I read books in English, I watch movies with English subtitles, I use English at work a lot so that helps me practice as well.”</p>
Exposure in childhood	P4	P4: “My childhood mostly. Extra classes I took and my nanny. It gave me a sense of being in an English-speaking environment without having to be in it.”
ESL classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P6</li> <li>• P7</li> <li>• P11</li> </ul>	P7: “Attending school, where I needed to communicate in English every day (almost the whole day, approximately at least 80% of my time).”
Work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P1</li> <li>• P9</li> <li>• P10</li> <li>• P11</li> <li>• P13</li> </ul>	P10: “It was the work environment for me since that was a place where I had to speak English the most at the beginning.”

P4 reported having a high level of fluency in English at the time of coming to Canada due to her second language exposure as a child. This experience could be explained by Lenneberg’s (1967) theory that children have a critical period when they acquire a second language with more ease than adult learners (see subchapter 2.3.1). Free-time activities and direct exposure for children showed to be very beneficial for the second language fluency.

It can be concluded that most participants found free time activities beneficial for their language development. These activities include socializing, reading books or watching movies. Second most common answer was work environment which also implies socializing but in a formal environment. Some participants claimed that ESL classes have also helped since they had to use English on a daily basis. One participant had exposure to language in childhood which was most helpful to their language development.

The following question focused on how participants felt because of their language difficulties. Answers were sorted in 3 categories – positive, neutral, and negative. For each category participants’ quotes were selected to provide a description. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 *Participants’ perception of their language difficulties*

	Participant	Explanation
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P4</li> <li>• P5</li> <li>• P10</li> <li>• P11</li> </ul>	<p>P4: “I don’t think I have a lot of language difficulties. My English is on a high level which gives me more than enough confidence to use it daily.”</p> <p>P5: “Honestly, I feel really good about my English proficiency. When I would talk to people, they would always assume that I lived in Canada for 10 years or so because of how good my English was when speaking to them.”</p> <p>P11: “Accepted, the community is friendly towards newcomers.”</p>
Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P1</li> <li>• P8</li> <li>• P9</li> <li>• P12</li> <li>• P13</li> </ul>	<p>P1: “I feel not that confident at times but I’ve gotten better after some time.”</p> <p>P8: “I would like to improve my English so that I have a minimal accent, but I never felt unwelcomed or excluded because of my accent.”</p>
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P2</li> <li>• P3</li> <li>• P6</li> </ul>	<p>P3: “I just wanted to feel normal and to belong somewhere.”</p> <p>P6: “I feel that language difficulties prevent me from integration</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>P7</li> </ul>	<p>into a society because I feel there is some kind of a wall between me and the new culture if I don't know the language. It made me feel excluded at the beginning and like I couldn't fit in the society I was living in."</p>
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The table shows that results vary. Most participants were neutral towards language difficulties. Equal number of participants had either a positive or a negative answer. It can only be concluded that these differences were a result of individual experiences.

Participants were then asked what had the biggest impact on their improvement in English language proficiency. The majority stated that career had the most impact on their language improvement since it led to more work opportunities: "I wanted to fit in more and have more success in school and at work, and having better English was the key to it" (P7). Secondly, socialization also played a huge role because it implied active usage of language. Other reasons included intrinsic motivation, exposure in childhood as well as education.

The last question in this segment was "If you could wish for anything concerning your language barrier issues, what would it be?".

The most common answer was regarding language fluency and better vocabulary for 5 participants. Two participants wanted better English language knowledge background and three participants wanted to improve writing and have someone correcting their mistakes. One participant wanted to improve his accent and two participants did not have any specific wishes concerning their language issues.

Most common language barrier with regard to language skill was writing (4), and it was closely followed by vocabulary (3) and speaking (3). The least mentioned language barriers are pronunciation (2) and better education (2).

#### **3.4.4. Cultural integration questions**

This segment included questions which focused on cultural integration. The aim was to determine how Canadian newcomers adjusted to Canadian culture.

The first question examined how difficult it was for participants to communicate in everyday life. Only one participant claimed that the transition to Canada was difficult: “It was very tough. Luckily, the government of Canada has a lot of programs and services to help newcomers which made the process so much easier” (P1). Participants were also asked how they managed to complete different types of paperwork (paying bills, getting a driver’s license, signing a rental lease with a homeowner, getting a credit card etc.).

The majority answered that they found the necessary information through research:

“I used internet and Google Maps to find places where I needed to go. I went to the bank to get information about credit cards. I used groups on Facebook to gather information about translating Croatian driver’s license and went to registry to confirm what I need. About most things I was informed before I came here.” - P8

Some participants also pointed out that the legal information in general was very easily accessible. Furthermore, they had positive experiences with people offering those services: “All information I needed was easy to find online and people working there were helpful and understanding. They would explain everything to me in the simplest way possible” (P6).

The next question was “Did you need someone to interpret for you?” The participants were asked to answer “yes” or “no” and to provide an explanation to their answer.

11 participants claimed that they did not use translation services, while two of them did. One of the participants (P1) used translation services for 3 years. The participants that did not use translation services provided explanations such as: “No. My English was good enough to find my way around. Even when I didn’t know what to do or where to go, I always knew how to ask for help” (P13).

Participants were then asked where and how easy it was for them to form relationships with native speakers.

The results showed that social environment (6) and work (6) were mentioned equally by participants when asked about forming relationships with native speakers. Other answers included school (4) and cultural gatherings (1).

In the following question participants were asked if there was an occasion when someone stopped or refused to talk to them based on their non-native language level. None of the participants had ever faced discrimination based on their English language level.

Next question was “Did your previous education help with settling and finding a job in your field of expertise?” Six participants claimed that their previous education did not help with finding a job in their field of expertise: “When I was looking for a job nobody looked at my experience from Croatia. It was like starting from the beginning, no education, no experience” (P8). However, three of them pointed out that, unlike education, previous work experience had a positive impact. Four out of 13 participants stated that previous education helped them with finding a job. Although it is important to note that one of them completed their education in Canada. The remaining participants did not have work experience.

Participants were then asked about their work experience in Canada, specifically if they had worked in hospitality services, retail shops or any other job including customer service. The results are shown in Figure 5.

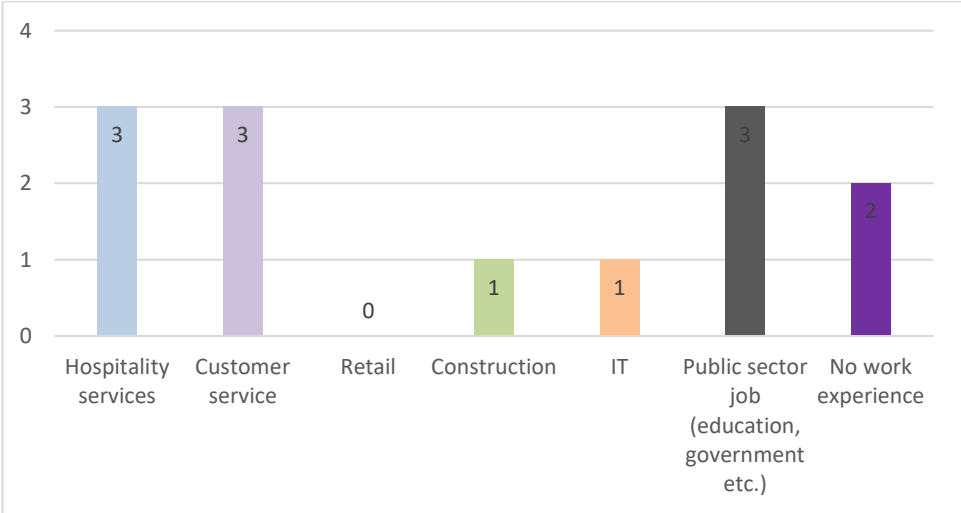


Figure 4 Participants’ work experience according to specific job categories

As shown in the figure, 6 participants worked in the selected job categories – 3 in hospitality services and 3 in customer service. However, 5 participants have worked in other fields, such as construction, IT and public sector. It is also important to note that 2 participants have no work experience. Furthermore, no participants worked in retail.

The last question in this segment asked whether participants looked for a doctor who spoke their mother tongue. Ten participants did not have a doctor who spoke their mother tongue. On the other hand, three participants found a doctor who spoke their mother tongue.

Considering participants' answers in the interview, it could be concluded that almost everyone adjusted positively to the Canadian culture. Most of the participants' answers (11 out of 13) showed a healthy balance between their primary culture and the Canadian culture which leads us to assume their acculturation category is integration.

Participants reported difficulties with writing as the most common language barrier. Other language barriers that were reported concerned vocabulary knowledge, speaking, pronunciation, and grammar knowledge. Regardless of the language issues, the overall impression was that participants managed to integrate into the culture and become a part of Canadian society.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study aimed to answer two research questions. Those questions concerned the influence target language and target culture exposure had on acculturation categories (Berry et al., 1987) for Canadian newcomers and the issue of language barriers during the newcomer immigration period.

According to Berry (1987), there are four acculturation categories. If the immigrant decides to participate in his first and second culture, that would be an example of an ‘integration’ acculturation category. On the other hand, if an immigrant chooses to leave his first culture and not join his second culture, his acculturation type would be ‘marginalization’. The immigrant chooses one culture over the other in the final two acculturation categories. For ‘assimilation’, the immigrant chooses his target culture, and for ‘separation’, the immigrant chooses to participate only in his primary culture.

When immigrants spend much time in either culture, they must speak the appropriate language. Immigrants deciding to participate in the target culture may encounter more language barriers than immigrants who stay within their primary culture (ethnic enclave) since they must use a second language to communicate their thoughts and needs. The author of this thesis gathered immigrants’ experiences on joining the target culture in Canada to analyze their acculturation journey and thoughts on their second language learning process and to investigate which language barriers they came across.

The results showed that most participants had been participating as active members in the target culture while using the target language at least half the time in the social environment, e.g., work, school, and social events. Eleven out of thirteen participants talked about experiences that showed ‘integration’ as their acculturation category. One participant relied on his ethnic enclave for most of his needs, which resulted in his slow progress in second language learning since he mostly spoke his first language. Therefore, his acculturation category was described as ‘separation’. One participant completely left his primary culture and had not participated in any aspect of it, getting involved in his target culture. His acculturation category was thus ‘assimilation’.

According to the reported data, the two language skills participants had the least problems with were reading and listening. However, speaking and writing proved to be more challenging for them. Participants also reported different English language proficiency levels

at the time of their arrival, which might have affected the development of their language skills and created more language barriers compared to more proficient Canadian newcomers. It can be concluded that most participants (12 out of 13) have acculturated to the Canadian culture with two variables that make the most difference; the general language knowledge before immigrating and their daily routine, which determined the level of English they need to have to function in society.

The limitations of this study concern the number of participants and the question of valid interpretation of the participants' experiences within a larger group of people. Future studies of this nature should include more participants. A study should be conducted with participants from similar backgrounds to exclude primary culture as an active variable influencing acculturation and language learning.



## **SUMMARY**

This qualitative research study aimed to describe how newcomers acculturated to the Canadian culture and which language barriers they experienced during their acculturation process. The interview was conducted with 13 participants who were newcomers to Canada. Berry et al.'s (1987) four-type acculturation model consisting of 'integration', 'assimilation', 'separation', and 'marginalization' as acculturation categories was used to analyze and describe participants' experiences. The results showed that 11 out of 13 participants could be placed into 'integration' as their acculturation category. The results also showed that participants were aware of problems and issues they had with language skills, vocabulary and grammar. They were also aware of the strategies and activities they could use to deal with linguistic issues.

Key words: newcomers to Canada, acculturation, language barriers

## SAŽETAK

Cilj ovog kvalitativnog istraživanja bio je odrediti kako se novi migranti akulturiraju u kanadsku kulturu i s kojim se jezičnim barijerama suočavaju tijekom procesa akulturacije. Intervju je proveden sa 13 sudionika koji su bili novi migranti u Kanadi. Berryjev (1987) model akulturacije koji se sastoji od 4 kategorije - integracija, asimilacija, separacija i marginalizacija - korišten je pri analizi i opisivanju iskustava sudionika. Rezultati su pokazali da 11 od 13 sudionika pripada integraciji kao akulturacijskoj kategoriji. Rezultati su također pokazali da su sudionici svjesni poteškoća koje imaju s uporabom jezičnih vještina, gramatike i vokabulara, ali i načina na koje mogu riješiti jezične poteškoće.

Ključne riječi: imigranti u Kanadi, akulturacija, jezične barijere

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## **APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Which year did you immigrate to Canada?
4. Which country are you from and what is your mother tongue?
5. What is your level of education?
6. What was your job in your home country / What is your job in Canada?

### **INTEGRATION QUESTIONS – ARRIVAL**

1. What was your reason for immigrating to Canada?
2. What were your biggest challenges integrating into a new culture?
3. Which aspects of your old culture did you keep practicing while in Canada? Please provide examples.
4. Did you join your ethnic community once you arrived in Canada?
5. What were your expectations prior to moving to Canada and were those expectations met?
6. Did you have any problems with English after arriving? Please provide specific examples.
7. How often do you speak English and how often your mother tongue? On which occasions do you use which?
8. What motivates you to achieve fluency in English and integrate into a new culture?

### **LANGUAGE BARRIERS QUESTIONS**

1. On a scale from 1-5, how well did you speak English at the time of immigrating, 1 being not good at all and 5 being very good, taking into consideration language education and practice prior to immigration.
2. Did you take English language courses after you immigrated to Canada? If yes, was the course provided by the government or a private organization and are you satisfied with English proficiency you acquired in that course? What sources of language support did you encounter after immigrating to Canada?
3. Which language skill was most problematic for you: listening, speaking, reading or writing? Why?
4. What kind of alphabet did you use in your first language? What issues did you face while learning how to write English? How did you solve them?
5. Which problems did you encounter while speaking the English language after immigrating to Canada? Were you confident enough to speak English with native speakers at first? How did you solve problems with speaking?
6. Did you have any problems with listening and reading in English? Provide specific examples. How did you solve these problems?

7. What about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation? Please provide examples. How did you cope with situations when a native speaker mentioned an unfamiliar word? How did you acquire new words?
8. What was most helpful in developing your language proficiency? Which sources helped you to learn and practice the English language (different media sources, by socializing with native speakers, workbooks, work environment, etc.?)
9. How do you feel as a result of your language difficulties?
10. What do you think had the biggest impact on improvement of your English language proficiency?
11. If you could wish for anything concerning your language barrier issues, what would it be?

### INTEGRATION QUESTIONS – AFTER SETTLING

1. How difficult was it for you to get around and communicate in everyday life? Where did you find information on how to handle different types of paperwork (paying bills, getting a driver's license, signing a rental lease with a homeowner, getting a credit card etc.)? How well did you understand people offering you those services? How well did they understand you?
2. Did you need someone to interpret for you? If yes, how long did you use their services? If not, how did you handle speaking in English with others by yourself?
3. How easy was it for you to form relationships with native speakers? Where did you meet most of your friends? Did someone ever stop or refuse to talk to you based on your non-native language level?
4. Did your previous education help with settling and finding a job in your field of expertise? What kind of work did you find once you immigrated to Canada? Did you work in hospitality services, retail shops or any other job including customer service? How well did you manage customers' requests? Please provide an example if possible.
5. Did you look for a doctor who speaks your mother tongue? Did you need a translator for your doctor's appointments? How did you explain your symptoms to your doctor?



## **APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 5 (P5)**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

1. Age: 27
2. Gender: Female
3. Which year did you immigrate to Canada? In 2017
4. Which country are you from and what is your mother tongue? Croatian
5. What is your level of education? Bachelor's degree at Vern University in Zagreb (Public relations and media)
6. What was your job in your home country / What is your job in Canada? I left for Canada a few days after graduating. I didn't have experience in my field in Croatia but I did work at different student jobs while I was studying. I was volunteering in AIESEC in Zagreb for two and a half years as a vice president and that experience helped me gain skills and experience, I used in Canada. Right now, I employ people for a company in HR department. I communicate with other partners and with my team and with people I interview daily.

### **INTEGRATION QUESTIONS - ARRIVAL**

1. What was your reason for immigrating to Canada?  
I always had a dream to move to Canada. When I was 12 years old, I visited my aunt in the USA, and that was the time when Internet was not that popular, and I didn't go to the movies that often to be exposed to that culture. When I just arrived there, I was amazed and drawn to it so I wanted to come back when I grow up. After graduating, I realized Canada has a better immigration program which would make it easy for me to apply and immigrate to Canada instead of the USA. Canada is also more open to immigrants than USA, the quality of life is better than in the USA.
2. What were your biggest challenges integrating into a new culture?  
Before I moved, I was constantly thinking if I'll be able to find a job and find a place to live there. When you're moving to a different country it's always a priority to think about your existential needs, to make sure you'll earn enough for your basic living needs. I completely ignored the possibility of a cultural shock. My biggest problem was finding friends. It wasn't about my English proficiency but about their ways of socializing which are so different than ours. They don't prioritize hanging out with friends as much as they do work. When I did make connections with other people in Canada, we would usually talk about things on a surface level, like small talk. While I was in Croatia, when I would go meet someone for the second time ever we would already be talking about something personal, like our crush from middle school. It was a big change for me to take it down a notch and adjust to their socializing norms. Another challenge for me was the fact that I moved to Canada all by myself, with no friends or family which made my first few months there pretty lonely. People here are

really polite. It was a bit hard for me to get used to it at the beginning, but I learned that when entering a place, you always say “Hello”, and also “How are you”. Small talk is a common thing here, even with people you don’t know.

3. Which aspects of your old culture did you keep practicing while in Canada? Please provide examples.

I miss food from back home. Food here is much different than what I’m used to. When I was younger, I didn’t really care what I was eating, but now that I’m older I watch what I’m putting in my body. Now I’m cooking at home, and I usually cook Croatian recipes. I also miss our coffee since coffee here doesn’t taste the same. I brought our coffee from Croatia, and I make it at home and enjoy it on my balcony for hours. Coffee drinking culture is not the same as in Croatia. Canadians don’t sit for hours and sip on coffee like we do.

4. Did you join your ethnic community once you arrived to Canada?

My parents wanted me to join my ethnic community here because they thought it will offer me more support since I didn’t know anyone here. But I saw it as a chance to start everything fresh from the start. I didn’t want to be that person that will come to a different country and still stick to only Croatian people and speak only Croatian. I wanted to experience diversity, so I didn’t stick with the ethnic community for long. I had one Croatian friend that helped me a lot with my visa application process and once I came to Toronto, I was seeing her on a monthly basis. Outside of her I don’t think I have other Croatian friends.

5. What were your expectations prior to moving to Canada and were those expectations met?

My expectations when it comes to my career were low. I expected to work much longer on a low-paid, irrelevant jobs before actually finding a job in my field. Luckily, my career advanced quickly after I immigrated here. When it comes to day-to-day life, my expectations were not met. The focus is on work and career more than on enjoying life and having fun which is what I was used to.

6. Did you have any problems with English after arriving? Please provide specific examples.

I have much more confidence when speaking English now than I did before even though I considered my English fairly good when I just arrived. When I was in Croatia, I was speaking English often when I was in AIESEC. But I would still say that being here for 3 years so far has helped even more. I have more confidence now, I make fewer mistakes, I learned a lot more words and phrases. My boyfriend is Canadian so I practice speaking with him daily. When I just arrived, I was working as a hostess and I gained those customer service skills where I communicated with my colleagues and customers. I was very nervous at the beginning because I didn’t want to make mistakes and a big part of my job was talking to customers so there was plenty of opportunities

for me to make an error. Now my English is improved and I make more mistakes in Croatian than I do in English.

7. How often do you speak English and how often your mother tongue? On which occasions do you use which?

I use Croatian only when I speak to my family and friends back home. I would say it would take 30% of the time. At work and with my friends and boyfriend here I talk in English, so I'm used to it more now. I sometimes forget words in Croatian, and I end up using an English word as an equivalent to what I'm trying to say.

8. What motivates you to achieve fluency in English and integrate into a new culture?

I think I should work a bit more on grammar rules and pronunciation of some more complicated words. Better English proficiency opens more opportunities for people when it comes to their social life as well as their career, which were my goals.

### **LANGUAGE BARRIERS QUESTIONS**

1. On a scale from 1-5, how well did you speak English at the time of immigrating, 1 being not good at all and 5 being very good, taking into consideration language education and practice prior to immigration. 4. I worked a lot on my English even before moving to Canada. I have read books in English ever since I was 15. When I was visiting my aunt at 12 years old, I already picked up the American accent, so it helped me a lot with confidence when speaking. I noticed a lot of our people when they come here still have their Slavic accent. I think my English was really good but, of course, not perfect.

2. Did you take English language courses after you immigrated to Canada? If yes, was the course provided by the government or a private organization and are you satisfied with English proficiency you acquired in that course? What sources of language support did you encounter after immigrating to Canada?

After my trip to the USA, I started reading books in English and watching movies with English subtitles to learn pronunciation and learn more words. I like reading science fiction or classics. I never took extra classes for English outside of my formal education in school in Croatia.

3. Which language skill was most problematic for you: listening, speaking, reading or writing? Why?

Writing. I know the meaning of words, but I make mistakes because words sometimes sound differently than they are spelled.

4. What kind of alphabet did you use in your first language? What issues did you face while learning how to write English? How did you solve them?

The Croatian language uses the Latin alphabet. I didn't really have that many problems. Just the spelling I already mentioned.

5. Which problems did you encounter while speaking the English language after immigrating to Canada? Were you confident enough to speak English with native speakers at first? How did you solve problems with speaking?

Sometimes it happens to me that I don't know a word when I'm talking to my colleagues, and it's related to my field of expertise. I usually just ask them to clarify it a bit more or I would understand the meaning from the context. I always find a way to express myself and to understand others, so I don't see those categories as troublesome.

6. Did you have any problems with listening and reading in English? Provide specific examples. How did you solve these problems?

I didn't have any issues with this.

7. What about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation? Please provide examples. How did you cope with situations when a native speaker mentioned an unfamiliar word? How did you acquire new words?

Grammar is not my strong suit in English. My hobby in my free time is writing so I think that helped a lot with spelling and grammar. My biggest problem would be my fast speaking. When I would speak to my colleagues or when I would hold an interview for my company it would happen to me quite often to make mistakes and say a word wrong. It was more because of the speed of my speaking than because of my knowledge of English. Usually, people I talked to at that moment would excuse me by saying: "Oh, English is her second language". They didn't think much of it.

8. What was most helpful in developing your language proficiency? Which sources helped you to learn and practice the English language (different media sources, by socializing with native speakers, workbooks, work environment, etc.)?

I read books in English, I watch movies with English subtitles, I use English at work a lot so that helps me practice as well.

9. How do you feel as a result of your language difficulties?

Honestly, I feel really good about my English proficiency. When I would talk to people, they would always assume that I lived in Canada for 10 years or so because of how good my English was when speaking to them.

10. What do you think had the biggest impact on the improvement of your English language proficiency? Being introduced to western culture when I was 12 years old had the biggest impact on me and gave me motivation to really learn to speak the language. Having opportunities to speak the language through AIESEC, reading books and speaking with my family in the USA helped a lot with improving from my basic English to a decent level.

11. If you could wish for anything concerning your language barrier issues, what would it be?

I am just happy that I decided to read in English and learn English that way because you don't have to be limited by your English knowledge. In interviews or with friends you can always say whatever comes to your mind since you have a good language repertoire. I just wish I had written in English more so my writing could get better. My advice for everyone learning English would be to find a native speaker and to practice with them. It gets so much easier to learn that way.

### **INTEGRATION QUESTIONS – AFTER SETTLING**

1. How difficult was it for you to get around and communicate in everyday life? Where did you find information on how to handle different types of paperwork (paying bills, getting a driver's license, signing a rental lease with a homeowner, getting a credit card etc.)? How well did you understand people offering you those services? How well did they understand you?

It wasn't that hard for me because I am a really organized person and I like to be prepared. Before coming here, I already did my research and had everything ready for my arrival. Since my English was good when I arrived it was easy for me to get a bank account opened and to get a phone number and all other necessary things.

2. Did you need someone to interpret for you? If yes, how long did you use their services? If not, how did you handle speaking in English with others by yourself?

No, I was confident enough to deal with everything myself.

3. How easy was it for you to form relationships with native speakers? Where did you meet most of your friends? Did someone ever stop or refuse to talk to you based on your non-native language level?

When I just arrived to Canada it was hard for me to find friends so I downloaded an app where you can match with different people around you based on your hobbies and values and make friends that way. My English is very good but I realized Canadians get really interested in you when they find out you're not from here, so they start asking a lot of questions about my background. Most of my friends are immigrants or immigrants' kids because I could relate to them more.

4. Did your previous education help with settling and finding a job in your field of expertise? What kind of work did you find once you immigrated to Canada? Did you work in hospitality services, retail shops or any other job including customer service? How well did you manage customers' requests? Please provide an example if possible. Your diploma from back home can help you to be qualified for a job but more important thing is Canadian work experience. There are some exceptions like U.K. or Australia that have agreements with Canada where their diplomas are valid to find a job in Canada, whereas Croatian diploma wouldn't be admitted as a proper education level, and they would ask you to take extra classes or courses. After gaining Canadian work experience, employers cared much less about my Croatian diploma. I was working as a hostess in a restaurant for a few months before getting a job as a recruiter. There were always some situations where I would make a mistake in English but this country has a lot of immigrants with a mediocre level of English so I didn't feel that bad about my English.
  
5. Did you look for a doctor who speaks your mother tongue? Did you need a translator for your doctor's appointments? How did you explain your symptoms to your doctor? I didn't really care which nationality my doctor is. I didn't have issues explaining my symptoms in English. I mostly used walk-in clinics while here.

## **APPENDIX 3 – INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT 13 (P13)**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

1. Age: 27
2. Gender: Female
3. Which year did you immigrate to Canada? I immigrated to the USA first in 2015, when I was 21. I, then, moved to Canada in 2018.
4. Which country are you from and what is your mother tongue? I'm from Croatia and my mother language is Croatian.
5. What is your level of education? I finished high school (gymnasium) in Varaždin in Croatia and didn't attend any University.
6. What was your job in your home country/What is your job in Canada? I was a student and after I worked at a lot of short gigs. In Canada I work as a waitress.

### **INTEGRATION QUESTIONS - ARRIVAL**

1. What was your reason for immigrating to Canada? The situation in Croatia.  
Did you plan to leave your mother country for a long time?  
I left Croatia with my main goal to never come back. I didn't really have a plan on how to get permanent residence somewhere, I just have temporary plans I think about only when my previous plan comes to an end. All my visa types I ever had been temporary, but I always know I'll find some other way of staying here because I don't want to go back to Croatia. I do not support or want to live in a country with political and economic issues like Croatia. I was simply so unsatisfied and unhappy there because there were no opportunities for me. When I finished high school, my older sister was already in university and our mom was a single mom. With three children to raise I just didn't have a chance to continue my education because of financial reasons. After that I went to work and when I saw what it was like to work in Croatia, I decided to not accept it. Employers are just using their employees and after a year and a half of working I decided I want to leave this country and look for better opportunities for myself.
2. What were your biggest challenges integrating into a new culture?  
First when I arrived it was a cultural shock. I've never seen so many different people before. Everything looked different from roads, buildings etc. I had to get a new driver's license which included learning new driving rules which are different here. Zagreb is a piece of cake compared to driving in Canada. I got used to it quickly though because I was a young driver. When it comes to people, everyone here is so nice and polite. Everyone always greets you with "Hey. How are you?". It's more of a rhetorical question and you just respond with "Good. How are you?". It's just about being polite and having basic manners like holding the doors for you etc. It was funny to me at first because I was just asking myself why everyone wants to know how I am, until I realized it's just how they greet themselves. That is something we don't have in

Croatia. I had to get used to the winter weather and them not having a coffee culture like we do. They are always on the go and have somewhere to be.

3. Which aspects of your old culture did you keep practicing while in Canada? Please provide examples. Did you join your ethnic community once you arrived to Canada?

At first, I didn't practice my own culture because I was in a new place and I wanted to experience their culture first since it was interesting to me. For the first few holidays I didn't bake my own cakes because I wanted to try theirs more. Now that I'm here longer I miss that part of my life, so I bake our food for Christmas and such. When it comes to drinking coffee, I don't practice that anymore since it's not a big thing here. They just take their coffee and go on.

The year when we were in the finals of a football championship, I was working as a nanny for one Croatian lady. I met so many Croatians at that time when we were all cheering for our team. There is a big park and a Croatian Church community where my nationals gather every weekend. The viewing of the final football match was organized in that park as well as the celebration after the game. The parking lot was huge in that park and every car had a Croatian flag on it. At the same time, while driving on the road, I've seen so many cars with Croatian flag honking to each other as a greeting and I realized how big the Croatian community is in Toronto. The proud feeling of being a Croatian was through the roof at that point.

4. What were your expectations prior to moving to Canada and were those expectations met?

When you realize people are not so unhappy everywhere it is so much easier. People in Canada aren't as unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives as Croatians. Here nobody will harass you in any way, you can earn enough for your lifestyle and enjoy your life and free time. Everyone treats each other with respect here. I was scared that I would not be able to find a job because my English wasn't that good. My vocabulary wasn't that good since I was only working with kids at that time. That's why I wanted to find another type of job so I expected it would be harder since I didn't have much experience and my language skills were not that good. When I just started my job search, I went to give my resume to 5 restaurants and from 5 of them, 3 of them called me back. That's when I realized it's really easy to find a job here because there are even worse English-speaking people than me. I just had to show I am willing to learn and work hard, and doors will just open for you. I didn't realize you can advance that fast from your job position. Regardless of your experience, you can become a manager fast if you're trying hard.

5. Did you have any problems with English after arriving? Please provide specific examples.

I didn't have English lessons in school up until my high school education when English was my second option for foreign language learning, after German. So, everything I learned was quick basics during those 4 years. I might even say I am self-



taught because I grew up with American music and American movies. I believe a person can be gifted for languages or just not. I and my sisters would always listen to American music so that's how we would learn English. It was an inactive type of learning though which made a difference after I moved here. It was hard to suddenly start forming my own sentences when I never had to actually speak the language before, but just listen. I would say, my level of understanding was really good, but grammar could have some improvements. I would always have to think about translating from Croatian to English in my mind first and that would make me make mistakes in my speech, as well as stuttering. It was even difficult at work since I was taking care of children here. Whenever I wanted to explain something to them, I would be at a loss for words and wouldn't know how to explain it to them properly and then they wouldn't take me seriously anymore. With adults it was easier since I would pick up words and phrases quickly.

6. How often do you speak English and how often your mother tongue? On which occasions do you use which?

I only have one constant Croatian friend here, but she was also born in Canada so all people I talk to here are English speakers. But since I work in a restaurant, whenever I have guests that speak Croatian, which is all the time, at least once a week, I always start our communication in Croatian so they know we can talk in Croatian for the rest of their stay. It is the same for Serbians and Croatians or even Bosnians. When you are here in Canada it is all the same. The most important thing is that we understand each other.

Also, I remember having a Croatian neighbor. Once I was waiting for the elevator with him and he was humming a Croatian song. After that, whenever I saw him, we would have small talk in the lobby.

7. What motivates you to achieve fluency in English and integrate into a new culture?

At the beginning I did not really try to learn official English. I just tried to catch a few phrases here and there while talking to people. I always kept thinking I'll find a way to communicate whatever I need.

### **LANGUAGE BARRIER QUESTIONS**

1. On a scale from 1-5, how well did you speak English at the time of immigrating, 1 being not good at all and 5 being very good, taking into consideration language education and practice prior to immigration.

I would say 3.5.

2. Did you take English courses after you immigrated to Canada? If yes, was the course provided by the government or a private organization and are you satisfied with English proficiency you acquired in that course?

In the USA, one of my visa requirements stated that it was compulsory for me to take courses in English. I had the freedom of choice which classes I'll be attending so I

chose English language classes to improve my language skills, since I wasn't interested in anything else.

Those classes were mostly organized for extreme beginners. Since it was a public, government-prescribed requirement for all newcomers, it was expected for everyone to have a lower level of English language knowledge. In every class a different amount of people would be attending. Usually, there would be 15-20 people in a class. We would learn through interactive games, songs and with different materials. In class we would actively talk to each other to practice our spoken English and we would also have homework where we would practice our written English.

3. Which language skill was most problematic for you: listening, speaking, reading or writing? Why?

Speaking and writing. Writing because it works in a different way than in Croatian. We read the same thing we write, but in English they have silent letters and different pronunciations for the same letters. Speaking was also hard for me because, even though I understood everything, I couldn't form a sentence in my head quick enough since I was always translating from Croatian to English. I don't have these problems with speaking anymore after the class I took and also since I work with customers, so I speak English daily. When it comes to writing, I use autocorrect option on my phone, so I don't notice the issues anymore. I just started with a new course recently and I had to fill in a workbook. I realized I still don't know how to spell certain words. Now I try not to use the autocorrect option anymore so I force myself to learn the spelling of different words. Most common spelling issues I have are double letters in words because I never know if it's a single or a double letter, as well as articles a, an and the. When I was working in one of my first jobs, the kids used to correct me all the time when I misused an article. I was never able to learn which one to use. I always thought it should come naturally to me.

4. What kind of alphabet did you use in your first language? What issues did you face while learning how to write in English?

Croatian uses the Latin alphabet so that was not an issue. The problem for me was double letters, silent letters, and other spelling difficulties. I just recently started practicing and trying to improve in that category.

5. Which problems did you encounter while speaking the English language after immigrating to Canada? How did you solve problems with speaking? Were you confident enough to speak English with native speakers at first?

When you're trying to explain something or you are missing a word, people always help you to find the exact word you are looking for and try to make sure they really understand what you are trying to say. Sometimes people don't want to be rude so they don't correct you but I always told my boyfriend who is a native English speaker to always correct me when he hears I'm saying something wrong. There were enough times when he would correct me on one and the same thing that I would eventually start correcting myself after noticing I made the same mistake again. That's one of the

best ways I have learned English so far. In the beginning I was too shy to speak in English because I thought people would think “What is this one doing here”. I realized they are so used to having immigrants here that it was normal for them to hear different accents and broken English on a daily basis. They would also be amazed that I speak two languages since most of the speak only English.

6. Did you have any problems with listening and reading in English? Provide specific examples.

No, I was always fairly good in those categories.

7. What about grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation? Please provide examples.

All of these were an issue for me at the beginning. To this day I don't know how to pronounce certain words. For example, “literally”. My boyfriend always tries to correct me and I try to repeat after him but it mostly doesn't work for me. My Croatian accent was prominent when I just got here. Now that I've been speaking English daily for years, it really improved so much. Since I work in a restaurant, every time I would come to a table and say, “Hey guys, how's it going?” they would always ask me “What accent is that?”, “where are you from” “Are you from eastern Europe?”. Especially if they are Croatians. They notice I am Croatian right away. People actually like different accents here and think it's really cool. In the beginning, I also had lots of issues with my vocabulary. When I just started working at a restaurant, I had to learn the menu so I can explain to the customers what each meal consists. I had to learn all names of different ingredients, kitchen utensils and cooking methods. For example, the burger menu also comes with Hickory Sticks. I had no idea what that was. It ended up being a chips French fries. I feel I know more words in different categories that I had to use daily like cooking, and I still don't know enough in some categories, for example, about cars. Grammar was okay for me. I don't know the rules. I always relied on the feeling that it sounded correct. One of the issues I had was that I kept using some words in the past tense when they weren't supposed to be used in the past tense. For example, “I advised you” or “advices” as a plural.

8. What was most helpful in developing your language proficiency? Which sources helped you to learn and practice the English language (different media sources, by socializing with native speakers, workbooks, work environment, etc.?)

I listened to a lot of American music when I was a teenager so that built my vocabulary. I also talk to my boyfriend a lot and he corrects me so I learn pronunciation and grammar. My job helped me learn new words as well. When it comes to growing up in Croatia, I think we have an advantage because we don't translate and synchronize movies like Germans or Italians. I learned a lot connecting subtitles to audio in movies. Here in Canada, I think everyone should talk as much as they can with others because that really helps a lot with confidence and vocabulary.

9. How do you feel as a result of your language difficulties?

When I just started working in the restaurant, I remember, I was scared and even a little bit ashamed to speak English with customers so they don't think I'm weird. Every time we would have lunch breaks, everyone would be talking to each other and I wouldn't understand half of it so I didn't have many opportunities to engage in a conversation. I was thinking to myself: Wow, I will never fit in here. Now, after becoming more confident in speaking English I became really good friends with them.

What do you think had the biggest impact on the improvement of your English language proficiency?

The most important thing that determined my language proficiency was the way I grew up in Croatia, surrounded by English language music, movies, social media etc.

10. If you could wish for anything concerning your language barrier issues, what would it be?

I wish to have been able to practice speaking more when I was in high school. That would've prepared me much better than just learning grammar.

### **INTEGRATION QUESTIONS – AFTER SETTLING**

1. How difficult was it for you to get around and communicate in everyday life? Where did you find information on how to handle different types of paperwork (paying bills, getting a driver's license, signing a rental lease with a homeowner, getting a credit card etc.)? How well did you understand people offering you those services? How well did they understand you?

I used Google for basically everything. I also had my boyfriend and friends I can ask for help. But when I just came, I was only depending on myself so I joined some Facebook groups for newcomers in Canada and I found some useful tips there.

2. Did you need someone to interpret for you? If yes, how long did you use their services? If not, how did you handle speaking in English with others by yourself?

No. My English was good enough to find my way around. Even when I didn't know what to do or where to go, I always knew how to ask for help.

3. How easy was it for you to form relationships with native speakers? Where did you meet most of your friends? Did someone ever stop or refuse to talk to you based on your non-native language level?

I met most of my friends at work. It was a bit hard for me to meet new friends because people my age already have formed friendships and if you are not a part of some group like college or work then finding friends would be really hard. I tried meeting up with some people a couple of times but it didn't last long.

4. Did your previous education help with settling and finding a job in your field of expertise? What kind of work did you find once you immigrated to Canada? Did you work in hospitality services, retail shops or any other job including customer service? How well did you manage customers' requests? Please provide an example if possible.

My previous education didn't help. I found a job in customer service as my first job in Canada. There were times when I just started working when customers would ask me which drinks were discounted for that day and I would know which one but I couldn't remember how to pronounce it. I would try to explain it to them by saying the first letter or pronouncing it closely to its correct pronunciation and they would eventually get which one it is. At first, I would say "Let me go check" but now I'm not afraid to say that I don't know how to pronounce it.

5. Did you look for a doctor who speaks your mother tongue? Did you need a translator for your doctor's appointments? How did you explain your symptoms to your doctor? It didn't matter for me. I didn't have issues explaining my symptoms and understanding my doctor in the English language.

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FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

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Split, 13.02.2023

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Znanstveno polje: FILOLOGIJA  
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