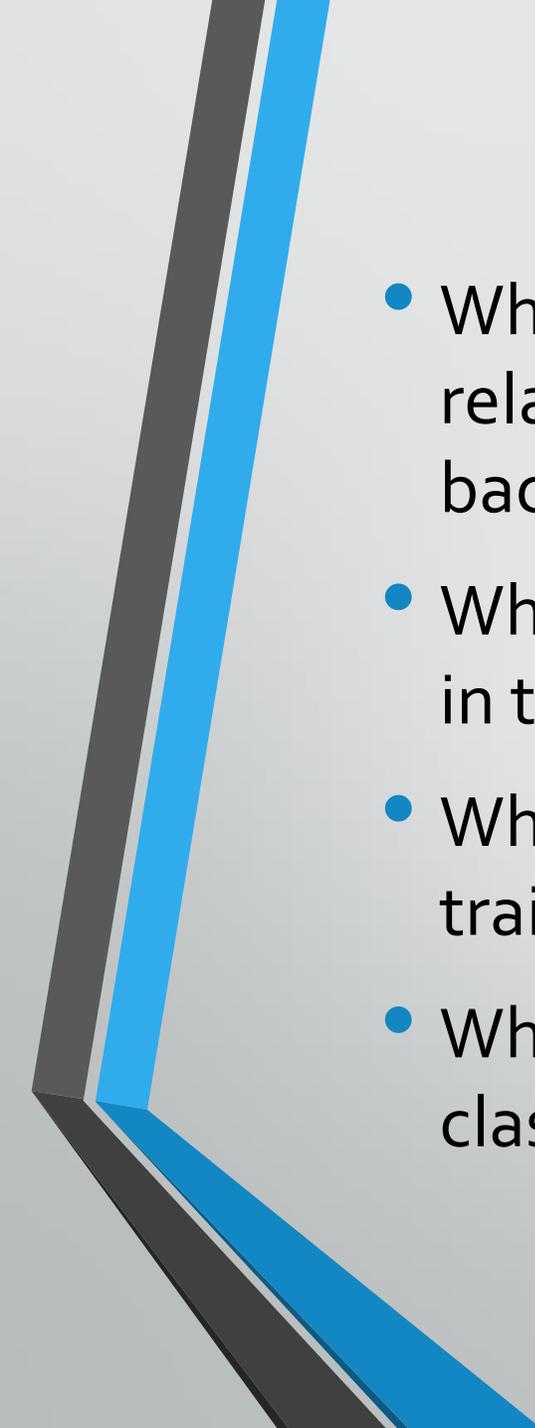


**English language challenges faced by  
non-English speaking background  
employees in the Australian  
workplace:  
An exploratory study at the local  
Registered Training Organisation level**

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- What are the socio-cultural, language-related or other skills-related challenges that employees of non-English speaking background experience in the Australian workplace?
  - What learning strategies do non-English speaking employees use in the workplace?
  - What language activities were helpful during English language training?
  - What are some ways that challenges can be addressed in the classroom before students enter the workplace?

# Participants

- Three male participants and two female participants
- Ages ranged from 21 to 37 years
- Countries - Afghanistan, Taiwan and Italy
- All were currently employed and had been employed in Australia for between five months and six years
- Apprentice chef, waitress, warehouse manager, baker, maintenance system co-ordinator

# What were the three most challenging aspects of English language for the participants?

- ***Interactions with other people*** which required listening and speaking skills
  - *Pronunciation*
  - *Conversational skills – topics, small talk*
- ***Confidence issues***
- ***Learning workplace-specific vocabulary***

## Interactions: *Pronunciation*

- *It is like Aussie English at my workplace, my senior colleagues are all Aussies and those who are the same level with me they speak Indian English with an accent...and many others like African, and Bangladesh, Burma, Fiji, all over the world, Vietnamese. We need to get used to some of the sounds.*
- *Even just in Australia people have different accents everywhere, and I have to listen... really carefully all the time, like my co-worker will say "do you really understand?" Because I always say yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah ... because that just means I heard you, doesn't mean I understand.*

## Interactions: *Conversational skills*

- *When it comes to work, ninety percent of the time we use plain English. It is easy, but when it comes to some like everyday conversation thing, sometimes we don't know what's going on. So let's say news or some sort of game is going on or soccer or NRL, when somebody is talking you don't know, you just keep listening, you don't know what to say 'cause you don't know what to say.*
- *It would slow me down and also it would interrupt the other guys, just it would ruin the whole conversation and mood and the whole thing.*
- *I think our supervisors and managers are quite aware of that one [colloquial language]. And ...they speak to our ears like a language teacher.*

# Confidence

- *I was really stressed for eight months like 'cause I kept doing the wrong order because I was nervous for the whole time, and I kept doing the wrong order, and the customers were complaining.*
- *I think the main thing is you have to be confident and you will be fine.*

# Learning workplace-specific vocabulary

- *For example when they told me put some sauce in the ramekin, and put it beside the salad, I didn't understand, 'what is ramekin?', then I asked another chef 'what is ramekin?', then he showed me and gave me the ramekin. Every day we learn new things, 'cause I didn't know what is the name of that in English...But one day I asked 'what is the name of the bowl we make salad in?', he said 'salad bowl'...*

- *When I start work, I have to make a list first, for example for preparing we have to prepare two containers of everything...In the beginning it was hard for me, I don't know how can I spell the capsicum? How to spell the camembert cheese?*
- *I struggled a little bit with the spelling because something I would pronounce it and the same way I spell it, it just turns out something else...when I hear a word from somebody else, I can spell it out ninety percent correct, but when anything I say it out loud and spell it, I get it wrong because I think it is just the way I pronounce it and as I pronounce it I spell it that way and sometimes I get mixed up between 'a' and 'e' and 'u', it's just always in the wrong place.*

## Some other areas of challenge include:

- Understanding fast rate of speech
- Reading and writing in a timely manner
- The formality of emails (both reading and writing)

# Participants' learning strategies

- *I just stop and keep listening to the conversation, just keep going and going then I'll picture in my head 'oh, that's what they're talking about' then I step in and just throw a few words here and there just to keep things going.*
- Conversational fatigue
- Using the context of the situation, using dictionary on phone, learning how to look things up on the internet (navigation skills), keeping a word list, taking the menu home, never being afraid to ask questions.

# Activities that were helpful

- Work experience – Australian workplace expectations such as punctuality, teamwork, being organised
- Practical activities which involved speaking/listening e.g. mock interviews
- Conversation activities
- Pronunciation
- Spoken vs written grammar

## Activities suggested by participants:

- Task-based conversation opportunities
- Small-talk practice
- Idioms
- Pronunciation
- Listening to other accents (guest speakers, TV shows)
- Videoing interactions to consider non-verbal behaviour



***The more we learn, the better it is, the easier  
life gets in everywhere, at work or in everyday  
living.***



**Questions?**

**Activities that have worked in your teaching situation**