Ways of working and ways of speaking:

A linguistic ethnography of migrant IT professionals in Australian workplaces

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Statement of Candidate

I certify that this thesis, titled *Ways of working, ways of talking: a linguistic ethnography of migrant IT professionals in Australian workplaces,* has not been submitted for a degree or part of a degree at any other university other than Macquarie University.

I certify that this thesis constitutes original research of which I am the sole author and that help provided in the writing and other aspects of this thesis has been acknowledged as required. I also certify that all the sources consulted for the writing of this thesis have been acknowledged as required.

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Abstract

This thesis is a sociolinguistic study of the employment experiences of a group of non-English-speaking-background (NESB) migrant professionals in the information technology (IT) sector both as job seekers and employees in Australia. The study has two principal aims: (a) to discover the linguistic barriers which these individuals face in accessing employment and (b) to explore the linguistic challenges they face in actual workplace interactions.

Australia has long relied on immigrants to fill both skilled and unskilled labor shortages. Despite this fact and broad political support for immigration, previous research has shown that the trajectory from migration to the workplace is a problematic one and many professional migrants experience downward occupational mobility. It is widely assumed that language difficulties are one of the reasons behind migrants' difficulties in finding appropriate work and that intercultural workplace communication is problematic. This study is designed to explore both these assumptions.

IT professionals were selected for this study because they continue to be supported by the Australian Government Skilled Migration Program but constitute an under-researched professional group in Australia. In keeping with the dual research aims, two related but distinct data sets were collected: one set consists of individual interviews with skilled migrants about their experiences of seeking work in the IT sector and the other consists of ethnographic data collected in four sites through observations, semi-structured interviews and recordings of spontaneous interactions and meetings.

Findings relative to pre-employment experiences include employers' tendency to refer to

native speaker models when assessing IT professionals' English language proficiency as determined by accented English. Further barriers to employment include markers of foreignness such as names and lack of local experience. Whist the study found that significant barriers to workplace entry exist, the analysis of actual workplace interactions revealed that the participants were able to communicate successfully in different contexts that required managing a range of linguistic repertoires. These repertoires are acquired and developed within teams over time and include frequent instances of informal talk and a mixture of work and non-work talk, both of which are salient features of communication between colleagues in collaborative teams. These collaborative linguistic strategies work to reduce power and manage rapport among colleagues and include alignment strategies, shared topics, turn-taking and the co-construction of narratives.

The thesis concludes with recommendations for teachers of professional communication, recruiters and policymakers.

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Abbreviations

AMEP= Adult Migrant English Program

CA= Conversation Analysis

*CALD= Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CDA= Critical Discourse Analysis

CP= Computer Professionals

CoP= Communities of Practice

CSWE= Certificates of Spoken and Written English

DIAC= Department of Immigration and Citizenship

ELICOS= English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Courses

ESL= English as Second Language

FTAs= Face Threatening Acts

ICC= Intercultural Communication

ISLPR= International Second Language Proficiency Ratings

MNC= Multinational Companies

NS= Native Speaker

NNS= Non-Native Speaker

*NESB= non-English Speaking Background

SOL= Skilled Occupation List

PD =Productive Diversity

PR= Permanent Resident

SLA= Second Language Acquisition

TESOL= Teaching English as a Second Language

*Although both ‘NESB’ and ‘CALD’ are used in the Australian context to describe linguistically and culturally diverse groups, in this thesis following Colic-Peisker (2011), the term ‘NESB’ is used other than in quotations from sources where ‘CALD’ is used.

Chapter 1 **: Introduction**

1.1 The research problem

This study is motivated by two factors. The first is a result of personal observations I made while I was teaching English to professional migrants from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), many of whom had studied, lived and worked in Australia over a number of years as international students and then gained permanent residency (PR), as well as those who had arrived on a Skilled Migrant Visa. As a teacher I observed that many of the learners were either struggling to find work or to 'fit in' to the workplace while others were working well below their qualifications and experience. In some cases these students returned to study because their managers had recommended further language training, particularly in conversation skills, in the belief that these skills can only be developed in the classroom environment. I was motivated to learn what particular aspects of their workplace day-to-day communication the managers believed these workers needed to develop. I was also intrigued by the fact that the managers themselves overlooked the role of the company as a potential training ground. At the same time they did not seem to consider that suggesting a qualified employee undertake further English training might impact negatively on the employee.

The students were adults whom I regarded as proficient speakers. [1]The course they were studying was offered to students who had completed Certificates of Spoken and Written English (CSWE) Level III, which is equivalent to IETLS 5 on entry. Others had completed a degree in an Australian university. Nevertheless they all assessed their own English proficiency negatively.

The second motivation stems from my long-standing interest in attitudes or perceptions about what constitutes appropriate language for particular contexts, specifically assumptions about what constitutes appropriate language for the workplace. It was apparent in the AMEP teaching and policy environment I was working in at that time that language for the workplace was constructed as a set of skills that could be separated from other aspects of communication. I was therefore interested in how these policies would impact in teaching and learning contexts.

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[1] In this study when I refer to participants as ‘proficient’ I do so as a result of my knowledge of their background, their educational level, visa entry requirement and my observations of their linguistic performance in their interactions with me as the researcher and in their workplace. This is based on Ellis (1990, p. 387), who states that ‘[wh]at a learner does systematically is the best evidence we have for what she knows about the L2 and what she has the ability to use’. The term ‘proficiency’ is taken from Taylor (in Ellis 1990, p. 387), who distinguishes proficiency defined as ‘idea of ability to use one's knowledge in actual contexts of situation’ from 'performance' which he says refers to ‘actual instances of use’.

Furthermore, I observed that there was an increased push within ESL training courses funded by the Federal Government Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to teach 'workplace communication' and that policy makers – just as the managers mentioned above - thought this might be delivered in the classroom as a separate 'package' of linguistic skills at the expense of what is sometimes referred to as 'general' English.

In 2010 the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Evans reformed the Skilled Migrant Program points system because it was seen to have failed to attract those with the right skills to Australia. He stated emphatically that:

> "…If they don't have the English-language skills, don't have the right trade skills and can't get a job…they shouldn't be eligible for permanent residency" (The Age, 2010)

He thus emphasised that language and work skills are inextricably linked in the process of gaining permanent residency (PR) in Australia.

Although I was asked to teach to these requirements I often struggled with this curriculum requirement as it was not always clear what kind of 'workplace communication' my learners would encounter or whether it might be a form of language with which I or other teachers were familiar. Intuitively, I considered that many of the textbooks or recommended teaching materials were inadequate on many levels.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The globalised market place is characterised by the mobility of people and goods (Appadurai,1996). Migration for the purpose of work contributes overwhelmingly to these

flows and leads to economic prosperity in the host country as well as the country of origin (International Labour Organization, 2006). The impact of this mobility makes the workplace a site of language and intercultural contact. Australia has received 6.5 million migrants since 1945 and it is estimated migrants will continue to fill labour shortages into the future (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). In spite of abundant evidence of their contribution, migrants to Australia have experienced discrimination in the workplace.

1.3 Why IT professionals?

The study focuses on the experiences of IT professionals. Although defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as Computer Professionals in one category, this group of professionals includes a wide range of occupations (see Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 23 for a list of these). The motivation to focus on IT professionals is twofold.

First, this group of professionals has been consistently supported by the Skilled Migration Program and remains on the top 10 sought after occupations. Following the 2010 Skilled Migration policy overhaul by the then Immigration Minister Chris Evans which renewed the emphasis on skill-based migration (DIAC, 2010), this group of professionals was still highly sought in the Australian IT industry (see Table on page 4 for a list of the types of computer professionals needed and the points required by these professionals (DIAC, 2010). The policy overhaul also gave rise to a new Skilled Occupation List (SOL) which includes IT professionals (DIAC, 2010) The 2010 SOL includes the following computing professionals: Applications and Analyst Programmer, Computer Analyst Auditor, Software Designer, Systems Designer, Systems Manager, Systems Programmer. The 2010 change in policy direction is supported by professional and industry groups, such as the Australian Computer Society, which make recommendations according to industry need.

Secondly, my motivation in focusing on this group of professionals is informed by observations that IT professionals differ from other professionals in that they are highly mobile and consider their skills transferable. I wanted to find out whether this transnational experience had any impact in the participants' search for employment and in their experiences in the Australian workplace. Past studies show that factors such as ethnicity or country of birth are viewed negatively in the Australian labour market (Ho, 2004). Colic –Peisker (2011) states that:

> "Overall, it has been well established that in the post-war decades, when people from non-English-speaking background[i] started settling in Australia in large numbers, they generally occupied lower rungs of the labour force than the English-speaking-background (ESB) section of the population." (p. 638)

Previous studies of other professionals such as engineers showed that in spite of skills shortages at the time of arrival, members of this group still had trouble gaining employment (Hawthorne, 1994). Other studies of IT professionals have found that although this group fared better than other professionals there were still barriers they had to overcome, particularly when the demand for their skills decreased (Alcorso, 2006).

My interest in this group of professionals is also due to the transnational or global nature of their work. Biao (2004) states that in fact IT professionals are responsible for a new pattern of migration as their skills are easily transferable. Certainly many of the participants in this study regard themselves as global transnational workers and had anticipated a seamless transition from arrival to the workplace. Existing research on communication in IT workplace in New Zealand (Plester and Sayer, 2007) indicates that IT workplaces are different from non-IT by being more self-directed and flatter in their

organisation. It is therefore imperative to gain an understanding of how this seemingly mobile group of transnational professionals fares in the Australian labour market.

A further motivation was that although studies of communication among IT workplaces have been conducted in New Zealand to date the Australian context has not received such attention. Examples of studies in New Zealand include the study of functions of banter (Plester and Sayer, 2007). Another study, from the Wellington Workplace project, focused on leadership discourse and workplace culture in an IT company at a time of change (Holmes, Schnurr and Marra (2007).

Motivated by the concerns about my teaching context within the social and political context I have described above, I formulated the three research questions as shown below. These guided the study in seeking an understanding of migrants' pre-employment and employment experiences. My observations were that professional migrants experienced barriers to the workplace. In this study barriers were both visible and invisible markers of differences or 'otherness' that precluded these professionals from gaining full employment in the Australian labour market. Therefore, in formulating the first research question I was keen to explore the role linguistic difference can play on employment success in the context of a culturally diverse society.

Also, conducting fieldwork in the participating companies, I sought to find out which language features (if any) were problematic. From a teaching perspective I wanted to see how actual workplace talk could inform my teaching practice. In particular, I was interested in the characteristics of communication, in other words what communication actually 'looked like' in the actual workstations. Therefore in formulating the second research question I wanted to investigate how interactions were structured, whether they were typified by pragmatic cross-cultural differences and what adjustments, if any,

migrants from NESB need to make to achieve successful communication with their colleagues and employers.

Further, as the literature review will show, the study of language use in modern workplaces indicates that the ability to navigate a variety of language styles or genres is highly sought-after. This aspect of communication has rarely been addressed in relation to whether it constitutes a particular barrier for NESB workers. If migrant workers are to have access to full participation in Australian workplaces, then they must be able to navigate these repertoires. Conversely, employers and gatekeepers who are recruiting NESB workers need to include these aspects of communication in the way they assess the suitability of potential candidates. The third research question was formulated with the aim of discovering the discursive features of collaboration whilst keeping in mind the wider social structure and ideologies that impact on communication.

These are the research questions that guided this study.

1. *What types of barriers (linguistic or social) do migrants in the IT industry experience in the Australian labour market?*
2. *What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?*
3. *What key communicative collaboration patterns can be observed in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges do these patterns of communication pose for skilled migrants?*

The research questions and the data collection approaches resulted in the collection of rich data and several themes emerged in the coding process. These themes were

chosen as they represented aspects of the participants' experience that they chose to highlight. The quotes selected in the analysis chapters were chosen to further highlight aspects of their experience. Following is an outline of the themes that emerged from the coding and these will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis chapters as indicated.

1. Job seeking experiences and barriers to gaining employment (chapter 4): barriers identified were lack of local experience, structure of CVs and job interview practices, signs of otherness such as foreign names and accents and language learner identities.
2. Features of workplace communication (chapter 5): key characteristics found were that work was structured around different types of meetings. Workplace interactions were informal, included fusion of work and non-work talk and technical and non-technical language. Participants displayed strategies to avoid miscommunication where linguistic diversity could be an issue.
3. Strategies for achieving collaboration (chapter 6): relational strategies found in the data were narratives, avoiding disagreement, mitigating directives to subordinates and floor sharing techniques. Further, team identity was highlighted by identifying the 'other' and highlighting team expertise.

In the analysis chapter these themes will be elaborated and excerpts and quotes from the data will illustrate each one.

1.4 Summary and Chapter outline

This introductory chapter has explained the background and motivation for the present study. In addition, it has provided a rationale for the study. Australia's continued reliance on migrant skilled labour means that workplaces will continue to be multilingual. Past research indicates that skilled migrants have experienced some difficulties entering the Australian workplace and these studies have pointed to language as one potential difficulty. IT professionals belong to a group that will continue to be favoured by Australian migration policy therefore it is imperative to study their pre-employment and employment experiences and compare these with the experiences of other professionals groups.

This thesis is organised into 7 chapters. Following this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on the topics of migration and work, approaches to the use of language in post-modern workplaces and intercultural communication theories in terms of competing theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 outlines the methods of data collection and provides a justification for the choice of sociolinguistic ethnography. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will take up the analysis of different aspects of the data. Chapter 4, mostly based on interview data with individual migrant IT professionals, analyses real and perceived barriers to employment using the lens of *orders of indexicality* proposed by Blommaert (2005). Chapter 5 then analyses the range of communicative events evidenced in IT workplace interactions and discusses the challenges and opportunities these present for migrant IT professionals. Chapter 6 then moves on to focus on micro aspects of the interactions collected in the workplaces under study and identifies a number of ways in which participants achieve teamwork and collaboration. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by revisiting the research questions and presenting the implications of the study.

Chapter 2 **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

2.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to explore the linguistic features of professional migrants' interactions in the workplace in Australia in order to better understand how language becomes a site of inclusion or exclusion for NESB speakers. However, before it can do so, the broader context of Australian policy in relation to migration and the labour market needs to be mapped out together with relevant research into the experiences of employers and professionals, and in particular the barriers to participation in the labour market faced by IT professionals from abroad which have been identified in previous research.

When I began this thesis my aim was to explore the linguistic features of workplace interactions between NESB and ESB speakers. Based on my students' reported experiences I expected these interactions would reveal problematic talk. However, as I began collecting data it became clear that whilst workplace interactions were problematic for the IT professionals I was following, they consistently regarded entering the job market as a hurdle. In order to account for these difficulties, real or perceived, it was therefore necessary to look beyond the workplace interactions to the broader social context. Therefore this section will first provide an overview of Australia's migration patterns and policies since the post-war period. Then the chapter will review previous studies, which identify different barriers to participation in the labour market experienced by IT professionals from abroad. The third section of the chapter (section 2.5) introduces the theoretical frameworks that have been adopted in exploring intercultural communication in the workplace. The chapter ends by outlining the way in which this study complements previous work and detailing the contribution it makes to the field.

I will begin by providing an overview of definitions of workplace communication, as they are relevant for the present study. Then key aspects of Australia's recent history of migration and related policy will be discussed in order to provide the background to the current social climate confronting migrants on arrival. This background will show that the need for migration has remained a constant concern for Australian policymakers since the post-war period. This need has been reflected in numerous government policies which have addressed the selection process as well as the challenges that have arisen from effectively managing a linguistically and culturally diverse workplace.

2.2 Definition of workplace communication

This is also a study of workplace talk and one of the motivations was to discover what constitutes workplace talk, as explained above. It is therefore necessary to include an overview of how different scholars have defined workplace talk and finally, how it is defined in this study. I stated earlier that I was interested in finding out what type of language and interactions the professionals who were my students used in the workplace. It is therefore appropriate to include a section that highlights that what is understood by the term *workplace talk* is not clear-cut but contested. The difficulty of capturing what constitutes workplace communication suggests that talk at work is not only defined by the institution and but that it is not separate from social factors.

The aim of this section is to review definitions of the term 'institutional talk' and how it is defined in this study. The term 'institutional talk' is attributed to Drew and Heritage who defined it in contrast to what they referred to as 'ordinary conversation'. Numerous attempts have been made to define and distinguish this form of talk. For example Neil (1996) offers the following comprehensive classification. Firstly, she identifies work-centred discourse such as discussions about who does what tasks. Next, she identifies work-related discourse such as discussions about pay and conditions and days off.

Further, she claims that general conversation or small talk, such as greetings, prolonged conversations about weekends, topics about home and family, constitute another type of talk. Another type of talk the author identifies is 'large amounts of fooling around' (some of which occurred in the participants' L1 in her study) and lastly, she identifies silences (1996, p. 95). Even given this detailed classification, Neil agrees with Drew and Heritage (1992) that just because an interaction takes place in an institution it does not necessarily constitute institutionalised talk (Neil, 1996) Koester (2006) also contrasts workplace communication in casual conversation, stating that the former is goal oriented and determined by institutional roles and identities.

These definitions are limited in that they focus on defining institutional talk according to topics while ignoring the functions of talk. Also, as Cameron points out (2000), they ignore the *manner* in which the employees are required to talk. This is particularly relevant in modern workplaces where certain language uses and language varieties are valorised over others, or, in other words, where talk has become commodified.

The definition used by Otsuji (2008) in her study of five Australian workplaces, captures the fluid relationship between work and non-work talk and highlights the unreliability of dichotomising institutional/casual talk. Otsuji prefers instead the term 'trans-institutional' talk which she believes is more inclusive (p. 79). Following Gaudio (cited in Otsuji 2002), Otsuji uses the notion of 'third place' to refer to casual social interaction which people may seek outside home and work. Otsuji says:

> "A conversation which is held in the workplace, but whose content and purpose is away from pragmatic business with a colleague with whom one might (or might not) be in a hierarchical relationship, could share characteristics with a conversation held in a 'third place'." (2008, p. 80)

Otsuji defines trans-institutional talk as talk which

> "…refers to any conversation which falls outside a conversation dealing with a pragmatic business transaction and is the mental, spatial and temporal 'third place/space' which goes beyond not only the dichotomous institutional versus casual frame of activities, but also goes beyond the temporal and spatial constraints where a historical and biographical contribution to the construction of identity, linguistic and cultural work is possible." (2008, p.81)

This definition is more useful as it relies less on a typology of language used at work according to topics and more on the function of language at work. Also, it is aligned with the notion that the new work order blurs boundaries between home and work and that this is reflected in language - a topic central to this study and one that informs the definition it adopts.

In addition to that by Otsuji, the definition adopted here is complemented by the one offered by Thornborrow (2002) which views workplace communication not as an essentialised and predetermined set of skills but rather as a set of *practices* which are locally constructed (Thornborrow, 2002, p. 7). This constructionist view of language guides the thesis and the approach to the data analysis. In chapters 5 and 6 the analysis of the data presupposes that the data is context bound. Further, the definition adopted in this study also rejects the false dichotomy between institutional and ordinary conversation. This stance is aligned with researchers in the area of workplace communication. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) who also adopt a definition that avoids rigid dichotomising since they consider that speakers' multiple identities are negotiated in interaction, rather than being pre-determined. In addition Holmes and Stubbe (2003)

state that modern workplaces, which are typically less hierarchical and more diversified, place greater demands on workers' interpersonal communication skills above and beyond formal aspects of workplace communication**.** This approach to workplace communication avoids the problem of capturing types of interactions and focuses instead on how language is used, emphasising the functions of talk rather than its content.

One of the claims of the thesis is that it analyses the use of language within the macro context in which it occurs. In this thesis the macro analysis includes viewing communication in contemporary workplace. Aspects of communication in contemporary workplaces will be discussed in the later chapters when I analyse examples of relational talk such as avoiding disagreements. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) outline the changes in the new capitalism which emphasise new roles for employees. They state that:

> "The new work order puts a huge stress on the need for lifelong learning and the need continually to adapt, change and learn new skills, very often *on site* while carrying out the job" (Gee et al 1996 p.6)

Whilst at first glance these broad characteristics are appealing, they can present challenges as employees are also required to take on new roles and enact new identities (Iedema and Scheeres, 2003, Scheeres, 2003). The changes in workplace practices are also reflected in communicative styles preferred by employers with customers and in their teams which are at times prescribed and imposed (Cameron, 2000).

This section has outlined key definitions of institutional talk and defined how it is viewed in this study. I have argued that previous notions of what is understood as institutional talk are problematic as they rely heavily on the false dichotomy between general and institutional talk. Rather, it is the nature of the work and the relationships formed in the workplace that determines the type of talk. Therefore these factors have to be considered in a study of this kind. In addition, the section provided a brief outline of the characteristics of contemporary workplaces as this informs the analysis of participants' talk in context in the later chapters.

2.3 Background to Australia's immigration policy

Like other countries from the so-called 'global north', Australia is regarded as a traditional migrant host nation and has been a multilingual and multicultural nation since the middle of the 20th century. According to the ABS, in June 2011 there were six million overseas-born residents from more than 200 countries living in Australia including those from New Zealand (NZ) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Migration policy in Australia has always reflected the business sector's need for workers with particular skills. Since the post-war period the federal government, both Labour and Liberal, has formulated migration policy to support labour needs which it considers a necessary stimulus measure. For example, during the post-WWII period, Australian immigration policy aimed at increasing the number of migrants settling here as part of the famous 'populate or perish' campaign (Jupp, 2007). Accordingly, migrants from European countries were sought to fill vacancies in the industrial sector. Despite official support for migration, tensions surrounding the arrival of non-British migrants have persisted over the years and in reality there has always been tension associated with increases in migration levels, particularly where professional migrants are concerned (Jordens, 1995). Concern that migrants, even if temporary, will pose a threat to locals'

jobs is neither new nor surprising in Australia (Lakha, 2005). For instance, the film *Mike and Stefani* (Film Australia 2002) provides examples of the propaganda used by the Calwell government to attract migrants to Australia in the 1950s and the strategies adopted by that Labour government to address locals' fears that foreigners might take 'our jobs'. The concerns addressed by the government in that celluloid document are strongly echoed in recent media reports regarding the issuing of 457 short stay working visas for fruit pickers from the Pacific Islands (Paxinos, 2002; Martin, 2008). It is ironic that more than half a century later it is still necessary for the Australian government to convince sections of the public that the presence of migrants is not a threat to the country but a benefit, as will be discussed later in this section.

Government policy regarding migration was dominated by assimilationist policies until the 1970s when a number of multicultural policies that valued and promoted diversity were introduced. These were introduced by the Whitlam government and were continued by the subsequent Fraser government. In an era underpinned by support for multiculturalism, the notion of 'productive diversity' was adopted by the Commonwealth government in 1992 under the Keating-led Labour government and was subsequently taken up by the Howard government. *Productive Diversity* was made up of five key concepts: flexibility, multiplicity, devolution, negotiation and pluralism (Cope, 1997). The authors explain that this approach to managing a diverse workplace promoted a more inclusive approach which aimed at capitalising on Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity (Leitner, 2004) and moved Australia's multicultural policy into a phase of multiculturalism that was more closely tied to economic benefits (Leitner 2004). The aim of *Productive Diversity* was described as follows:

> "The main emphasis of the Productive Diversity program in the last three years has been to articulate a sound business case for diversity

> management. The achievements to date will be built on thorough further development of business case studies and tools to support Australian businesses to maximise the benefits of diversity in the workplace and the community." (Australian Government, 2003)

Productive Diversity (PD) was considered a progressive policy for its time as it aimed at addressing the under-use of migrant skills in the workplace. In spite of some initial success however, this policy was not successful in the long term. Bertone and Esposito (2000) evaluated the success of the PD policy in the workplace in a study commissioned by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and CEDA, a business research group. The study (which adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods) explored the knowledge about and views on productive diversity of managers in a number of sectors ranging from automotive to information technology and tourism. The study found that productive diversity was implemented in several ways. This policy attempted to make use of ethnic diversity at work such as having specialised health services. Another area in which productive diversity was found to be successful was in introducing interpreter services for NESB customers and multicultural marketing, therefore using heritage languages as a resource to expand markets. In addition, productive diversity was found to be operating successfully by addressing diversity at work and providing cross-cultural training. Lastly, breaking down barriers by providing cross-cultural training and recognition of skills was another way this policy made a positive impact. The study also found that some large employers such as Telstra and NAB had gained by reaching out to specific markets and hiring ethnically diverse staff to reach these markets. However, there was an overall tendency to stereotype NESB workers who found it difficult to step outside their role as designated "diversity" person. In contrast, Anglo employees did not experience this burden when moving into different roles in the companies (Bertone, 2002). In addition, even among the companies that

supported productive diversity, it was found that implementing these policies was considered a low priority. Furthermore, productive diversity was not necessarily supported across all areas of participating companies.

Since the 1990s, Australian migration policy has continued to accept skilled migrants as a result of pull-factors such as continued labor shortages (Hugo, 1994; Boese, 2009; Colic-Peisker, 2011) and push-factors such as relatively limited opportunities in migrants' countries of origin. Between the post-WWII period and 2010, permanent migration under the skilled category represented 51.8% of the total addition to the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, p. 2). However, significant changes have been observed in this period as the types of workers needed are no longer unskilled but professionals. For example in the 1999-2000 period the IT industry identified a need for 31,500 IT and Telecommunication employees (Xiang, 2001, p. 74). Furthermore, the sources of migrant labor have changed to include greater numbers of migrants from India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) making migration more visible than during earlier periods. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the 2005-6 period, in addition to migrants from the UK (24%), the majority of skilled migrants are overwhelmingly from India (18%) and the PRC (16%) (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2005).

Another notable change to Australia's migration policy has been the acceptance and inclusion of short-term skilled migrants (Voigt-Graf, 2004; Khoo, 2005). This change was brought about by the Howard government in 1996 and led to a situation where for the first time there were more temporary migrants arriving than ever before (Khoo, 2003). Short-term visa holders include those who hold a 457 temporary work visa as well as international students. Amendments to the migration law in 1996 allowed both 457 and international student visa holders to apply for permanent residence whilst

onshore in a so-called “two-step migration program” (Mares, 2009). This means that many contemporary migrants to Australia had in fact already been living here before having their status changed formalized to “permanent.”

These policies respond to the need for skilled workers and are dominated by economic rationalism (Boese, 2009). This is also reflected in the government’s need to convince the public of the economic benefits of migration, a notion that has been termed ‘economism’, (Boese, 200). Economism has also driven the push for the acceptance of migrants in regional centres and in some areas where the influx of migrants has helped to revitalise otherwise economically depressed regions (Colic-Peisker, 2006). Centres such as Young in NSW became one of many ‘refugee welcome zones’ in a bid to revitalise the local economy. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury comment that:

> “Not surprisingly, pro-refugee arguments expressed in dollars and cents seem to have had more effect on politicians and government bureaucrats than the humanitarian rhetoric coming from refugee advocates.” (2006, p. 205)

In the face of the 2009 global economic downturn there were fears that the continued arrival of migrants would pose a threat to jobs. Around this time the Editor of IPA Review magazine Chris Berg reminded Australians that new migrants bring jobs to the economy as they are also consumers (Berg, 2009). Berg’s article demonstrates his belief that is was necessary to assuage public fears of the inflow of foreign labour by pointing to the economic benefits they bring.

This section has provided an overview of key migration policies from the post-war period till the present time and their impacts in Australia. The discussion illustrates that at the same time that there is a need to fill labour shortages, social and political tensions in

Australian society persist. Elder (2007) explains these tensions by proposing that two narratives of the Australian story co-exist. The first is that of Australia as a white British nation, and the other is of Australia as a multicultural society. Evidence of the persistence of the white British narrative is provided each time that increases in migration ignite tensions in the community. Hage's suggestion (1998) that Australia is an imagined white society also supports this thesis. Ongoing tensions associated with the arrival of migrants are not likely to change in the near future. The next section reviews studies that have addressed the concerns that migrants face both in their quest for work and in the workplace. It also discusses the need to conduct more research into the experiences of migrant professionals and specifically IT professionals, a group which has not previously been the focus of a linguistic study.

2.4 Labour market disadvantage in the Australian context

In the previous section I outlined the key policies that regulate migration to Australia. This section will review studies of labour market disadvantage.

The problems resulting from the flow of overseas-trained individuals into the Australian market have been studied by academics from a range of disciplines including economics, sociology and linguistics. These studies have uncovered numerous barriers facing overseas-trained workers and their consequences. It is ironic that the expertise that facilitated many migrants' entry to and settlement in Australia is not valued in the market place. The phenomenon of highly skilled workers being employed in positions which do not adequately utilise their skills and experience, leads to 'the proverbial taxi driver with a PhD' (Doomernik, 200) cliché, a phenomenon referred to as 'brain abuse' by Bauder (in Mahmud, 2008, p. 1). In this section I outline findings of research into the barriers facing migrant professionals in the Australian workforce and strategies that have been adopted to overcome them.

2.4.1 Factors that lead to market place disadvantage

Since the 1980s studies have shown consistently that professional migrants settling in Australia are over-represented in lower skilled positions (Mahmud, 2008; Clyne, 1994; Bertone, 2004; D'Netto, 2008; Colic-Peisker, 2003) and are forced to accept lower level skilled or unskilled jobs in order to survive in Australia (D'Netto, 2008). In addition migrants have reduced social mobility when compared with their pre-migration status (Mahud et al 2008) and when compared to their Australian-born counterparts (Bertone, 2004).

For instance, research into the experience of engineers, a group of professionals whose skills were in demand due to local skills shortages and who were supported by the Skilled Migration Visa program throughout the1980s, found that in spite of their desirable qualifications, migrant engineers had difficulty gaining employment (Hawthorne, 1994).

One barrier consistently cited in the research is lack of 'local' experience, that is, experience working in Australia (Hawthorne, 1994; Hawthorne, 1994; Hawthorne, 1994, Hawthorne, 1996; D'Netto, 2008)

Other barriers include the fact that overseas and local qualifications do not always match easily (Hawthorne 1994). In addition, Australian norms surrounding job interview techniques were found to pose difficulties for some professionals (Hawthorne 1994, 1996). At the same time reluctance by employers to provide feedback on interview performance made this difficult to address (Hawthorne 1994). Research by Mahud et al (2008) also found that Australians seem to prefer locally trained employees and to make judgments on the basis of an applicant's country of origin rather than their qualifications.

Another barrier reported in previous studies is migrant professionals' alleged lack of English proficiency (Hawthorne 1994, 1996, D'Netto et al, 2008). However, the research shows that the claim that NESB applicants lack English language proficiency can be seen as a way of discriminating against NESB professionals (Hawthorne,1994; Berman, 2008; Colic-Peisker, 2005; Piller, 2009). (Examples of linguistic discrimination on the basis of language in the US are documented in Lippi- Green 2011 and in Canada the study by Creese and Wiebe, 2009). In addition, it has been pointed out that accented English can be misinterpreted as a lack of proficiency which can significantly limit an individual's chances of employment as well as promotion (D'Netto et al. 2008 among others).

These studies are significant as they have uncovered a range of difficulties experienced by migrants and the possible economic and social consequences that result when migrant's skills are underutilised. However, previous research is not limited to studies of factors that lead to market place disadvantage. Research has also been conducted into employers' attitudes to hiring overseas-trained professionals. This research is reviewed in the next section.

2.4.2 Studies of employer attitudes

Research into employer attitudes to NESB employees is particularly significant as it helps to unravel the attitudes held by the gatekeepers and allows policymakers to address the difficulties from all angles. Furthermore, the results of these studies help shift the emphasis from an individual migrant's responsibility to navigate and succeed a hostile labour market to the behaviour of powerful gatekeepers. The studies that I outline here suggest an ongoing reluctance on the part of employers to accept overseas-qualified professionals. This is a problem that needs to be addressed at the policy level.

Research also suggests that reluctance to employ NESB candidates is expressed in subtle ways that avoid accepting responsibility.

An early study of employer attitudes towards overseas-qualified engineers found that one of the problems faced by engineers in the Australian workplace was ethnic stereotyping (Hawthorne 1994). For example, engineers from Eastern Europe were not considered suitable candidates due to the nature of their technological background and linguistic fit. Indian engineers were not highly regarded due to the perceived lack of clarity in their speech given their 'excessive' speed and intonation patterns (p. 69). This researcher also reported that some of the employment agencies' assessments of NESB applicants bordered on racism. This is exemplified in a case where an agent described a Middle Eastern engineer as having 'that very dark arrogant look- I mean, me it is almost *evil*' (1994, p.69, italics in the original). Since then, ethnic stereotyping has repeatedly been confirmed as a persistent barrier to employment. For example the study by Booth (2002) offers a unique behind- the-scenes view of the attitudes held by gatekeepers, namely Australia-based recruiters of IT professionals from India who are interviewed via video conference. This study analyses Australian recruiters' perceptions of the interviewees' performance using the discussions among the recruiters following the interviews about each applicant as the primary source of data. The study, based on the researcher's observation of the interviews and analysis of the comments made by the recruiters, reveals that the recruiters' assessments of un/successful candidates are based on their evaluation and assessment of linguistic and paralinguistic factors which came to be seen as indicators of 'cultural fit'. Although Booth states that her presence may have tempered the comments made by the recruiters, the scripts reveal attitudes towards the Indian applicants that often point to cultural stereotyping and recruiters' intolerance of communicative differences. For example, the recruiters were found to place a lot of emphasis on body language as well as intelligibility, communicative style,

and presentation skills. In addition, Booth found that the recruiters evaluated favourably those they felt had similar technical expertise and workplace values to themselves, which suggested that they were looking for cultural similarities in the candidates. According to Roberts et al (cited in Booth p. 371) this focus on differences means that employers focus on deficits rather than benefits. Candidates would therefore have to work at reducing differences and highlighting similarities in an already demanding communicative situation.

Applying non-traditional economic models to explain how employees are selected also highlights employer preferences for ESB candidates. Traditionally, economists have used Human Capital (HC) theory which uses supply and demand models to account for labour distribution. Research shows however, that this leads to underemployment and underpayment for migrant workers (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Colic-Peisker, 2003; Ho, 2004). However, researchers agree that problems such as underemployment are more adequately explained by frameworks that account for socially driven factors in the labour market. Thus, the framework known as labour market segmentation theory (LMS) (Castles, 2003) offers a more appropriate way of explaining social factors such as some employers' preference for employing workers who closely resemble themselves. Alcorso (2006, p. 72) states that the 'labour market segments partly due to the result of attributes of various social groups' i.e. factors external to the labour market.

Research shows that employers' preference for ESB employees is sometimes stated explicitly. For example a study by the Victorian Human Rights Commission (2008) conducted specifically to address the issue of labour market experiences found that migrant professionals were disadvantaged at the job entry level. This study focused on four Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) areas in the state of Victoria - Shepparton, Dandenong, Footscray and Broadmeadows - and reported that 30% of

native Australian employers stated a preference for hiring Anglo-Celtic-Australians. In addition, the findings suggest that discrimination takes place on racial and religious grounds.

Further confirmation of the existence of ethnic discrimination at the job entry level is provided by an experimental study conducted by economists Booth, Andrew and Varganova (2009). This study was designed to explore whether potential employers responded differently to applicants with names which suggested a specific ethnic background. Bogus applications were designed which differed only in the fact that the applicant's name suggested Anglo-Saxon, Indigenous, Italian, Chinese or Middle Eastern origin. These applications were then submitted to real entry-level service job openings. The study found that those with Chinese and Middle Eastern names were significantly less likely to gain a job interview than applicants with names denoting the other ethnic backgrounds, as these individuals had to submit at least 50% more job applications to achieve the same call-back rate as Anglo-Saxon applicants. Other research further confirms that employers view foreign names unfavourably (Almeida, 2010; Carlsson, 2009; Hosoda, 2010).

Finally, Almeida (2010) study of accountants and IT workers in Wollongong adds to our understanding of the role of recruiters in the labour market participation of migrants. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, Almeida investigated factors that influence employer choice and result in the under-utilisation of skilled migrant labour. The study confirms earlier research that Australian employers are reluctant to employ overseas-trained professionals. However, Almeida's study reports that employers who had experience of working in diverse teams were more tolerant of ethnic differences. Further the study found that higher IELTS scores do not necessarily translate into increased employment success and that employers considered factors other than

English language proficiency such as more ‘tacit’ forms of communication skill including tact, modestly and interaction skills (2010, p. 215).

The fact that discrimination exists in the labour market is seldom stated directly. In contemporary democracies racism is rarely displayed in overt terms but occurs in subtle discursive ways that make it difficult to prove. This has been referred to as the ‘new racism’ (Van Dijk, 2000) and is evidenced in a recent study which identified six discursive strategies adopted by potential employers across a range of industries and at different levels of management to deflect discrimination from the institution to the individual (Tilbury, 2006). These strategies include avoiding the topic of discrimination, transferring discrimination to clients, to the market, to job (ir)relevant issues, to other staff, and finally, transferring the problem of discrimination to the potential employee. Tilbury and Colic-Peisker argue that by positioning themselves as ‘bit’ players in the larger labour market, employers are minimising their responsibility for any shortcomings or shifting responsibility to the migrants themselves, absolving the institution of any responsibility in the name of the neo-liberal right of choice.

The studies outlined in this section have identified an important obstacle to successful participation in the marketplace, perhaps the most important one of all in order to effect change — employer preference for ESB employees. It is timely to recall that professionally trained migrants experience greater difficulty being accepted into the Australian workforce than blue-collar worker migrants as the professional bodies are more guarded and less willing to accept overseas qualifications (Jordens, 1995). It has always been the case that professional bodies have more control over who is allowed in; in other words, they are stronger gatekeepers than the government itself. The case of overseas- trained doctors and the difficult trajectory they experience in gaining acceptance by the Australian Medical Association is a well-documented instance of the

complex rules they must navigate to obtain registration in Australia (ABC Radio National Health Report, 2008) which became the subject of a parliamentary inquiry (Parliament of Australia Inquiry, 2010). To further our understanding of how this disadvantage is manifested, it is therefore important to compare candidates' perceptions of interview experiences with the ways in which gatekeepers perceive and evaluate NESB candidates. It is equally important to compare these findings with actual workplace experiences. In this regard the present study fills a pertinent gap since it contributes to our understanding of these barriers as perceptions rather than actual participant deficits and claims that these perceptions are part of invisible but nonetheless real barriers to employment.

The next section focuses specifically on studies that document the experiences of IT professionals, who are the focus of this study. The review of this literature will further identify the need for the current study.

2.4.3 IT professionals' experience: previous studies

Recent studies have focussed on the labour market experiences of overseas-trained IT professionals, both permanent residents and holders of a 457 temporary visa. This visa category is specifically intended to fill labour shortage gaps. Research by Almeida (2011) and Alcoro and Ho (2006) shows that migrant IT professionals in Australia have a better experience than other professional groups but indicates that this group of professionals also experience some disadvantages.

The greater success enjoyed by IT professionals in comparison to other groups of migrant professionals is attributed to several factors. First, IT professionals' skills are currently in demand in Australia. Second, IT professionals are highly mobile and their

skills are easily transferrable (Alcorso and Ho 2006, Almeida 2010). Third, the IT sector is accustomed to the participation of a highly diverse group of overseas-trained professionals. This is demonstrated in the finding that HR professionals in the IT sector and IT division heads displayed a greater level of tolerance towards ethnic and religious diversity than individuals in other sectors of the labour market (Almeida, 2010, p. 215). This greater acceptance is possibly the result of the diverse nature of the IT professional community, following two decades of recruitment of IT professionals from abroad.

Another factor which favours migrant IT professionals' chances in the employment market is that the sector recognises international and industry qualifications such as CISCO, Microsoft and Oracle (Almeida 2010). For example, the CCIE (Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert) certificates are regarded as the most prestigious certificates for network engineers. Many of the participants for this study had already gained CCIE certification or were preparing to take the examination. Furthermore, IT professionals' skills and knowledge are viewed as highly transferable making this sector 'a de-territorialised structure of production' (Alcorso and Ho, 2006, p. 121). In particular, Almeida (2010) found that unlike accountants, migrant IT professionals were considered better decision-makers than migrant accountants, because they were viewed as being more international.

However in times of economic downturn, NESB IT professionals were the first to lose their jobs (Alcorso and Ho, 2006). Also, there is some evidence that IT professionals' experiences differ along gender lines with males enjoying a smoother workplace experience than their female counterparts (Alcorso and Ho, 2006).

Research has also been conducted into the experience of a subgroup of IT professionals, namely those who are recipients of the 457 temporary visa category.

Unlike migrants who struggle to find work on arrival, the 457 visa recipients arrive in Australia only if they have assured employment already. A study by Khoo, Voigt-Graf, Hugo and McDonald (2003) found that short-term employment opportunities led to insecurity when job growth slowed in this sector. Also, there was concern that 457 visa holders were paid less than local residents. The study by Voigt-Graf and Graf (2004) adds to our understanding of the expectations of some of the transient workers on 457 visas. This study found that Australia was not regarded as their ultimate destination by young Indian IT professionals. Instead, these young professionals considered Australia as a stepping-stone to gain entry to the US where they believed greater opportunities existed.

However researchers have also conducted studies which go beyond recruitment experiences and aspirations and focus on communication in the workplace and relationships amongst colleagues and supervisors. Based on in-depth interviews Lakha (2005) investigated aspects of temporary Indian IT professionals' workplace communication and their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Accordingly this study provides insights into language use at work, a little-explored area in the professions. Respondents stated that in some instances communicative issues did result from differences in how work was conducted in India and Australia. For example, they identified differences in the ways in which staff communicate with their superiors. Lakha (2005) links these issues to hierarchical social differences between India and Australia. While some participants explained some of the communicative differences in relation to aspects of culture, these explanations were rejected by others participants as stereotypical. This study suggests that communication at work may indeed be mediated by cultural differences, or at least initially when - as new employees and newcomers to a country - professionals may perceive that their linguistic performance differs from that of their colleagues. However, as Lakha's (2005) research is based on self-reported data, it

is important to bear in mind that linguistic difficulties are likely to be based on multiple factors not all of which may be open to introspection.

Given that IT professionals regard themselves as having skills that are easily transferable, it is not surprising that they expect to fit into the workplace without undue complications. In fact overall, in spite of some difficulties, such as those outlined above, IT professionals have a somewhat more positive experience in the Australian workplace than other migrant professionals (Almeida 2010, Alcorso and Ho, 2006).

Research on the labour market experiences of migrant IT professionals in Australia so far has been carried out from economic and sociological perspectives resulting in the identification of labour market disadvantage for those individuals. Some research has focused on discourses of exclusion (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Tilbury, 2006). Whilst some studies have attempted to gain an understanding of language difficulties experienced by migrant professionals in the workplace (Lakha 2005), there is an absence of research that systematically investigates how those who report difficulties entering the workplace actually managed once they gained a job. As I will show in Chapter 3, longitudinal studies are needed that can chart the full trajectory from job seeking to employment, and from reluctance to employ to acceptance, to reveal whether the anticipated difficulties are in fact borne out in experience and if so, how these can be managed. Although several of the studies discussed above allude to linguistic difficulties experienced by respondents, these are not corroborated by analysis of the individuals' workplace interactions. In other words, previous studies have focused on identifying difficulties and barriers experienced but this represents only one stage of the experience. In order to complete the picture, it is necessary to also explore how communication occurs once migrant professionals begin their working life in Australia.

The following section will outline the distinctive sociolinguistic approach I take to analysing the barriers to employment reported by the participants.

2.4.4 Linguistic proficiency in the workplace

So far I have reviewed the literature that deals with barriers to employment in the Australian market and I have shown that many of these studies identify English *proficiency* as problematic for NESB migrants. The studies reviewed report the need for migrants to have greater English proficiency and indicate that NESB migrants enjoy greater employment opportunities in Australia than their NESB counterparts (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Hawthorne, 1996; Birrell, 1997; Ho, 2004). However, these studies are somewhat limited in that the problem of lack of English proficiency is reported as being a workplace barrier by the migrants themselves or employers but there is no observational evidence to indicate that this is in fact the case. Further, these studies assume that NESB migrants who report a lack of English language proficiency do in fact lack proficiency. Few studies have specifically addressed social factors that may disadvantage NESB employees such as attitudes towards non-native speaker varieties, often signaled by accented English. Another aspect of workplace communication that needs to be taken into account and understood in the study of workplace success is the nature of communication in contemporary workplaces, to avoid presenting reified and idealised notions of workplace talk. These two factors will be discussed below.

Some of the existing literature on NESB labour disadvantage has already indicated that linguistic attitudes rather than actual intelligibility issues often function as a barrier. Hawthorne advocates paying attention to other issues in the context as well as language proficiency. She states:

> “Attributing the labour market disadvantage of NESB immigrants purely to inferior English may serve to mask other critical factors - for example, race, culture and ethnicity.” (Hawthorne, 1994, p. 59)

Piller (2010) goes further and makes the point that often labour market disadvantage does not stem from lack of proficiency but from social factors, arguing that this is often overlooked. This point is illustrated by the fact that adequate English language proficiency in itself is not a guarantee of labour market success.

Other studies have shown that sociolinguistic factors and not weak English language skills may lead to disadvantage. For example Burton’s little-cited study (1989, cited in Booth 2002) found that the professionals she taught in English language classes needed to know how their professions were organised in Australia more than to improve their language skills. Other research suggests that the shift from a unionised workforce to individual workplace enterprise bargaining systems favoured by contemporary workplaces presents a further disadvantage for migrant workers (Bertone, 2000) since newcomers need to be familiar with how each industry or company conducts these agreements. Bertone highlights the need for migrant workers to have the necessary skills to negotiate with management, a role which traditionally belonged to union representatives. She argues that *'the greater stress on communication skills, multi-skilling, teamwork and participation* in the workplace […] would disadvantage migrants who have poor English language skills" (Bertone, 2000, p. 57; italics in the original)

Bertone also identifies the potential for NESB workers to experience difficulty with some spoken genres:

> “An increasing emphasis on interpersonal skills across most sectors and jobs has posed particular challenges for immigrants from diverse cultures and backgrounds.” (2004, p. 48)

Interpersonal communication skills or ‘soft skills’ also need to be addressed with particular reference to NESB workers. Research that addresses language skills in modern workplaces reveals that the focus on flexibility and flatter hierarchical organization systems is more likely to place greater demands on workers’ communication skills (Holmes, 2003; Gee, 1996). Other researchers argue that speaking styles and ‘scripts’ promoted in certain workplaces are instances of the ‘commodification’ of language in the workplace (Cameron, 2000; Heller, 2010) as will be discussed out in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

One aspect of workplace communication that has been investigated relates to client-employee communication. The use of language in the new capitalist workplaces has largely been studied from the viewpoint of the customer-client relationship, and explores how language is scripted and how certain varieties of English are imposed and thus commodified (Cameron 2000). For example Cowie (2007; Rahman 2009) report that call centre workers in India and Pakistan are trained to neutralise their Indian and Pakistani English in order to accommodate to North American markets where customers prefer to deal with workers using a US English variety. These studies focus on how particular varieties of English are not only favoured but in some cases rewarded in workplace settings. As will be pointed out in Chapter 4, these preferences signal linguistic attitudes rather than relate to the language proficiency that is required in the workplace.

Other researchers have investigated new discourses which workers in the new economy must navigate and negotiate and which can at times lead to tensions (Iedema, 2003) as

I stated above (section 2.2 is included in the macro context in this thesis). These studies highlight the problematic nature of changing workplaces for workers generally and do not address NESB speakers in particular. However, such studies indicate the need for workplace language courses to encompass more than proficiency development. In other words success in workplace communication can depend on knowledge of style and genres of speaking which are not easily acquired outside the communicative context.

It is this aspect of communication that I set out to include in my study in order to provide a fuller picture of the complexities of effective workplace communication. As my analysis will show, participants in the present study who work in different areas of the IT sector require both technical and 'soft' skills to manage back and front-stage talk. In fact, in many instances it is the 'soft' skills which are more highly valued than the technical skills. This point is highlighted by Almeida (2010) who reports that in spite of the attention and apparent preference by some employers 'proficiency' in English, employers in her study valued 'soft skills'. She states:

> "Rather employers assessed additional, yet more tacit forms of communication skills, such as confidence, tact, modesty, interaction skills, interpretation skills and use of effective open face-to-face communication techniques." (2010, p 215)

Another feature of workplace communication is that it includes mixed genres. The competence underlying speakers' ability to perform those different genres appropriately goes well beyond pure linguistic or grammatical competence (Canale, 1980). In fact, workplace communication often employs genres normally associated with casual talk. A number of studies which highlight these features of communication are discussed below.

Contemporary workplaces, with their emphasis on flexibility, give rise to a fusion of work and non-work roles and identities. One manifestation of this fusion is that the difference between communication at work and at home is less marked today than in pre-technology-driven workplaces. For example, the anthropologist English-Lueck (2002) found in her study of IT professionals in Silicon Valley that even though the phrase 'work-work' was used by participants in an attempt to delineate paid and unpaid work tasks, in reality participants found it difficult to draw this distinction clearly. Similarly, the sociologist Putman (2000) has observed that the main site for establishing social networks in contemporary times is at work. Focusing more on the language that accompanies this change, Fairclough (1992) emphasises that post-Fordist work practices and the accompanying discourses has resulted in the fact that:

> "people's social identities as workers are coming to be defined in terms that have traditionally been seen not as occupational, but as belonging to the sphere of private life." (1992, p. 7).

In terms of how work and non-work talk is organised in different institutions, research shows that the distribution of work/non-work talk can depend on how these terms are defined along the continuum between structural and functional lines (Otsuji, 2008). Further, the definition of work/non-work talk can be related to the nature of the work (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). Research also indicates that the functions of work/non-work talk differ according to various factors including gender (Holmes and Marra, 2004). Spencer-Oatey (2005, p. 107) suggests that achieving the appropriate 'mix' of relational and transactional goals in workplace settings can be difficult and can even backfire, for instance if the management of goals is perceived as being too strategic (Kasper in Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p. 107). Laver (1975) suggests that phatic talk (referred to as

relational talk in this thesis) tends to happen in English at the boundaries of talk, for example, at the beginning or at the end phase of interactions.

Research into relational talk in workplace communication has identified a number of interesting patterns. These studies indicate that relational talk can occur at different places in a stretch of talk and is not necessarily predictable or uniform. For example, while some studies have shown that relational talk occurs more commonly at opening and closing points in meeting talk (Mullany, 2007), others show that relational talk cannot always be neatly assigned to sequences such as openings or closings (Koester, 2006). Koester asserts that talk — whether work or relational based — takes place in a flow or mixture according to the dominant goal of the speaker. Whilst a number of the sequences analysed in Koester's study are easily recognised as work oriented, others are more concerned with the way the speakers relate to one another. Koester concluded from her studies that relational sequences were not easily identifiable as belonging to a particular place in interactions. This finding is supported by evidence from the present study.

This section has highlighted some aspects of workplace communication competence that ought to be considered in the term 'proficiency'. The next section reviews research into intercultural communication (ICC) as it is relevant to in this study.

2.5 Framework of analysis of intercultural communication at work

This section will discuss possible frameworks of analysis and the one adopted in this study of workplace communication. The relationship between language and culture has long been a central preoccupation of scholars in disciplines such as linguistics and anthropology. Studies of Intercultural Communication (ICC) have been concerned with how the relationship between the two constructs plays out in interactions which occur in

locations such as workplaces. The extent to which language and cultural differences are considered to impact negatively on interactions is shaped by the theoretical lens applied to the analysis of the interactions and to a large extent the researchers' orientation. Thus studies that are oriented towards cross-cultural linguistic paradigms (which have proliferated over the past thirty years) have emphasised the role of cultural differences in IC interactions, particularly when explaining miscommunication (Bührig, 2006). The essentialist view adopted in these studies attributes communication failure to cultural differences in communicative aspects such as speech patterns and linguistic preferences. In the following section I review the key theoretical paradigms that give rise to the proliferation of these essentialist cross-cultural studies before reviewing paradigms that adopt a different approach. The point of departure for the analysis of the data for this study is that IC interactions are best analysed by taking a constructivist orientation to IC.

The key question for researchers adopting a post-structuralist view of intercultural communication is summed up by Gumperz as follows:

> "How and to what effect does language enter into intercultural communication? Or, to put it somewhat more precisely, how does culture through language affect the way we think and communicate with others of different background" (2000, p. 36)

Gumperz argues that context plays a key role in communication and can be understood as:

> "….. the discursive practices that actors employ in the pursuit of communicative ends and in negotiating shared understandings in the course of their everyday lives." (2000 p. 37)

Gumperz argues that ICC encounters have been treated as problematic because they have failed to address power structures. Power structures should have a central role in the study of communication as it is due to unequal power structures and the ‘ pervasiveness of pejorative attitudes and values, that have their root in the inequalities of power and economic resources characteristic of today’s societies (2000, 36).

The issue of unequal power is central in ICC in the context of workplace interactions between ESB and NESB workers where the disadvantage experienced by migrants has been attributed to cross-cultural differences but may in fact be the result of institutional pressures which impact on the interaction. For example, the minimal responses given in an interaction such as a job interview can be mistakenly attributed to cultural explanations whereas the answer may lay in the asymmetrical power differences between the gatekeepers and the interviewee as well as ambiguity in the questions asked (Sarangi, 1994). In a quoted example, Sarangi makes a convincing argument that the question ‘right, mhm hm what kind of driving have you been doing in England’ (p. 417) refers to quality of driving rather than the ‘type’ of vehicles the interviewee has experience driving and argues that the interviewee’s failure to understand this leads to the long pause and minimal response provided.

With particular reference to workplace or business communication Piller highlights the flaws in Hofstede’s widely-accepted model of cultural difference (see Piller, 2009). Further she emphasises what she refers to as ‘culturalism’ which consists of behaviours which use elements of culture to define a person (Piller, 2007, p. 218). A social constructionist view, on the other hand, represents a shift away from this cross-cultural perspective emphasising that “it is linguistic and social practice that bring culture and identity into being’ (Burr, cited in Piller 2007 p. 209). In addition Piller emphasises that post-structuralist approaches focus more on what she refers to as ‘having culture’ rather

than ‘doing culture’ (Piller, 2011, p. 84) and as studies taking this approach employ ethnographic methods, they are more likely to provide contextually rich data about communication in IC contexts. Thus rather than imposing culture as a category, the researcher looks for contextual factors such as the employer’s orientation and how differences are interpreted by the company as well as whether they actually matter (2011 p. 84-5).

Studies of ICC interactions which only consider cultural differences as a cause of unsuccessful communication neglect obvious factors such as unequal power and its discursive performance. The impact of these variables on communicative styles can be seen in meetings between powerful managers and their subordinates where hierarchy plays a central role. For example the way that interactants respond to questions in business meetings, the focus of Yeung’s (2003) study of business IC encounters, illustrates this point very well. Yeung demonstrates that it is the nature of the questions asked that determined the subordinates’ silence during meetings and not the fact that they were Chinese. Other studies too have addressed silence as a factor in IC interactions, an interactional feature which has too often been attributed to cultural factors. For example, a microanalysis of business interactions reveals that the ‘silencing’ factor is attributed to issues of ‘ownership’ of English rather than given cultural characteristics (Aritz, 2009). In Aritz’s study it was not ethnicity that determined silence in interactions but whether the interactants were part of a dominant or minority group in the interaction. Similarly, a close analysis of business meeting interactions between Swedish and Finnish speakers revealed that some discourse features were not related to cultural factors but rather to the topic and the role the speaker had in the interaction (Louhiala-Salminen, 2005).

This phenomenon of mistakenly attributing behaviour to particular cultural traits has also been documented in the context of tertiary study. Research that investigated voluntary tutorial participation by a group of Japanese university students in Australian universities (where students are likely to be evaluated in negative terms if they do not participate in tutorials) (Nakane, 2006) reported that students resisted tutorial participation for a range of reasons such as avoiding loss of face. However lack of participation was also explained by students' anxieties about their English speaking abilities which were unrelated to cultural differences and more related to their perceptions of their ability to communicate with native speakers of English.

At the same time that these recent studies provide more pertinent explanations of what is going on in interactions, it is discouraging to see that English business IC training manuals continue to promote the view that culture is a 'given' in interactions and is the main factor that leads to communication success or failure (Angouri, 2010). Tzanne (2000) expresses a similar view in her study of miscommunication, stating that it is not just culture that people bring to the interaction:

> "Consequently it is reasonable to ask whether cultural background differences relate to the creation and/or development of *all* misunderstandings in which a person may get involved." (2000, p.7)

This author favors a more open-minded approach that takes into account 'the role of situated activity types and participants' roles and power relations in the production and comprehension of talk" (2000, p. 7).

This section has provided a sketch of a post cross-cultural view of approaches to workplace IC. It has highlighted key studies of IC that are oriented to the wider context

and go beyond culture to explain what happens in intercultural communication situations. The next section provides important background to the review of empirical studies of IC in Australia

2.5.1 Intercultural Communication Studies in Australian workplaces

This section reviews studies that have focussed on linguistic aspects of IC workplace interactions in the Australian context. Clyne (1990) pointed out that Australian workplaces are likely to be characterised by a high number of NESB speakers and stated this area creates an excellent opportunity for research (Clyne, 1985, p. 22; Clyne, 1985, p. 22). Review of this literature reveals that to date, there have been few studies of workplace ICC in Australia. The studies that have been conducted can be classified into two distinct groups. The first group of studies takes a cross-cultural approach whilst the second focuses more closely on the nature of the interactions according to contextual factors. The review of these studies, which is thematically organised, will conclude by highlighting the need for studies of workplace interactions that adopt a constructivist approach.

Some pertinent studies of workplace interactions use speech act theory to show that unsuccessful communication can be attributed to pragmatic differences. For example, Béal (1990, 1992, 1994) found that pragmatic differences in speech acts were the main reason for tensions and miscommunication between French and Australian English speakers in a French-owned Melbourne company. This study analysed spontaneous interactions between the employees using politeness theory and face threatening acts and found that pragmatic differences and lack of awareness of how speakers from other cultures operated contributed to misunderstandings. In particular, this study found that in request exchanges, directness and the use of redressive strategies differed among French and Australian speakers (Béal 1990). A further source of cultural difference was

found in relation to whether the question ‘How was your weekend?’ was interpreted as a relational or a formulaic question. Different interpretations of this sequence were the source of tension for these participants.

Similar findings were revealed in a study of interactions among factory workers from diverse cultural backgrounds in Melbourne where English was the lingua franca of migrants from European, Asian and Pacific countries (Clyne, 1994). Analysis of (un)successful communication gathered from natural and video recorded data of meetings revealed that conflict could be attributed to the different cultural patterns which underlined communication. In this study Clyne identified common features of each group’s communication pattern stating, "It is the culture that determines the areal networks promoting similarities in discourse patterns and expectations" (1994, p. 204). His data also found that the frequency of some speech acts differed according to the speakers' backgrounds. For instance he found that Europeans used apologies more frequently, and directives were used more by European men (1994, p. 203) than members of other ethnic groups in the factories.

However, although differences in pragmatic factors are responsible for workplace miscommunication, other contextual factors also play a role (Clyne, 1994, p. 203). For example, the power hierarchy and social distance in the context as well as the relationships amongst participants from other units of production are crucial in determining how workplace communication takes place. Pragmatic differences were also reported as a potential area of difficulty by female professionals in a study by Hawthorne (1996). (Hawthorne 1996). She found that the ‘directness’ and self-promotion required in job interviews as well as the lack of formality were problematic workplace communication issues for overseas-trained engineers (1996). However it is

important to note that these were reported perceptions only and were not based on an analysis of actual interactions.

The study of context includes taking into account preferred discursive factors as well. Thus Yeung's (1993, 2003) analysis of negotiation styles in meetings between Hong Kong and Australian bank managers is significant as the results represent a departure from previous studies. According to his participants, Australian managers were viewed as less democratic or consultative than their Hong Kong counterparts in this study. Using the participatory decision making model (PDM) approach proposed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (cited in in Yeung, 2003) the study found that Australian managers tended to report or announce their decisions rather than seek consultation from their subordinates. Furthermore, a decision transmission was marked by an 'overbearing and negative tone'. Decision advising on the other hand, was typically a mixture of 'selling and 'consulting'. This study is also significant in that it attributes possible differences in management styles to the ethos developed within each company. This is important as it suggests that training literature on 'the Australian workplace' is generalised and may not reflect reality. Furthermore, studies such as Neil's (1996) investigation show that work and communication is negotiated at the local level and transcends cultural differences.

The findings from Yeung's (2003) study are significant in that they differ markedly from those of previous studies which tended to show westerners as belonging to a democratic culture. Yeung's analysis of question types presents a compelling case in demonstrating that the Australian style of management is not necessarily more consultative or inclusive. This study highlights the need to scrutinise not only the frequency of participants' interactions but the contextual features that surround each interaction.

The studies reviewed above are concerned with locating linguistic features that may lead to problematic interactions and fall within the ‘cross-cultural’ approach to the study of language at work. These studies are valuable as they provide insights into possible sources of conflict in diverse workplaces. In some cases, perhaps particularly where there are clear divisions along ethnic lines such as in Béal’s (1994) study, there was a surprising lack of attention by management to the communication problems presented by different value systems. Béal (1994) argues:

> “The most striking fact was how little thought the company as an institution had ever given to the role of language in communication. They seemed to consider language as a neutral tool which had nothing to do with the specific society and culture it represented and was somehow 'transparent' for everyone.” (p. 54)

The study of cross cultural communication interactions has also led to the formulation of policy and ways to address cultural difference in a way that addresses the linguistic rights of all speakers. Clyne (1994), whose work in fostering multi-lingual policy and promoting teaching community languages in Australia is widely recognised and acknowledged, argued that whilst speakers from NESB have different communicative patterns, this does not mean they ought to change these in their host country. He states that attempting to achieve a native-like communication style (in both oral and written discourse) would necessarily entail a change in the psychological make-up of the individual (p. 208). He points out that there needs to be a balance between seeking to attain a command of the communicative rules required to prevent discrimination and beginning to lose a sense of identity (Clyne, 1985). Further, he argued that:

> “What is crucial is for people to be *aware* of variation in discourse patterns and to appreciate their validity. There is generally a greater

> tolerance of grammatical and phonological deviations from native norms than is the case at the pragmatic and discourse level…. largely due to ignorance." (1994, p. 208, italics in original)

As this review points out, Clyne is primarily concerned with the linguistic or communicative rights of migrant workers and the benefits of adopting a view of IC that is not problematic.

In the following section I review two studies which do not reveal problematic communication. These studies share an analysis of data that includes local aspects of workplace context and relationships. The first focuses on the way that the nature of the work shapes the nature of the talk that takes place amongst white-collar professionals (Willing 1992). The second study (Neil 1996) explores factors such as group dynamics and power relations in interactions between workers in the catering area of a Melbourne hospital.

Willing departs from the cross-cultural approach to the study of institutional communication and takes as his starting point the notion that 'all communication is problematic to some degree" (Willing, 1992, p. 1 original italics). His study, based on a corpus of data gathered from the interactions of white-collar professionals, analyses the way in which problems are resolved as they arise in professional settings.

The main focus of Willing's research is therefore discursive features of workplace communication. The main finding of the study was that problem solving was a feature of the participants' way of working. In addition, in order to problem solve, the participants had to be highly interactive. Willing identifies the main functions of this interactivity as *acknowledgement, guidance, clarification and repair* (p. 1*).* Willing's study analyses and

describes the devices that realise the above functions. He argues for the need to analyse how communication at work occurs in order to better inform language or management training, which in his view, is often based on unrealistic or rather vague notions of workplace communication.

Similarly, Neil (1996) goes beyond the role of culture in multilingual and multicultural teams and focuses on issues of group dynamics in her analysis of the ways in which collaboration is achieved amongst low proficiency NESB workers in a Melbourne hospital. By adopting an ethnographic approach to collect the data, Neil was able to identify important background and context-based information that informed her study of the participants' spontaneous interactions. The data analysis was informed by the notion that texts are jointly produced resulting in the identification of the following four collaborative strategies among her participants: turn sharing, repetition, paraphrasing and clarification strategies. Neil attributes collaboration to the strong sense of group identity amongst the workers and a shared power base. She argues that this is due to the fact that the supervisors in her study were also NESB speakers who had come up through the ranks. Accordingly, power was mitigated through this shared experience in the workplace. Furthermore, Neil explains that the participants represent a separate group from other hospital employees and have a strong sense of group identity. These workers are united by their shared characteristics of being migrants and having low status. These are crucial factors which helped Neil? to understand the group and the way they impact on their communication. The ethnographic approach to data collection therefore supplemented the researcher's holistic knowledge of the participants and their context.

This section has reviewed linguistic studies in the Australian workplace. Some of these studies have taken a cross-cultural and politeness view of IC interactions and focused

on analysing differences and problematic talk. Other studies have taken the approach that to analyse ICC interactions it is necessary to consider the wider context and the relationships within which the talk occurs. Each study offers a unique view of and insights into ICC interactions. Taken together, they demonstrate that ICC cannot be viewed as a particular type of communication. It cannot be assumed that just because speakers are from linguistically diverse backgrounds they will be unable to communicate successfully even if there are tensions between their groups. Rather, a more contextually sensitive approach is needed. The next section outlines the way in which the present study addresses this challenge, indicates how it differs from previous studies and highlights what it adds to our understanding of ICC in the Australian workplace context.

2.6 The focus of this study: workplace communication in context

In the preceding section I summarised and evaluated studies concerned with workplace communication in Australia and their theoretical underpinning and discussed the methodology that informed them. The present study adopts an approach to the study of ICC that differs from previous studies in a number of ways. The literature review indicated that a surprisingly small number of workplace communication studies have been carried out in Australia to date. This is surprising given the steady flow of migrants into the professions in Australia and the fact that barriers to employment and the existence of underemployment amongst migrants have been well documented. As I stated in the introduction, the study was motivated by observations of migrants in my classroom and was designed to verify the difficulties they were describing via observation in the workplaces using a multi-method interpretive approach with an overarching post-structuralist theoretical orientation.

Approaching the study in this way means that the study differs from others in several ways. This thesis considers a number of issues at once using a multi-method approach. It considers the wider social context, a socio-political context that seeks professional migrants and facilitates their entry into Australia. This macro context is evident in that the study outlines migrants' experiences in the labour market both before and after finding employment. Using Blommaerts' theoretical framework that accounts for these experiences within a global context, the thesis attempts to bridge a gap observed in previous studies which tended to focus either on migrants' pre or post employment experiences. The analysis of the macro context includes taking into account expectations and demands of modern workplaces or the 'new work order'. The thesis explores aspects of the professionals' habitus within this climate that necessarily shapes their interactions. The analysis of the linguistic data in chapter 5 and chapter 6 will show that how the participants navigate the complexities of communication at work at the same time as attending to relational aspects of their communication that build teamwork and collaboration.

Being able to demonstrate that some professionals can experience barriers at the pre-employment stage and yet participate successfully in workplace interactions once they are in employment is a significant finding. Of course, this is not the case for all the participants, as I indicate in the analysis chapters since the design of the study focuses more on those who are active participants at the expense of those who are more passive or excluded from interactions. I argue that the findings therefore show that barriers, which are often invisible, are a powerful means of excluding migrants during the job-seeking process. However, by analysing successful IC workplace interactions I show that that some of the gatekeepers' fears about migrant workers' unsuitability are unfounded.

The second way in which the study differs is in its approach to the conceptualisation and analysis of the data. Some previous studies that have explored barriers to employment have presented these barriers as attributes of NESB professionals. Other studies have attributed these barriers to labour market segmentation theory. This study however conceptualises the barriers in terms of social phenomena that result when global labour flows bring linguistically diverse people together in the workplace.

The third way in which this study contributes to existing research is in terms of its theoretical orientation. In this thesis, the participants' interactions are studied using methods that account for the impact of the wider social context on their language use, and which take into account the company culture, team culture and global factors that shape the workplaces where the fieldwork was conducted. In addition, the analysis takes into account local contextual factors such as the structure and culture of the workplace. In particular, I take into account how work is carried out and distributed, how teams are organised, how team-members interact within their team and with other employees and with internal and external clients. In this way the participants' linguistic repertoires are analysed beyond the linguistic level.

Further, the study addresses an issue that has not yet been the focus of in-depth study in the Australian context. It is certainly true that Neil (1996) and Willing (1992) provide exemplary approaches to the study of context-specific workplace interactions. Otsuji's study (2008) highlights the fact that the Australian workplace is not always a monolingual space. Otsuji's study also provides an account of identities displayed by the use of English or Japanese by multilingual speakers. However, linguistic studies have tended to orient towards cross-cultural differences of ICC in workplace settings. These studies are valuable in that they highlight the role that culture can play in communication, and more importantly where linguistically this is located.

Finally, this study fills a gap in our understanding of ICC workplace communication by documenting and exploring the vast repertoire of styles valued in the knowledge economy. Consequently, in collecting and analysing the data, I did not limit myself to a traditional understanding of 'proficiency' but instead paid attention to recording all the styles and genres that form the ways of speaking of this group of professional migrants.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of previous research into the discourses of migrants in Australian workplaces, the role of language in neo-capitalist times and developments in the study of IC over the last two decades. The chapter has also reviewed approaches to the study of intercultural communication in recent times. The discussion has highlighted the shift from viewing IC as problematic talk to a more complex approach which analyses the context within which talk is produced where culture is just one of the factors that impacts on the success or failure of communication. Having reviewed the key studies and their findings, I have identified the ways in which this study will add to our understanding of migrants' experiences in and out of the workforce.

The next chapter outlines the methodological approach to data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 **Methodology**

3.1 Introduction

As explained in the Introduction, this study sets out to gain an understanding of the linguistic barriers to employment and in the workplace faced by migrant IT professionals in Australia. Specifically this thesis aims to answer the following three research questions:

1. *What types of barriers (linguistic or social) do migrants in the IT industry experience in the Australian labour market?*
2. *What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?*
3. *What key communicative collaboration patterns can be observed in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges do these patterns of communication pose for skilled migrants?*

The questions were designed to gain an understanding of participants' experiences in the labour market and in the workplace at the social or macro level. The study therefore explores factors such as the employers' attitudes towards NESB English varieties as well as issues related to the employees' NESB identities which shaped some of their experiences in the market place. The research questions also aimed to explore ways in which communication and ways of speaking are organised in the workplaces. The research questions are therefore designed to uncover both the communication patterns used by these professionals as well as the factors which contribute to successful interactions and miscommunication.

This chapter provides a detailed outline of the data collection methodology. The chapter is divided into five parts. The first section outlines the procedure for selecting research sites and recruiting the participants. Subsequently, a description of each site is provided, including how work is carried out there. The next section outlines the types of data collected from each site. Finally an explanation of the approaches adopted in analysing the data is provided.

The study adopts a multi-method approach which employs the principles of linguistic ethnography as developed by Hymes (Hymes, 1972a; Gumperz, 1972). The principles underlying this method maintain that language use cannot be analysed in isolation from the social context within which it occurs and other factors that impact on the interactions which take place. Furthermore, ethnography is viewed not only as a method of data collection but also as a research paradigm (Blommaert, 2010). Analysis of the factors with which the project is concerned demands the kind of focused, holistic approach which linguistic ethnography offers. These approaches are elaborated in the following sections where their appropriateness for responding to the research questions is demonstrated.

3.2 Approaches to data analysis

As stated above, this thesis employed a mixed-methods approach to account for macro and micro aspects of language use. Data collection and analysis followed the principles of linguistic ethnography which aims to give the researcher a greater understanding of language in context (1972b, p. 20). Three different types of data were collected — interviews, recordings and observations. This approach provided the researcher with a rich data set from the emic point of view and facilitated the process of understanding behaviour and practices that participants would not necessarily describe (Blommaert,

2010). This ethnographic approach allows the researcher 'to understand another way of life from the native point of view' (Malinowski cited in Schwartzman, 1984, p. 5) by using data collection methods such as participant observation, interviews and observation which over time allow the researcher to interpret the events observed (Blommaert, 2010). Linguistic ethnography is a holistic approach to the study of language which goes beyond the analysis of formal structures and instead looks at how shared understandings are achieved in context and the rules that govern them (Gumperz, 1972; Gumperz, 1972). In addition, linguistic ethnography takes as its context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code represents only part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw (Hymes, 1972a, p. 7; Hymes, 1964, p. 3; Hymes, 1972a). A linguistic ethnographic approach was deemed the most appropriate for this study since it aimed to gain insights into the shared communicative norms of a particular group of speakers.

The next section outlines the way in which the general framework of linguistic ethnography was put into practice in order to analyse the data for the present study.

3.2.1 Analysing the macro data

The first analysis chapter (Chapter 4) is based on data gathered between 2008 and 2010 using semi-structured interviews conducted with individual participants and company participants employed in the three participating companies. The process of sorting and coding the data consisted of three principal phases. First, each interview was conducted by the researcher using open-ended questions and additional questions as necessary. The questions were guided by the semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix V). In the second phase the researcher listened several times to the recordings and transcribed the interviews taking particular care to note recurring themes. Since transcription was taking place at the same time as other interviews were

being scheduled, issues that came to the fore during transcription were probed in additional questions in subsequent interviews. Initial thematic categories were identified during the interviews and confirmed in the subsequent phases of listening to the data several times and transcribing the interview. Potential thematic categories were either accepted or rejected following multiple readings of the transcripts and confirmation with those participants who were interviewed more than once (See Appendix VI, Table 2). This process allowed the thematic categories (the types of barriers to employment as experienced by the participants) to emerge from the data. Once identified through the listening and transcribing phases, the barriers were listed. In this way a group of categories began to emerge. In the third stage, the categories were confirmed and labelled. Excerpts were then selected for detailed analysis on the basis that they were highly audible and their meaning was clear. The criterion for identifying each category was that one or more participants either explicitly stated or implied that it represented a barrier to employment. This analytical process follows the principles of ethnographic approaches to data analysis which seek to answer the question of 'what is going on here' and also the principles of content analysis which seek to group and examine recurring instances of data (Wilkinson, 2000).

As indicated above, salient themes emerged from the interview data through a process of listening to the interviews several times. This allowed the researcher to identify a pattern of themes. At first these themes were categorised as barriers relating to the participants – for example, their lack of experience in the Australian marketplace. However, further listening and reflection on the data led me to explore other ways of coding these barriers that were less deficit-driven and more socially derived. In the coding process I included markers of otherness as a category.

In Chapter 4 the interview data will be scrutinised to see just how easily those who possess the necessary, desirable human capital are able to make the transition to their host society. In other words it considers how well does human capital and the texts that support it move across borders with IT professionals – a group of professionals with highly mobile skills who often expect the move to a new host society to be unproblematic.

3.2.2 Analysing the micro data

Chapters 5 and 6 are based on analysis of the recordings of spontaneous interactions and meetings as well as observations recorded in the researcher's fieldnotes. The interpretation of the speech events is further anchored in observations of primary and secondary participants. As with the interview data, the analysis of the interactional data was carried out following several steps which are outlined below.

Chapters 5 and 6 present and discuss the types of interactions and types of language used in the workplace interactions recorded and studied, and the way in which these interactions were discursively constructed. The data for these chapters was coded following a lengthy process of repeated listening and transcribing. The method of transcription was broad, attempting to provide as detailed and as accurate a record of the interactions as possible with pauses and overlaps marked, particularly in multi-party interactions. In addition, the transcription included researcher notes about paralinguistic features. The decision to use a broad transcription method rather than a narrow one was determined by the scope of the research questions which aimed to identify categories of interactions or speaking genres.

My decision to adopt a broad method of transcription was also informed by the view that transcription is a technical process rather than a theoretical one; a stance favoured by

Conversation Analysis CA researchers (Cameron, 2001). The limitations of the detailed and localised nature of narrow approaches favored by CA research is highlighted by Wetherell (1998), who states that CA is unable to account for the reason that utterances are made (p. 402). The use of broad transcription was preferred and the focus on interpreting the data was determined more by the discursive practice approach provided by CDA (Fairclough, 1992), which includes many of the elements of analysis described by CA. Thus the process of listening, transcribing and coding was determined by concerns about the context within which the interactions took place and whether these were problematic for the participants.

In addition, as the research questions addressed in these chapters aimed to capture and describe the type of language used by the participants, I focused on the viewpoints the participants expressed through their contributions to the discourse, rather than attempting to quantify all instances of the various types of interactions. This process required me to determine if each interaction was unique or whether the participants (the insiders) viewed this as representative of how they typically worked among themselves. Observational data (recorded in my fieldnotes) and triangulation (considering the views of the interactions provided by the key and secondary participants where possible) also contributed to this interpretative process. The analytical process was further aided by my observations regarding the distinction between team talk and client talk. This allowed me to demonstrate that team talk across the three companies was informal and conversational in both spontaneous interactions and meetings.

The process of coding the data was lengthy and the categories shifted and were modified several times as initial categories were expanded or collapsed over time following further listening and reflection. Several methodological approaches influenced the coding process. At first the categorisation process was driven by attempts to identify

speech acts, their functions and possible instances of miscommunication. However, this process proved to be messy and not representative of what was going on in the recordings. Another attempt to reach a workable coding system involved analysing all instances of talk rather than separating the interactional and the meeting data as originally intended. This proved to be more efficient as it enabled me to focus on the function of the speech events rather than their form. The approach I took in coding the data was to categorise the most salient features of the interactions I observed and recorded. At the same time I was aware that this may not be representative of the company culture. As I point out in section 3.3.4, the thesis privileges those who are active participants in the workplace as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to account for those who are not involved nor included. This process resulted in the identification of the following key characteristics of workplace communication which are the subject of analysis in Chapter 5:

- meetings as a way of organising work,
- informality
- the fusion of work and non-work talk
- technical and non-technical language
- strategies to accommodate to others as a valuable resource

At the micro level the coding system led to the identification of the following categories: advice giving, avoiding disagreements and negotiating team identity by identifying the 'other'. The coded categories arrived at in this way reflect the fact that the participants' language work ranged from the ability to navigate types of talk or genres defined as 'soft skills' (e.g. when managing demanding clients) to dealing with issues of perceived lack of language proficiency. The analysis in Chapter 6 focuses on the construction of the interactions and illustrates the collaborative nature of these interactions, as evidenced by strategies that build team identity

such as mitigating disagreements, advice giving, floor-negotiation techniques and shared narrative techniques.

3.2.3 Locating appropriate research sites

“We have a policy that we don’t let students in here”
(HR staff member, company contacted Fieldnotes, 09)

Gaining access to a research site is often reported as problematic in studies which focus on spontaneous workplace communication. Mullany (2007) states that the workplace represents 'a prime example of a restricted research site' (p. 49). Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) argue that the challenge associated with ‘gaining access to companies and convincing managing directors that the research will be worthwhile is an extremely difficult one’ (p. 45). Gaining access is particularly difficult when the research involves the study of spoken interactions, a factor which explains why a lot of workplace research in the 1990s focused on written language (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris cited in Poncini, 2004). In addition, access is not something that is decided once and never revisited (Hirsch, 2001, p. 5). Rather, negotiations over access tend to be ongoing. For instance Poncini (2004) reports that she was initially allowed to record the interactions she was observing for the purpose of listening to them again (not transcribing), but later as trust between the investigator and the company members grew, these conditions were revisited and she was able to gain consent to use the recordings as data.

According to Sarangi and Roberts (1999), it is crucially important when making contact with company managers that the researcher communicates in plain language what she wants to do and avoids discourse that is 'threatening, obfuscating or irrelevant' (cited in Mullany, 2007, p. 55). Similarly, the feedback I received from company HR representatives was that it was important to use simple English, both in spoken and

written communication, and to be brief in explaining the research aims and questions as potential participants had limited time for lengthy descriptions (Mullany, 2007). Mullany (2007) suggests preparing a non-academic text summarising the project when approaching companies. When contacting unknown potential participants, after an initial telephone contact, I emailed them a simply- expressed one page summary of the project seeking their consent to participate (see Appendix IV). In one case, the HR manager of a potential participating company sent the request to the whole organisation seeking participants and eventually one of the managers emailed me with an expression of interest.

In seeking participants' consent to take part in the study, I sent a print-friendly document to the HR representatives with whom I was negotiating (making it easy for them to forward this to relevant staff) (see Appendix III). I also took care in my interactions with company representatives to avoid embedding requests in long email messages.

In conducting research of this kind, it is helpful if the managers understand the aims of the project and its relevance to them. Mullany (2007) reports that the company personnel she approached did not understand her interest in researching gender and workplace communication even though she cited the glass-ceiling (a well known problem) as the central aim of her study. In my search for participating companies I emphasised the importance of understanding intercultural communication in Australian workplaces and its implications for preparing migrants for the workplace and avoiding the 'brain drain' that is said to occur in Australia when skilled migrants are underemployed (as outlined in Chapter 2). However these concerns did not appear to be assigned a high priority by many of the respondents. As one company manager said, he could pick and choose his employees from a large pool of applicants and did not really see the relevance. On the other hand, two of the companies *SolutionsPlu*s and

InfoContact were actively committed to a diverse workplace. The first contact I met with at *SolutionsPlus* said this was one of the reasons he wished to participate - “We are always complaining of labour shortage so let’s do something about it” (*Fieldnotes 08*).

It is important to note that although some companies were prepared to participate, it was not possible at the time that I approached them. Some positive responses I received included the following:

1. “‘we always try to help out PhDs if we can”
2. “we’ll be able to sort something out”, and another said “it is not a matter of if but a matter of how”
3. “we are a research company so it might be cool to be involved”.

(Fieldnotes 08, 09)

One company contacted had already agreed to accommodate a number of MA and PhD students and had a policy of only accepting one project at each level per year. Another potential company for the study was one that accepted regular placements from university students. However, in this instance they company stated they were unable to accommodate any more students on their floor at that time. Another company manager was supportive and asked his PA to arrange for him to meet with me to discuss the project via telephone. However these preliminary scoping meetings were typically rescheduled at the last moment. Nevertheless, his intention to accommodate the project was genuine and efforts were made on both sides until I secured the participation of others.

Some researchers gain entry to a workplace by becoming employees or ‘passing’ as one. For example Cowie (2007) worked at her research site for fifteen hours a week for six months. She says:

> “there were definitely advantages to having a rather undefined role, I had access to a wide range of staff across the company, I could move quite freely across offices and classroom, and most of my insights came from what different parties thought I would be able to do for them.” (2007, p. 317)

Interestingly however, even given her employee status, Cowie experienced some disadvantages, noting, for example, that she was unable to interview participants in depth. Numerous other ethnographies have been conducted while the researcher has been working in the research site (Moeran, 2005). Security issues and limitations on opportunities to record interactions in the current study presented a potential problem on site. For instance, one company stipulated that the emerging technology area would be out of bounds at all times.

The search for suitable research sites where permission could be obtained for conducting interviews and recording spontaneous interactions began in May 2008. As stated in the Introduction, IT professionals are consistently sought by relevant Australian Industry groups and remain on the SOL (Skilled Occupation List). Therefore a suitable research site for this site was one where it was possible to meet IT professionals who had gained permanent residence (PR) in Australia either through the Skilled Migration Programme or after graduating from an Australian University. To address the research questions it was necessary to have access both to participants who were looking for work and those who were already employed.

It was anticipated that finding a research site could be a lengthy and potentially difficult process given the need to record spoken interactions. Therefore, several strategies were employed, including asking for advice and introductions from contacts in my work

and social networks who had either worked in or who had contacts in the IT field. I also did some ‘cold calling’ by either phoning or emailing companies that I believed would be suitable according to their location, size and other characteristics ascertained through my contacts and research. For example, companies profiled in the media as being diverse and flexible were contacted on the assumption that they might be more receptive to a researcher interested in multicultural workplaces. The first point of contact was usually a member of staff in the Human Relations section of the company and, wherever possible, I made contact with the Diversity Officer in HR, if the company had one. I also approached a professional organisation which represents computer professionals who agreed to advertise in their newsletter once the study was supported by university ethics protocols. However, this avenue was not exploited since, in the meantime, other companies had agreed to participate.

A total of 24 companies were contacted in 2008. I subsequently held face-to-face meetings with representatives of five companies of whom four agreed to take part. These companies are referred to as *TAFE Centre*, *Its.IT*, *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact* in the thesis and are described in more detail in Section 3.2.4 below.

It is important to note that around this time, the global financial crisis (GFC) began to unfold with some company representatives reporting that this had impacted on their willingness to take on extra tasks even if they would otherwise have been more supportive of research. For example, one of the contacts I spoke with said her employer was being taken over in a merger and there was a lot of insecurity about jobs (‘*no job is safe*’) which made it difficult to commit to additional projects. A company that had agreed to take part withdrew due to a restructure that had also resulted from market pressures. This atmosphere of rapid change and insecurity helps explain the difficulties I experienced in identifying appropriate research sites.

In order to gain consent to participate in three of these companies, the 'top down' approach — that is, making contact first with a member of the company's HR or management team — was more productive than the 'bottom up' approach. The first research site, a teaching institution was the exception to this rule, as is explained below. Typically however, the 'bottom up' approach was unsuccessful. For instance, I met a number of employees in non-managerial positions who wished to participate in the study but were reluctant to approach their managers to seek permission and facilitate contact with the researcher. One of my contacts, a contractor about to finish a period of temporary employment with a company, said I could ask his manager only *after* he had left the company as he thought the request would impact on his relationship with her. Other contacts I made were prepared to be interviewed only outside work and did not want to act as intermediaries regarding the research.

The next section describes each of the research sites and outlines how contact was established with each. In addition, it discusses possible reasons for their involvement.

3.2.4 Research sites: description and recruitment

The description of the companies provided here is based on each company's print and web-based publicity material , observations and other information gathered formally and informally from participants. In the case of *SolutionsPlu*s, the researcher also read blogs about the company where information was shared about how to gain employment there. My impressions of each company were recorded as fieldnotes. Care has been taken here not to reveal any information which could threaten the anonymity of either the companies or the individuals who work in them.

The first research site, *TAFE Centre*, is a dual-sector tertiary institution which offers both federal and state government funded courses. The TAFE area of this institution offers

pathway courses to higher education degrees. In the case of the English as Second Language ESL courses, these were offered to students from low to high proficiency. The Certificate IV course on which I was teaching is regarded as the highest ESL qualification in Australia. Notwithstanding this, the class from which I recruited the participants was mixed in level, with some learners genuinely needing ESL language tuition while others were there simply because it was better for them to be involved in an English language activity while they were seeking work. Many in this cohort were therefore part-time attendees who considered being enrolled was an advantage while they were job seeking, first because they could state this on their CVs, and second, because they could access services such as CV writing workshops at the TAFE which were offered free to students.

Entry to this research site, where I was employed at the time I began the research, was made possible by obtaining the permission of the TAFE directorate. Access to this site was negotiated in mid 2008 with the administration who agreed to allow me to interview students and former students as the study had already been granted ethics approval by Macquarie university. It was important to gain access to this site as it allowed me to interview migrant professionals who were in the process of looking for work; this data informs the first research question. As participants recruited from this site were not employed at the site, they are referred to as individual participants.

The first group of participants consisted of professionals who were seeking to enter the job market whom I had met through an (ESL) course at this *TAFE Centre*. Some of these participants were my former students. As outlined in the introduction, as a newcomer to the AMEP and post-AMEP ESL programmes, I was constantly struck by the negative experiences my students reported and their perception that they needed to complete further English language study in order to improve their job prospects. I

listened to their first-hand experiences of seeking work, as well as their stories of failed attempts to gain work resulting in significant frustration. The teaching setting provided a relaxed opportunity to get to know this small group of ten participants, and to maintain contact with them beyond the end of their course. Our conversations also provided insights into their experiences after they completed their ESL training courses and eventually entered the workplace.

Although three of the participants were already known to me, recruitment followed the institution's guidelines by formally inviting them to take part in the study by sending a letter or email message. It was agreed that once the letter had been sent, I would make no further contact unless the individual responded. Consequently, only those who replied to the invitation were interviewed.

Through these individual participants I met other migrant IT professionals – their friends and colleagues from other courses — who were also either looking for work or working already. This method of recruiting has been described as the 'snowball' or 'chain' sampling method of recruitment (Noy, 2007). A total of ten individuals (see details, Appendix VI, Table 1) were recruited to participate in the study through this method. The group included one female and nine males and represented a range of nationalities, first languages and periods of residence in Australia.

Data from this group of participants was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews which were recorded (see Appendix V). I wanted to interview members of this group about their experiences over time. This was possible with those participants I came to know better, such as Nicolas, Felipe and Ricardo, with whom I kept in touch via email, responding to the regular updates they sent me about their experiences.

Another motive for my wishing to interview the *TAFE* participants was that, in the early stages of planning the research, I thought they may have been able to facilitate entry to research sites for me after they found work. However this proved to be impossible. Nicolas found work only after eighteen months of searching. Felipe found work in a voluntary capacity and Ricardo believed it would be problematic to negotiate entry to his workplace. Given the research timetable, it was necessary to abandon this plan and look for other research sites to gain interactional data.

Entry to *Its.IT*, the second research site, was negotiated in late 2008. This was made possible following two face-to-face meetings with the manager whom I had met through a work colleague and during which the aims of the study and the details of involvement were outlined. The manager then selected one participant, a NESB employee, whom he regarded as suitable for this study as he would be willing to be interviewed and recorded at work. This participant was given my contact details and after talking on the phone about the time commitments required we agreed on a schedule of visits.

Its.IT — is a large Australian company with headquarters in the major eastern capital cities as well as subsidiaries in the Asian region. The company provides network solutions and products to clients, usually large companies which can afford this level of service. In addition, this company provides follow-up assistance with technical problems for which the clients are billed according to contractual arrangements. The team where I collected data invoices clients for these products and services and provides a troubleshooting service delivered by qualified network engineers. The team is made up of staff who are familiar with the technologies sold and supported by the company; all have technical expertise themselves. The two key participants, Oscar, a Lebanese born in Bahrain and Jeff, an Anglo Australian, are tertiary graduates in Computer Science from Australian universities working in the sales area of the company. Oscar is a long-

standing member of this team and has received several awards for Employee of the Month. Jeff on the other hand is a relatively new member of this team who is planning to return to study and complete his Honours Degree which he had suspended the previous year. Although these two participants deal with billing clients, they also require the technical background which ensures familiarity with the services provided.

The participants are located behind the reception area and the manager's office and are not visible to the public. The work area is organised as an open plan area and each staff member has a desk with low panels which allow a little privacy. The atmosphere in this 'back room' is busy and fast-paced where everyone appears to be rushing and where everything needs to be done 'yesterday' or before the last courier of the day can reach a client. Work in this team also consists of answering either calls from salesmen "who can't be bothered walking over" from their part of the building or their emails, or questions from people who walk over to this team's space.

The culture is friendly and there is a lot of banter among the staff. The talk that is non-work oriented centres on partners, cars, who is buying a house and plans for the weekend. The conversations reveal shared personal knowledge about each other. The main concern the manager had about allowing me access to the company was that my presence might prove a disruption to the workflow. Fortunately, this turned out not to be the case and no such requests to withdraw from participating were received.

The staff spoke favourably about the company managers and believed it was a good place to work. They claimed there was flexibility and opportunities to move around the different areas and branches of the company and learn new skills. At the onset of the GFC one of the participants was able to negotiate a part-time position in order to return to study.

Access to the third research site, *SolutionsPlus,* occurred following a meeting with a senior company manager who forwarded the details of the study to the director of one division in the company which had a large number of NESB employees. The director subsequently suggested a one-day scoping meeting in late January 2009 to establish the project's specific aims and needs and a schedule of visits. At this meeting I was given both an extensive tour of the company and an introduction to the workings of the branch I would visit. At this meeting an opportunity was also provided to meet and talk to potential participants. Subsequently, it was agreed visits would take place two days a week over a six-week period between February and April 2009 to conduct the interviews and observations and make the recordings.

SolutionsPlus is a large multinational US-owned company which designs, produces and supports a range of networking products and is seen as an industry leader in this field. Apart from designing and manufacturing products, the company provides unlimited support for customers for the use of their products and services. This service, which comes at a high cost to the corporate customers, is highly regarded in the industry as it ensures ongoing access to expertise and uninterrupted running of operations twenty-four hours a day and all year around. To ensure this, call centres are located around the globe. In Australia *Solutions Plus* operates in the eastern cities. The site where I conducted fieldwork employed over 200 employees in its technical services area alone. Other sites were focused on sales and administration.

SolutionsPlus is regarded in the industry as a good employer and positions are highly sought after by both graduate and experienced professionals. Apart from opportunities for promotion and ongoing training opportunities, *SolutionsPlus* is also regarded as a good employer where diversity is highly valued. Some of the participants had moved from overseas and others had worked in stints in overseas sites. This trans-national

experience was highly desirable from both the employer's and the employees' point of view since the employer was able to fill vacancies in offshore locations with a known specialist and employees were able to move to gain experience with different technology. The company tried to accommodate this wherever possible but it was rumoured that the GFC might lead to diminished opportunities, especially for family relocations.

One of the features of the site was its multicultural nature and the pride associated with this diversity. Most staff on the site were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) with at least 20 different nationalities represented. Knowledge of a language other than English (LOTE) was highly regarded by both the employer and customers. Managers said engineers may be called on to use their first language (L1) either with customers and/or with colleagues and this was seen as an advantage rather than a deficit. Diversity itself was explicitly reported as a benefit with participants commenting "you learn from each other", "everyone is different and this is a good thing" (Fieldnotes 09). At the same time those who felt their English skills or speaking/presentation skills were lacking, were given opportunities to improve them by joining informal speaking clubs. These sessions were held outside working hours and were attended by staff mentors for whom English was the first language.

Support for diversity was not limited to promoting NESB employees. A group within the organisation was formed with the aim of promoting engineering as a career option for young women. In addition, there was support for visually impaired staff with much of the company signage provided in Braille.

Although most of the staff in the area I came to know belonged to 'Gen Y' (they were aged in their mid twenties to early thirties), there were staff of different ages throughout

the organisation at different levels of the hierarchy. In addition the company recognised the value of industry experience as well as formal tertiary qualifications in IT, as the professionals was seen to contribute different types of skills. According to literature sourced from the internet, the company is also involved in education programmes in developing countries. *SolutionsPlus* also participated in the global environmental campaign Earth Hour. Participants reported that socially beneficial initiatives which individual employees sought to participate in (such as volunteering for State Emergency Services) were also supported by the company, even when voluntary work would mean time away from work. Participants said that *'*social responsibility, they are big on that at Solutions Plus*". (Fieldnotes, 09)*

In addition, company literature displayed in the foyer suggests that *SolutionsPlus* supports the 'work-life balance' ethic. The Director's and the Vice-President's support of work-life balance policies was reported in the media and displayed prominently in the Reception area of the company's main office. Comments that support this ethos were echoed by participants who said:

> "The managers are always telling us to go home but we want to finish, anyway if do go home we log on and keep working to finish the work off." (Participant, Fieldnotes 09)

> "These kids are young, they don't realise what it means to relax and do other things, I'm always telling them to go when it's time to call it a day." (Senior staff member, Fieldnotes 09)

Work at *SolutionsPlus* is largely organised in teams which have a team-leader and a manager to whom they report. Managers however do not generally monitor staff closely and teams are considered self-directing and flexible. Teams sit in close proximity in

open plan areas and pods with low panels and work closely with colleagues across the site. Managers tend to sit away from the teams in their own offices in the middle of the floor space which have no windows. I was told there is a rule that managers cannot have rooms with good views as this would be considered favouritism.

The participation of the fourth company, *InfoContact*, was made possible through a contact in my own network. After meeting with the chief information officer (CIO) of this company and explaining the aims of the study, it was agreed that a senior staff member would seek potential participants via email and a follow-up meeting was held with those who had responded.

InfoContact which is the IT department of a large local council which oversees the IT needs, upgrades and running of the council offices, public libraries, childcare centres, swimming pools and numerous tourism activities within its popular areas of governance. The company is diverse and supports the work-life balance in practical terms by offering a nine-day per fortnight arrangement. In addition, *InfoContact* staffs are able to work from home at times to accommodate partner or child care arrangements. Fridays were declared casual Friday and the gold coin donation made by staff was given to a charity. A staff drinks party was held monthly where food and drinks were provided. I attended this function once after my visits were complete.

Staff at *InfoContact* were organised according to their area of expertise dealing with issues such as infrastructure or troubleshooting or implementing projects. The staff work in flexible teams whose membership changes at times since many staff members participate in multiple projects simultaneously. As in many modern organisations, the company has a number of short-term or contract staff as well as a pool of permanent staff.

I visited *InfoContact* two to three days per week between June and August 2009. During this time it was possible to spend approximately two weeks with each of the six key participants and their team. All key participants were permanent staff members who accessed flexible time arrangements. These key participants were recruited with the help of the manager who was assigned to help with this task. He emailed the staff on my behalf in May 2009 seeking expressions of interest in participating in the project. During this time I got to know many of the workers in this unit, including administrative staff, managers and technical staff. I was always made to feel very welcome and having a security pass meant I could come and go freely. Participants emailed me to let me know their meeting schedules and they gained the approval of their colleagues for me to attend and record sessions.

The participants who were already employed and were recruited from within the last three participating companies were classified as either primary or secondary participants on the basis of their involvement in the data collection. Primary participants took part in at least one recorded interaction and were interviewed and observed. Secondary participants' involvement was limited to one of these three methods of data collection. The secondary participants therefore included those who took part in group interactions but were not interviewed and those who agreed to be interviewed but, who, given timelines and work demands, were unable to contribute to further discussion or were absent when I conducted observations in their teams. However both primary and secondary participants were made aware of the project goals and had given their consent to take part (see Appendix VI, Table 2 for a list of primary and secondary participants).

Reasons for participating: what's in it for them?

As stated above, one way to facilitate access to a research site or participants is to highlight the potential benefits. Indeed Sarangi (2006) states that just as important as 'thick description' is the need for researchers to engage in 'thick participation' which, in his view, includes providing feedback and opportunities to take action on the discourse findings (p. 204). Cameron, Fraser, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson, (1992) make the point that the subjects' own agendas should be addressed by research and that 'if knowledge is worth having it is worth sharing' (p. 131). However, the difference between being an 'invited guest' or 'an uninvited intruder' in professional settings means that expectations of how useful the research is will often differ (Bosk cited in Sarangi, 2006, p. 216). The notion of providing reciprocal benefits for participants is not new to linguistic research. Examples of reciprocal researcher-researched benefits can be found in the case studies outlined in the work of Cameron and her colleagues (1992). Jenkins' (2006) study demonstrates how participants can benefit from participating in research when she reports that, as a result of taking part in her study of NNS speaker attitudes to the NS model of English, one of the participants was able to reflect on the fact that she still held up the NS model in her teaching practice (2006, p. 85). Huisman (2008), on the other hand, provides a poignant account of the problem of lack of reciprocity between researchers' and participants' needs. Huisman depicts in her article the potentially unequal power relationship between participants and researchers by recounting the relationship she developed with one participant for whom her visits filled voids and were treated like friendships. This was offset by the reality that the researcher would stop visiting once she had gained the data she needed. Neil, (1996), who conducted research in a Melbourne hospital where many participants were members of the Hospital Employees' Federation, comments:

> “Often my task became one of consciousness-raising of the needs of a multicultural workforce and the consequent value of this kind of research if I was going to proceed.” (Neil, 1996, p. 75)

In the end Neil gained access to the site with the agreement that she would provide management with what they termed a ‘language needs survey’ to help management provide NESB staff with workplace English language tuition. The researcher fulfilled this obligation by designing and administering a questionnaire to 75 staff members. Although the management did not act on the results of the questionnaire, it proved to be useful for the researcher as it provided her with insights into the background of the staff who later became her participants (Neil, 1996, p. 76). The question remains as to whether the union or the hospital acted on any of the recommendations she made. The issue of the impact doctoral research can have on social policy is highly relevant to its conceptualisation, as are its ethical considerations. In this study, one question that arises is whether it is legitimate to say to prospective participants that this research can further our understanding of intercultural communication. Whilst the desire to use research results to impact policies may be central to doctoral researchers’ concerns, in reality any positive outcomes may occur only slowly.

Given all these considerations, it is interesting to reflect on the reasons why the participating companies decided to allow access. In all four participating companies a key senior staff member saw the contribution to the study as valid even if not directly relevant to the organisation. However, at *Its.IT* there were fewer opportunities for the researcher to engage with staff informally than at *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact*. This may have been because staff at the latter two companies felt more comfortable interacting with the researcher since they had gained experience of conducting fieldwork as part of their post-graduate management courses. Staff’s apparently greater level of

comfort with my presence in the latter two companies was evident in the informal conversations we had during my visits, particularly when I was introduced to new staff and questions were asked about my research. The latter two companies were also proudly culturally diverse and saw themselves as showcasing their best practices to an outsider interested in intercultural communication. Consequently the presence of a researcher was seen as a positive experience for these two companies and provided an opportunity for the researcher to obtain feedback on issues of inclusiveness and exclusiveness with relation to ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in a way that would not identify individuals. Furthermore, *Solutions Plus* managers regularly asked me for updates of my results and impressions. *InfoContact* managers were also interested in how they could improve any problems experienced by NESB staff but insisted on strict confidentiality. For this reason I provided regular written summaries of my findings to *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact* throughout my visits. These summaries omitted the names of individuals and the companies. Informally however, the supervising staff at times asked how the research was going and 'how are we looking?'. At *SolutionsPlus* summaries were provided regularly to the supervisor via email. At *InfoContact* updates were provided less formally and only orally, often in response to questions about how the study was progressing.

3.2.5 Participants' profiles

The process of recruiting participants was different for each of the four sites. All participants were migrant professionals in an area of IT and all volunteered to take part in the study and had the option to withdraw at any stage even following the recording of data if they requested this. All participants signed a consent form (Appendix IV) and were provided with the researcher's contact details in case they wished their data to be excluded post-interview. This section describes the recruiting procedure. As the researcher was an employee in the first site, access to potential participants was

somewhat easier and began in 2008. Participants from the other three sites were recruited subsequently, taking into account individuals' availability and willingness to take part.

Although the company participants at *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact* were identified prior to the visits aimed at recording interactions, it was possible to speak to many staff members throughout my time at these sites. In spite of their busy schedules, staff were always able to talk at some stage throughout their day. The kitchen in both *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact* proved to be a fruitful meeting place where conversations were held and I spent some time here speaking to participants while my voice recorder was left in another team in the company. In addition, once people knew what I was interested in they recommended other colleagues who might be interviewed. This technique is common and has been documented by other researchers. For example Winiecki (2007) began by asking management hosts 'who is a good person to talk with?" and after talking and observing a person over one or two shifts, he would ask them to recommend someone else (p. 355). Mullany (2007) also states that finding a 'key participant' is crucial as this will inevitably lead to others.

In busy and unfamiliar workplaces it was sometimes difficult to establish relationships with those who had volunteered for the study as a primary participant. Therefore it was difficult at times to distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' participants. It is not always easy to 'quantify' the participation of individual participants according to their time commitment in this type of research. In the end the decision to classify participants as either 'key' or 'secondary' was arrived at as follows. Those who had (a) participated in an interview (whether semi-structured or informal), (b) were present in at least one recording and (c) whom I had observed in some interactions were considered 'key'. Any

others were classified as ‘secondary’. The table below lists bio-data of the key participants. Details of secondary participants, can be found in Appendix VI

TABLE 1 INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS - INTERVIEW DATA ONLY

Name	Country of origin and year of arrival (if known)	Visa/ Residence status	Professional Qualifications Position/ background	Number of Interviews/Year
Felipe	2007/Mexico	Skilled Visa, PR	Business analyst	2/ 2009
Ricardo	2008/Peru	Skilled Visa, PR	Business analyst	2/ 2009
Luz	2007/Mexico	Skilled Visa, PR	Business analyst	1/ 2009
Hectór	20007/Mexico	Skilled Visa, PR	Business analyst	1/ 2009
Antonio	2008/Argentina	Skilled Visa, PR	Sales	1/ 2009
Jim	China	International Student, PR	Computer Science graduate	2/ 2009/10
Patrick	India	International Student, PR		1/ 2009
Leon	China	International student, PR	Software designer	1/ 2009
Nicolas	2007	Skilled Visa, PR	Software engineer	3/ 2009-10

TABLE 2 KEY PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMPANIES

Participant Name	Country of origin and year of arrival (if known)	Visa	Professional Qualifications Position/ background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. Meetings 4. Observation
Company 1 Its.IT				
Jeff	Australia		Computer Science	1, 2, 4
Oscar	Lebanese background but grew up and lived in Bahrain until he came to live in Australia	International Student/ PR	Work placement as part of his degree/then in current position/ Internal Sales manager	1, 2, 4
Company 2: SolutionsPlus				

Amir	2009 Israel	Skilled Visa, company sponsored/ waiting for PR	Network Engineer	1,2,3,4
Jordan	South Africa			1,2,3,4
Guy	France	International Student/PR		1,2,3,4
Gabriel	Venezuela	Skilled migrant visa /PR		1,2,3,4
Mac	NZ			2,4
Company 3: Infocontact				
Claire	China	International Student/skilled visa	Computer Science/Project Manager	1,2,3,4
Sophia	Italian/ Australian born		Manager	1,2,3,4
Mia	India		Certificate IV in Training	1,2,3,4
Rick	Australian		Manager	1, 2,4
Alan	Fijian, Chinese		Computer Science	1,2,3,4

3.3 The data: Interviews, recordings, observations, fieldnotes

As a result of the data collection efforts described in the previous section, the corpus for this study consisted of the following data sets: semi-structured interviews; observations recorded as fieldnotes; and recordings of spontaneous conversations with key and secondary participants with or without the researcher as a participant-observer. The audio recordings of interviews and interactions were transcribed for the analysis. The sections that follow will provide a detailed outline of the procedures adopted in gathering this data as well as the motives for choosing these methods.

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were scheduled according to the participants' work priorities with them generally choosing the time and place these would take place. Interviews with participants at *Its.It* were scheduled rigorously to minimise work disruption. Given the

small number of participants at that site, this was unproblematic. At *SolutionsPlus, I* began with a schedule provided by the overseeing manager in the early stages of the visits. However as time went on and relationships became established, I arranged the interviews with individual participants. The snowball sampling approach was also effective in this company as interviewees suggested colleagues in other areas of the site who would be willing to contribute. At *InfoContact* the site supervisor arranged an initial meeting with all the participants which the researcher attended. Following that meeting, I arranged to meet and interview each of the participants. All company participant interviews were conducted in the workplace at a time and place chosen by the participants. Interviews were recorded only where consent was given by the participant and later transcribed. Where permission to record was declined, notes were taken and later written up as fieldnotes.

Individual participants (those recruited from the first research site) provided information via occasional email messages which contributed to my individual ethnographic accounts of their experiences. The open-ended questionnaire for this group of participants was aimed at gaining insights about their job seeking experiences and their perceptions as they were experiencing this. It was insightful to see how both their strategies for employment success changed over time and how their perceptions shifted. These insights were compared with those participants from other data sets, those already in employment as they recounted their experiences. Participants in this group were interviewed at least once in 2008. Second and subsequent interviews took place in 2009 and regular email contact was maintained until 2010. All these interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews with individual participants lasted from 40 minutes to 2 hours. These interviews took place in and around the participating teaching institutions and, on one occasion, in the participant's home.

Company participants were interviewed once at the beginning of the data collection period and later observed and recorded in their team interactions. Semi-structured interviews provided the optimal means of gathering stories about work trajectories and pre-employment experiences. This method was also used to gain valuable biographical and work history information and was considered more desirable than eliciting this information through a structured questionnaire.

There are four principal reasons for preferring the semi-structured interview format. First, the questions were used as a guideline only, allowing the researcher and interviewee to discuss other matters that arose and were considered pertinent. In many cases the follow-up discussions were more detailed but began as spontaneous interactions at unscheduled times. Second, the semi-structured interview format created a more relaxed atmosphere which, in some cases, led to participants agreeing to be observed and recorded in other work contexts. Third, in the three company sites, interviewees often suggested other potential study participants who worked in other areas of the company and were not known to me. This provided an important means of gaining a broader view of the company. Finally, a semi-structured format was the most appropriate way of investigating the participants' job seeking experiences and their perceptions of those experiences since I was interested in both their pre-arrival job seeking experiences and their experiences seeking work after arriving in Australia.

Every effort was made to follow up with the TAFE participants following their initial interview. The purpose of holding more than one interview with as many participants as possible from this cohort was to avoid what Mishler describes as:

> "The one-shot interview conducted by an interviewer without local knowledge of a respondent's life situation and following a standard

> schedule that explicitly excludes attention to particular circumstances – in short, a meeting between strangers unfamiliar with each other's 'socially organized contexts of meaning – does not provide the necessary contextual basis for adequate interpretation." (Mishler, 1986)

The researcher's aim in constructing the in-depth interviews of participants was to have the interview resemble a conversation more than a structured question-answer event in the interests of gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and also their evaluations of their work trajectories. Interviews can however represent a site of complex power relations (Talmy 2010). As Denzin and Lincoln state "Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (1994, p. 29). One of the challenges was therefore to reduce any perceived power imbalances during the interviews. Therefore the approach taken to collecting this type of data can be said to follow a constructivist approach which is concerned with *what* interviewees say as well as *how* they say it (Silverman, 1993,p. 97) and regards the interviews as occasions where meaning is co-constructed by interviewer and interviewees (Silverman 1995, p. 87). Thus the researcher was not merely seeking answers to particular questions but conducted the interviews as occasions where the participants were able to determine this speech event as much as possible and the inevitable greater power of the interviewer was minimised as much as possible.

Taking this approach to the interview data meant the researcher attempted to establish a relationship with the participants that allowed the interviews to become occasions where the participants not only recounted their experiences but also provided comments and reflections. However, researchers are not mere or objective observers and interviews can exhibit power imbalances. In spite of obvious differences between the

researcher and the interviewees, the majority of whom were younger males; several shared characteristics reduced power imbalances. For example, the researcher is a migrant from a non-English speaking background and was able to identify with some of the experiences heard in the interviews. Another similarity was that all participants were professionals and this may have reduced the power dynamics to some extent. Finally, working in a highly technical environment in which the researcher had no experience or knowledge always placed the interviewees as experts during the interviews.

Practical ways in which the researcher further reduced the perceptions of the interview as an asymmetrical encounter was to conduct the interviews at times and places chosen by the participants. The prepared questions were broad enough in scope to allow the interview topics to develop and participants to provide the direction of the discussions or narratives. In addition the researcher showed empathy to the stories of hardship and about reported on-going language learning experiences.

The value of the unstructured interviews emerged early in the collection process and I saw that if given the space and opportunity the participants would see the interview as opportunities to tell their story, resulting in narratives that provided insights into many aspects of their lives, including their language learning trajectory as well as their job seeking experiences. These topics were summarised in the Introduction.

As with other researchers engaged in conducting sociolinguistic interviews, I tried to position myself somewhere between a neutral outsider and someone who had some understanding of the issues the interviewers were facing (Modan, 2011). By adopting a position as a neutral outsider, my intention was to allow the participants to tell their own stories unencumbered by attending to what I might be seeking to discover. However, as the interviews progressed, I was aware that at times I shifted from being neutral to more

knowledgeable. This departure from attempted neutrality confirmed that the participant's experience was not unique and acknowledged the issue was not an isolated case.

Although it was easier to slip into a knowledgeable position following observation during fieldwork, this sometimes backfired. For instance, sometimes participants wanted to narrate their own stories and decide on what version of their working life they put forward. In some of the interviews I conducted in the second week at *SolutionsPlus* I came across as a knowledgeable insider, or at least attempted to understand some of the difficulties the participants faced in their work. However this positioning was rejected by the participants, as is exemplified in the following extract of my interview with Maya in which she resists my interpretation of what is going on and attempts to maintain instead the view that the company might uphold.

1. Vittoria what about when you are diagnosing the problem or trying to find out like you have to ask questions?
2. Maya no the questions you are asking, it's all technical, everyone knows, everyone knows, of course you have to have basic English apart from that,
3. Vittoria what about getting rid of customers, is that more difficult?
4. Maya no no no, we just ??? the template and customers understand, we have an understanding, if they go 'can I ask you one question' and I just go 'hey that's a different issue hum open another other case, get a different engineer, everyone understands,
5. Vittoria 'cause they're technical people too?
6. Maya yes they are too, so they're not like 'oh oh my phone died and they call you and like what happened and they would call you and like ,

do you have this password do you have the pathway, it's not like that right? and oh what do I do,

My questions were guided by knowledge gained from previous interviews conducted in the company. This is evidenced firstly by my question regarding how network engineers diagnose a problem. In previous interviews, participants had signalled that this can be a difficult task as those making the call are not technically able. Consequently the engineers have to be skilled at asking very detailed questions in order to understand the problem (2). The second example is the way I frame the following question the participant about using language that reflects what other participants had said about ending calls (3). My phrase 'getting rid of them' is a reflection of what I had observed individual employees saying about this process. Finally, my use of the term 'technical people' in (5) is also a reflection of this knowledge. In this workplace participants describe themselves as 'technical' and many customers as 'not technical' and I am adopting their term here.

Maya shows she is resisting my attempt at displaying insider knowledge and insists on her own telling of how work is done. This can be seen in her replies to my questions. In reply to the first question she says that as long as people have basic English they will know how to explain the problem (line 2). Secondly she plays down the possibility that callers might take advantage of the engineer by asking more than they should in one phone call (line 4). She is in effect denying this is a problematic aspect of her work, even though it had been signalled as being one of the most challenging tasks by some of her peers. Finally, she emphasises that the callers are technically sophisticated and they would not call for small matters such as passwords (6).

3.3.2 Recordings: the question of authentic data

Recordings generally took place while the researcher was present but in some instances the voice recorder was left with a key participant who organised recordings of his interactions. This allowed the researcher to engage in observations in other team areas. This was the case particularly at *SolutionsPlus* which was a large company with the largest number of participants. At times, two recording devices were used in order to maximise the amount of data collected.

Once the interviews and the interactions were recorded, the sound files were transcribed and labeled according to the speech event which took place within the team, the date and the number of interaction. So for example the following label:

"What are you wearing tomorrow" (**OscarTeam309)**

refers to a stretch of dialogue which took place during the third recording session in Oscar's team in 2009 about a conversation focused on the dress code for a work event. Approximately forty hours of data were recorded in the three companies. However not all of this was usable data as the recordings contain long periods of silences and some of the interactions included long periods of client-participant talk which is outside the scope of this study, and few peer interactions. Also, many of the interactions were too technical in nature and it was difficult to gain assistance with transcribing and decoding these conversations.

The researcher listened several times to all recorded sessions and transcribed all the data following broad transcription methods as outlined. However, speech episodes identified for analysis were transcribed with closer attention to detailed transcription conventions, particularly multi-party interactions.

It should be stated however that the aim of the data-gathering process was to record what sociolinguistics describe as ‘spontaneous’ talk. This recorded data was in effect changed since once participants have agreed to be recorded it can generally be assumed that they will alter the way they speak (Cameron, 2001, p. 20; Cameron, 2001). Although the data analysed here is described as ‘naturally occurring’, clearly participants modified their speech or at least indicated they were conscious of being recorded in some of the recordings. The fact that there was nervousness and hesitation is evidenced by the constant jokes about the recorder. However only on one occasion a participant switched off the recorder when the topic turned to a sensitive issue regarding conditions at work. Also, participants had the option of not speaking if they really did not wish to, and instead communicated with team members via email or internal chat as became evident in one of the recordings. I was only aware of participants avoiding being recorded on two occasions. The first occasion occurred in Amir’s team where participants were usually very conversational and inclusive of the researcher. On this occasion the team was involved in a chat and there was a lot of laughter. I gathered they were forwarding jokes that included explicit images and these may have been offensive. My understanding is that the participants would have shared this if they believed it was appropriate. Although this only occurred in one instance, it highlights an inherent problem of collecting workplace interactions. It also highlights that whilst participants make decisions to become involved in a study such as this, it is a useful reminder that they are able to maintain control over the level of involvement they develop with a researcher. In this situation I also believe participants were not behaving in a way that excluded the researcher but their decision not to include the researcher in this joke may have been made as a result of knowing the researcher, making possible value judgements that a particular type of humour would not be appreciated. On this occasion gender may also have a played a role. The second occasion took place in Mac’s team

where the team were discussing pay issues and Mac stated he was turning off the Dictaphone given the private nature of the discussion.

It is however the case that at least some of the time participants appeared less aware of the voice recorder. This is noticeable when the participants demonstrate a high level of involvement in their task and little or no acknowledgment of the recording device. Watts (1991) claims that close groups are less likely to alter their behaviour to cater for others (cited in Neil, 1996, p. 78). Overall, observations and field notes and the analysis of the interactions confirm that the company participants observed in this study can indeed be described as 'close knit'.

3.3.3 Observations and field notes: the need for triangulation

Bargiela-Chiappini et al (1997) state that full understanding of language and meaning is possible if past and local knowledge is available to the researcher (p. 23). Thus, observations were made to add to my understanding of the participants' experiences in context. Typically time was spent in the team prior to and following an interview with each key participant in order to observe a typical day at work and identify common routines and the type of interactions occurring throughout the day. This included observing people as they worked and as they interacted with internal and external clients. On some occasions I was able to 'shadow' key participants as they moved to different meetings around the buildings. This process allowed interpretation of the data to be informed by factors occurring outside the interview and the recorded interactions. Fieldnotes, written soon after each meeting, interviews and conversations with participants provided a valuable record of details which also aided the interpretation process.

It was my intention that through the fieldnotes, a reader unfamiliar with the context should be able to gain a contextualised understanding of the interactions observed. At *Solutions Plus* and *InfoContact* in particular, I was able to talk informally with many staff members who provided insights into the daily goings-on of both the companies and the teams. At *Its.It*, as in the other sites, the conversations held before and after the recordings proved to be informative about the company culture as well as the personal aspirations of the participants. The information gathered via observation and recorded in fieldnotes includes the following themes:

- how work is done (routines)
- perceived cultural differences according to how work is done
- cultural stereotypes reported
- language used and linguistic difficulties
- self-perceptions of English proficiency
- perceived difficulties using English at work

The section above has provided a detailed overview of the research sites and the participants and the methods by which these were selected. It has also detailed and justified the methods of data collection. The next section considers the limitations of the data.

3.3.4 Limitations of the data

As stated above, I set out to do an ethnographic study because it allows the researcher to collect a variety of data and includes access to the subtleties and nuances that occur in interactions in a way that is not possible with other methods. I sought to conduct a multi-site ethnographic study so that each site could contribute a different perspective and a large amount of data would be generated. The study focuses on the interactions

gathered by participants who volunteered to take part in the data collection. The study does not attempt to address any potential problems, whether linguistic or social, experienced by those who were not actively taking part in the interactions. Although I was able to collect data using the different methods as described, the study has several limitations.

The first limitation concerns a lack of continuity in documenting the individual participants' experiences from job seeking to the workplace in the manner of a longitudinal study. At the beginning of the study I had originally intended to follow the individual participants into their eventual workplace. However, this was not possible, as many of the participants in this group did not gain employment until well after the end of the data-gathering period. At the same time that this proved to be a limitation for this study, it highlights the difficulty that migrants face gaining work in Australia, the focus of one of the study's research questions.

Another limitation concerns the type of data I was able to collect. The level of access to participants at each of the three companies was limited by daily institutional demands and the busy nature of the participants' work. As a result of unplanned events and limited access to participants, the question arises as to whether the observations capture a complete picture of the interactions. In the case of the first company, *Its.It,* the number and length of visits as well as access to potential participants was restricted. At *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact*, however, the potential to speak to secondary participants was greater given the level access to the physical space I benefited from in the companies as well as greater freedom to recruit participants. It is also true that the data was not always triangulated in the way that had been intended. Even though many participants agreed to be interviewed more than once, they were not always available to participate in follow-up interviews. Attempts to set up re-visits, an ethnographic method

which aims at increasing experience with the group that is being studied as outlined by Van Maanem (1988) and Burawoy (2003), were unsuccessful at *Its.It* and *SolutionsPlus* due to lack of staff availability at the required time. Another inhibiting factor was that one of the companies was located in another state which made each visit difficult and expensive.

Valuable techniques such as playing back the recording to the participants have been signalled as an important method of data collection by some researchers (Tannen, 1984). Working on cross-cultural politeness theory, Spencer-Oatey and Jiang advocate collecting what they have termed 'perception' data by playing back part of the recordings to participants to augment observations and fieldnotes (Spencer-Oatey, 2003, p. 44). Cutting (2000) also checked how participants self-evaluated their own performance during their recordings in a post-data collection meeting. However, given the time constraints and the added level of imposition this would have meant for participants, I did not playback any recordings to participants.

A third limitation relates to the quality of the data collected. In an attempt to gather as much data as possible in the time frame allowed, many of the recordings were made in my absence by participants who carried a tape recorder with them. While this contributed to the overall quantity of data gathered, it also means that valuable observational data is missing from some of the analysis.

Another limitation relates to the fact that the study is concerned only with spoken data. Although current digital voice recording devices such as the one used for this study (Sony MP3 IC recorder) allow good quality audible recordings of multiparty interactions, spoken data does not provide the whole picture in interactions. In some of the interactions recorded in this study, for example in Anul's team where there were up to 15

people present, it was impossible to attribute minimal verbal cues to the right participant. Studies that use video recordings in workplace communication research include Fasulo and Zucchermaglio (2002), Voge (2010) and Virkkula-Räisänen (2010). While video recordings undoubtedly provide a richer type of data, it was not possible to make use of this medium in this study for a number of reasons. Most importantly, I believed that requesting permission to video-record the interactions would add a further obstacle to gaining access to the companies. By the time I got to know the key participants and felt they were relaxed enough with the (audio) recording device, the visits were nearing their end. I believed that introducing a new means of recording would have compromised these relationships.

A final limitation concerns the analysis of and frontstage talk (Goffman, 1969) also employed by Richards (2006) to explore professional identities. As the study analyses spoken data which occurs backstage i.e. talk among colleagues rather than frontstage talk — talk which occurs with clients. Although participants identified the fact that speaking with clients can pose particular challenges and I consider this part of their linguistic repertoire (See Chapter 5), the study does not analyse talk with clients due to ethical considerations. However, future studies which address this aspect of communication may gain additional insights into professionals' overall language needs and performance.

In spite of the study's limitations, the picture of the teamwork interactions is rich in detail. While the study cannot claim to be representative of the way that individuals in this industry communicate, it provides useful insights into how the participants dealt with various aspects of communication in particular circumstances. Indeed, the study supports the claim that the workplace community in each company will differ and that the contrary view is both detrimental and limited.

This section has provided a detailed account of the data collection process and justified the use of ethnographic approaches to data collection. Further, it highlighted difficulties encountered in securing the cooperation of research sites and provided an overall description of the participating companies and departments. It also outlined the researcher's key concerns regarding ethnographic data collection methods and pointed out some of the limitations of the data.

3.3.5 Ethics

The first step in setting up the study was to gain Ethics approval. Ethics Approval was initially granted by the Macquarie University Ethics Committee in June 2008 (see Appendix II) and renewed in June 2009 for a further year. This approval allowed me to approach participating companies for the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews and recording spontaneous interactions. Approval was also sought to interview contacts made through participants and identified through the 'snowball' approach.

All 10 individual participants and 12 key (company) participants gave written approval for the study by signing a consent form or providing oral approval (secondary participants) (see Appendix IV). However, as is the case in large companies where cross-team interactions are common, often additional participants 'walked' into the recordings. On these occasions participants were made aware of the recording and had the option to request that it not be used for the study.

In accordance with the university's Ethics guidelines, several steps were taken to ensure that the ethical concerns anticipated were dealt with correctly. The first concern was that the participants' rights and privacy were protected. Privacy was protected by assuring

anonymity and by assigning each participant a pseudonym, chosen either by the participant or myself. Another concern was to safeguard the participants' rights at all times. In order to do this fully and frankly I disclosed the purpose of the study to all participants at all times. The third step was to provide the option of withdrawal from the study at any time. Finally, the identities and the location of all four institutions were made anonymous by assigning pseudonyms, which further protects the participants and the companies' business dealings. I agreed I would change details so that the clients could not be identified. Even though some participants requested not to have their interactions recorded, no one withdrew from the study.

All three companies requested copies of the Ethics approval forms as well as a Certificate of Currency (CoC), which was provided by the University, in case of accidents and damage to company property whilst I was on site.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the data collection procedure and outlined the methodologies employed to collect and analyse the qualitative data. The study adopts a multi-method approach to addressing the research questions. A linguistic ethnographic approach is needed in order to collect qualitative data and account for the context within which the interactions take place. The data analysis is divided into three chapters which address each of the research questions in turn. Chapter 4 addresses the first research question by analysing the barriers experienced by professional migrants when attempting to enter the Australian workforce. The in-depth interviews provide insights into attitudes to NESB workers as well as participants' non-native speaker identities. Chapter 5 addresses the second research question by describing the types of interactions and language used by the migrant IT professionals. At the same time, the

interactions demonstrate that the participants are competent speakers who navigate a range of spoken genres successfully. The last analysis chapter, Chapter 6, addresses the third research question about communication patterns and focuses more closely on the discourse analysis of the recordings of the interactions. This analysis is complemented by observations and participant observer knowledge which facilitates interpretation of the events in context.

Chapter 4 **Linguistic and social barriers to employment**

4.1 Introduction

One of the key goals of this study is to investigate the different types of barriers experienced by professional migrants in Australia as they seek work. Australia is a long-standing host of permanent migration via selection and the Australian economy has long relied on migrants to fill skills shortage. Consequently today one quarter of Australia's population is either overseas-born or has one parent who was born overseas (see Chapter 1 for details). However, in spite of this history, migrants continue to face discrimination in the employment market place in Australia, as shown in Chapter 2. This study builds on previous research by addressing the experiences of a particular group of IT professional migrants, not previously the focus of a sociolinguistic study. This chapter analyses the data gathered from the interviews with individual and company participants (see Chapter 3) in order to address the first research question:

> What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?

The data for this chapter was gathered from semi-structured interviews as well as subsequent conversations with participants (as outlined in Chapter 3). The analysis reported in this chapter is focused on interpreting the experiences of and any difficulties perceived by the participants as they attempted to enter the labour market. First I was interested in whether the participants had anticipated any difficulties; subsequently I sought to determine what types of difficulties they had encountered.

Participants described a number of difficulties encountered when they first began to seek work in Australia. They attributed their lack of success to a range of factors

including lack of local experience, differences in the way in which pre-interview documents such as the curriculum vitae (CV) were presented and job interviews were conducted as well as the way that overseas qualifications were interpreted by Australian employers and recruiters. Furthermore, the participants identified aspects of their English language proficiency and signs of 'otherness' such as foreign accents and foreign names as potential barriers to employment.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the point of departure for analysing the data was Blommaert's (2005) orders of indexicality framework. Following this framework, the barriers to employment identified by the participants are viewed as a consequence of markers of difference or otherness which differentiate local and overseas-trained employees (such as foreign names and marked forms of English) which emerge in their interactions with potential employers. These barriers occur as a result of global mobility and are viewed as one aspect of language contact phenomena. In this study, the barriers identified by the participants are analysed within the broader social context offered by Blommaert's framework rather than being viewed as deficits on the part of individual participants. Thus the barriers mentioned are viewed as personal identity markers within the context of global mobility.

Blommaert (2005) argues that in order to properly understand language in society, discourse analysis must take account of the influence of 'the structure of the world system' (p.15) – an impossible task if analysis is limited to a focus on language which occurs within specified contexts within national borders. Blommaert maintains that as speech communities shift with global flows, discourse analysis needs to include wider factors:

> "We have to conceive of communication events as ultimately influenced by the structure of the world system. In an era of

> globalisation, the threshold of contextualisation in discourse analysis or sociolinguistics can no longer be a single society (or even less a single event) but needs to include the relationship between different societies and the effect of these relationships of repertoires of language users and their potential to construct voice." (Blommaert, 2005, p. 15)

Blommaert therefore expands the notion of context as it is understood by critical discourse analysts and takes issue with the way that critical discourse analysis (CDA) and convesationa analysis (CA) approaches define contexts. Blommaert maintains that proponents of CDA and CA approaches are intent on demonstrating the relationships between social structure and language use within what he sees as a limited definition of context. He claims that "Context comes in all shapes and operates at various levels from the infinitely small to the infinitely big … Context is *potentially* everything and contextualisation is *potentially* infinite (p. 40)." According to Blommaert, given this elaborated understanding of context, analysis of contexts is only possible if ethnographic methods of exploration are adopted.

Thus Blommaert's notion of context includes what he refers to as "the forgotten contexts" (2005, p. 56), which include factors that account for the way globalisation impacts on the context. He goes on to identify three forgotten contexts which he illustrates using narratives produced by asylum seekers in Belgium. The first of these contexts refers to linguistic resources, in this case those available to asylum speakers who lack the mastery of linguistic codes to explain their political background which are complex and hierarchical and not available to all speakers.

The second "forgotten context" is the trajectory of the text which takes into account translocal factors since texts shift from one context to another. For example, texts which

begin as stories make their way into notes and can be re-entextualised as legal texts which are more or less accessible to different speakers.

The third of Blommaert's "forgotten contexts" is the data histories which include the source and the history as reported by the participants, but which can be discarded or forgotten in the process of data collection. For example, the source of data can be overlooked in the trajectory of data collection, yet the data's history must be kept in mind since it impacts directly and indirectly on the way it is interpreted.

Blommaert (2005) argues that discourse analysts need to take into account factors such as these that are located beyond the interaction, since they explain social inequalities which he claims are nested in what he calls "orders of indexicality" (p. 69). Blommaert's framework is closely linked to Silverstein's "indexical order" and Foucault's "orders of discourse" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 74).

Orders of indexicality are intrinsically tied to voice and are unevenly distributed across societies and communities. Therefore, as people move across physical and social space, their ability to use communicative resources in one space will vary when they attempt to deploy them in another (Blommaert, 2005, p. 69). According to Blommaert, during a period of globalisation, voice consists of the ability to 'accomplish functions of linguistic resources translocally' *(*p. 69).

Blommaert also argues that some texts do "not travel well"' (p. 78) and provides two examples to illustrate this point. The first type of text he considers is the narrative; Blommaert illustrates this point by referring to the narratives of refugees seeking asylum in Belgium which were collected in 1998 (2005). Whilst for the asylum seekers these narratives are intended to validate refugee applications, analysis reveals that aspects of these narratives were dismissed by the Belgian officials who considered them

unimportant anecdotes. The second example is the English spoken by urban Africans which is “expensive” and provides access to middle class identities in the African country of origin but is not valued in the same way in London (p. 72). Consequently Blommaert argues that what is considered good English is a matter for “world systems” with the reverse occurring in locations where minority languages can acquire prestige they did not previously enjoy. The concept of orders of indexicality is useful for this study since it considers the barriers faced by migrants to be rooted in the values assigned to their skills rather than a consequence of personal deficits in those skills. In this study the barriers to employment experienced and reported by the migrants are considered examples of what happens when texts do “not travel well”. When viewed in this way, responsibility for eliminating these barriers shifts from the individual to the policy makers and gatekeepers who assign the respective values.

The chapter next outlines the four principal barriers identified by the participants during interviews. Each of the sections below first provides a detailed explanation of the barrier under consideration and then illustrates the discussion by providing examples from the data. The examples are illustrated with quotes from the data that highlight each of the themes identified as salient.

4.2 Barrier One: Local experience, organisation of CVs and the job interview process

This section explores the first of the barriers identified by the participants — their lack of local experience including their understanding of the way in which Australians organise their CVs and the conduct and expectations surrounding the job interview process. It is not only the participants who identified these barriers. They are also consistently mentioned by employers and recruitment agents and have been identified previously with regard to both engineers (Hawthorne, 1994) and IT professionals who migrate to

Australia (Alcorso, 2006). It is therefore worth exploring how this barrier is constructed within a profession whose members expect to be able to move easily transnationally given the shared technical knowledge and systems in their profession. Indeed, given the technical nature of their work, most participants had not anticipated such problems and felt that lack of local experience should not be an issue for IT professionals, as explained by Hernán:

> "That was the main problem here in Melbourne that we don't have local experience but I said to the interviewer, that for example Microsoft Word is the same here, the same in the United States, the same platform, so but local experience was the difference, so that was the problem that we faced at the beginning." (Interview 108)

Despite assuming that IT knowledge and practices were universal, lack of 'local experience' was problematic for all my participants in their search for employment, as is demonstrated with reference to the cases of Suresh, Claire, Felipe, Esperanza and Hernán and Kaveh.

Example 1: Suresh

Suresh first came to Australia from Nepal as an international student to undertake an undergraduate course in Computer Science in an Australian university. When he arrived, Suresh believed his English needed a lot of work in spite of the fact that he had been partly educated through the medium of English in his country, Nepal. He worked hard and four years after arriving in Australia, he graduated with Distinctions and was proud to be ranked among the top 15% of his cohort at university.

Regardless of his academic success, Suresh reported that, as a recent graduate with no local work experience, finding work was difficult. At the time he was ready to look for work, the demand for Computer Science graduates was low. In addition, he felt that 'the way I talk' was a problem. When asked to elaborate on this statement Suresh was unable to do so but his comment clearly indicates that he perceives his English to be inadequate in some way. Suresh reported that he eventually found work the 'backdoor way', meaning that he found appropriate work by accepting a lower level position doing troubleshooting in a small company and later working his way up to more suitable employment. In spite of the unchallenging nature of his first post, he believes the work gave him valuable experience in some areas which helped him along the way. He says:

> "I worked with customers and you need customer relations anywhere you go." (Interview 109)

Suresh's comment suggests that he has made the best of his situation rather than focusing on the negative consequences of being underemployed. He views the customer relation experience he gained, albeit at a low level, as a positive trade-off for the low level technical nature of the work he was doing. Both the interview and Suresh's interactions with other members of his team reveal that he is highly proficient at speaking English and evaluates his English as '*good enough'*. However, although he was proficient at expressing himself orally, during my fieldwork observations I found Suresh was quiet and unassuming when he interacted with other team members in the way that any newcomer to a position might be. (Fieldnotes, 09)

At the time of the interview, Suresh held a position commensurate with his qualifications at *SolutionsPlus*, a company that he was happy to be employed in. Although he was still

in his probationary period, he was confident that his performance at this company would lead to an offer of ongoing work.

Example 2: Claire

Claire came to Australia from China to study for a Masters degree in Computing and Business. As part of her degree she did a work placement in one company and gained some work experience in another where she made some contacts. Claire completed her degree and returned to China where she worked for an Australian company for two years. The majority of the company's work was conducted in English both in the China office as well as via teleconference calls to Australia. However, the company eventually became insolvent and stopped trading, so Claire returned to Australia where she married an Australian citizen and began looking for suitable work.

Claire was surprised that neither her work experience during her placement in Australia, nor her experience of working for an Australian company in China was sufficient to give her an advantage in seeking work in the Australian market place. Where she had expected that her China-based work experience would be considered as equivalent to local experience, instead she was advised to start working at lower level jobs, which for Claire meant she was returning to her graduate level all over again. During her interview she quoted one of the recruiters as having said to her:

> "Yeah you don't have local experience so you have to take the job from the scratch" (Interview 09)

The fact that Claire imitates the recruiter's comment as direct reported voice and delivers it in a matter of fact tone of voice emphasises her annoyance. Her frustration at

having to prove herself a second time is expressed through her emphatic repetition of how unhappy she was at having to work at a level beneath her competence:

Claire: I was not happy, I was not happy! (Interview 09)

Vittoria: So did you feel you had to prove yourself all over again?

Claire: Yes, I had to prove myself, yeah, so I had to prove that I have the skills and more,

Vittoria: And, can I ask …. Do you feel that that's an extra layer of proof you have to go through compared to local people, do you feel you are put to the test again….

Claire: Yeah, you have to, there are extra efforts you have to prove compared to native people or the locals, but that company I worked for, all the people, the majority of people there are [European nationality]1 people, so they possibly Italian people they feel they are superior to other, other ??? groups, or other ethnic groups, so they usually look after themselves, the other Italians first, so in the company the Italian people are much more likely to get a promotion than others, (yeah, yeah) and then they categorise people (really?) first there will be the Italian people, and then the locals, (oh really ha) yeah and then the Asian people they will be at the bottom!

Vittoria: Do you think that's discrimination?

Claire: This sounds like discrimination but they never say it? (no) no they never say it but you can feel through the work they give to you and through the uhm, you have to prove yourself who you are and through the promotion, (ah uhm) and through the promotion you can see much clearer

(Interview 09)

Like Suresh, Claire began working in more junior positions and was eventually employed at a level that matched her experience and qualifications. One of the first jobs she accepted was that of an analyst, a job considered very junior for someone with project management skills and one that is very technical rather than business focused. Claire found the analyst position less interesting than her previous work in project management and the lower salary was also a source of irritation.

At another job interview she attended after returning to Australia, Claire found that she had to prove she could speak adequate English in spite of her qualifications:

> Claire: Not now anymore, there was a transition period when I came back from China from overseas and then 'cause I came back due to I got married and then I had to look for job again, at that time, people still think you cannot have local working experience, even though you worked for Australian company over there, they feel, a little bit weird at that time, one, a recruiter she asked me, 'oh you have been working overseas for two years? So how much skill you think you can transfer to a local market' and I was a little bit surprised, I was doing IT stuff and (yeah) and I don't think that's too much of a difference if I do overseas or I do over here yeah so all the computer skill they are pretty much the same!
>
> (Interview 109)

In addition, Claire reported that the recruiting company told her it was necessary for her to complete an English language assessment to help them determine her suitability as an applicant. Claire believed this was unnecessary since she had studied at the postgraduate level in Australia and worked in an Australian company in China. Consequently she chose not to complete the English language assessment.

Claire: (uhm, uhm,) So then they want to give me hum a language test as well to see how proficient I was!

Vittoria: Really? Even though you had an MA from here?

Claire: Yeah, Yeah I don't know!

Vittoria: So how did you find, so did you do an English test?

Claire: Yeah, no, I think I didn't go for that job! Yeah I pretty, I felt insulted!

(Interview 109)

Later Claire contacted the employers she had met during her university placement and gained a position in that company, although at a more junior level than she desired. After some time, however, the company recognised that her skills merited a salary increase and promoted her to a higher position.

Claire they realised that actually I could do much much more then they give the position to me, so they give me a huge pay jump and they changed my position and let me to manage one channel of the operation so which was pretty good!

(Interview 09)

At the time of her interview for this study Claire was working in a position which matched her experience and professional background. Unlike Suresh who had anticipated difficulty in finding suitable employment, Claire was impatient to have her skills and experience recognised and rewarded appropriately. But in spite of her more intense frustration with being underemployed, like Suresh she had accepted that working her way up from a more junior position was an inevitable part of the migration process.

Example 3: Felipe

Felipe is a business analyst from Mexico who migrated to Australia with his wife on a Skilled Migration visa. Prior to migration he and his wife had attended workshops presented by migration agents focused on work opportunities in Australia. Felipe had extensive work experience and considered he was at the top of his field in Mexico where he had worked for a multinational company. When he arrived in Australia however, he found it quite difficult to progress beyond preliminary interviews and quickly became discouraged. In order to enhance his opportunities he enrolled in an English course for migrants and began a Masters course in Business Management paying overseas student fees as he was not yet able to apply for permanent residence. I interviewed Felipe twice in 2008-9 and maintained contact with him regularly via email until the end of 2009 and then sporadically during 2010.

At the first interview Felipe said he believed his lack of success was largely due to his lack of local experience and his lack of familiarity with the Australian way of doing things. Felipe also found recruitment procedures in Australia quite different from those in Mexico, particularly the requirement to sometimes complete psychological tests and attend several interviews for a single position. In particular he found CV writing difficult and even though he sought advice on how to go about this, he found the advice he received was not always consistent. In addition, he believed that the structure of the résumé differs in Australia from what he was used to in Mexico, because the way people work in the two countries differs.

Felipe: The only thing, I think the most important thing is the résumé, (yeah) and now I think now I know how it should be

Vittoria: What have you changed?

Felipe: Ah it's… the difference is how I used to do a CV in Mexico it was more based on the name of the company (yeah) here it's more based on the position (yeah) apparently they don't mind about the company if it was big or (no?) no, probably they, they are interested in big companies if you are applying for a small company they could be scared like 'hum these professionals are ???' but it's more finding the right thing for you, so I just put in big letters like the company and here should be the position, then how I describe the position, it was more in the sense of, hum, 'I was in charge of the IT" or ' I was in charge of finance' so that, that doesn't say anything at all, they want to see where,

Vittoria: The duties that you did?

Felipe: The duties, ok so ' I was in charge of uhm, doing this documentation" I was in charge of 'hiring people', so very specific things and I just used to write very broad things, because especially in developing countries it's more like, we don't have all the resources to do the specific things like you don't have the guy who cleans the table you don't have the guy that, you just have a guy to do everything, so I used to say 'I was in charge of a restaurant' and they used to say 'what in a restaurant?' 'everything you need in a restaurant I can do it!" 'No sorry' they're looking for the guy who can clean tables or, 'I can clean tables, I can learn' 'no sorry'

Vittoria: No no experience

Felipe: So when look up for the recruiter, I was applying for a business analyst position, and she said 'so when you were a business analyst?' And I said, 'in the last 12 years!" and she said ' no no no in the résumé it doesn't say that, in the résumé it says ?? manager, and I said but in that job I did business analyst and she said 'yeah but I don't know because my customer is looking for someone who has at least 5 years

experience as a business analyst and I can see you have all those 5 years but all spread' and maybe they are looking for someone in the last 5 years specialised as a business analyst so I said 'ok I understand, next one I sent business analyst, business analyst, business analyst' haha

Vittoria: Well that's right

Felipe: She said, you can put Project Manager/ business analyst

(Interview 108)

This extract demonstrates that, like Suresh, Felipe believed that in Australia work roles are more defined and specific than in Mexico where one position may encompass more than one role. For this reason he felt he had gained experience across different areas of his field while working in Mexico but this was not adequately demonstrated in the CVs he was presenting to prospective Australian employers. Further, another potential barrier was that his work experience was not understood by the recruiters given that jobs and tasks as they are performed differ transnationally and do not always match the expectations associated with Australian job classifications.

During the second interview Felipe said he had finally learned the importance of the résumé and how to structure it to make it more appealing. He believed he had been overlooked on occasion because of his résumé although he considered the looming economic downturn in 2009 was also a factor in his lack of success. He also reported that a friend from his network had invested a large sum of money to improve her own résumé which highlighted the belief in his social network that it was important to present this document appropriately in order to succeed.

Felipe: Oh a friend, she paid $1000, she applied for four months and she was desperate and,

Vittoria: $1000?

Felipe: $1,500

Vittoria: What do you get for $1,500? (Surprised)

Felipe: The super résumé! Hahaha

Vittoria: Has she got a job?

Felipe: After 4 or 5 months at XXCoName

Vittoria: And is that because of the résumé?

Felipe: She said it was!

(interview 209)

During our second interview, almost two years after he arrived, Felipe was less optimistic. By this time, his experiences working in a voluntary position had led him to conclude that work in Australia was conducted in the same way as in Mexico so he was less accepting of his lack of success. His frustration was compounded by the fact that many of his contacts had found employment during this time while he remained unemployed. At this stage Felipe seemed to be attributing his lack of success to other factors, such as his lack of networking which he had been told (and he believed) was the real key to gaining work in Australia.

The other obstacle that Felipe encountered was his lack of local experience. His strategy for remedying this was to take up a full time voluntary position he was offered through a contact he had made at university. Although demoralised as a result of not earning a salary, Felipe found solace in this role as he believed it would at least provide him with local experience and a reference.

Felipe: Yeah I'm getting experience and I'm getting a good reference so that's all right, I, I, thought maybe after 6 months I should start applying again and see , and see what can I find now with a local experience and things like that so,

Vittoria: Yeah

Felipe: Yeah, it's ok, I'm learning and I'm busy

(Interview 209)

Felipe believed the voluntary position was valuable for a number of reasons. First, he was well respected by the company owner and was given the task of putting in place a business plan, running several projects and recruiting voluntary staff. The owner was aware that Felipe was looking for paid work and had agreed to act as his referee when an opportunity arose.

Felipe: Yeah, he reviews all the structures to the (hesitation) when I arrived there he said 'actually I cannot offer you any money at all I just got the last person one month ago so hum I cannot offer you a position" but I told him, 'it doesn't matter just give me the opportunity I can help you and you can help me at the same time (hum hum) with the reference and the local experience

Felipe: I wanna get at least 6 months, so I can say look 'I have local experience' and then start looking hard again and then if nothing happened, then change strategy

(interview 209)

During 2010 I learned (via email) that Felipe had finally gained paid work in an Australia-based Mexican firm and was working in a position more closely aligned to his pre-

migration level. Felipe wrote that he had gained this work through his intra-ethnic networking, made possible by the social connections Felipe and his wife actively sought and maintained. Therefore his eventual success in gaining work was unrelated to the quality or standard of his CV and interview performance but rather occurred as a result of contacts he made.

Example 4: Esperanza and Hernán

Lack of local experience was also a problem for Esperanza and Hernán, a couple from Mexico who requested to be interviewed at the same time. Both were business analysts in their native country, Mexico. Both had started off as programmers and worked their way up to business analyst roles in Mexico. Like Felipe, their careers in Mexico had spanned a decade and both had worked for large firms. Esperanza had worked for a large US-based multinational firm where English was used at work. However, at the time of the interview both were working in lower level, technically-focused positions, as this extract from the interview reveals:

Esperanza:	Actually here we are not BAs,
Vittoria:	Oh you're not?
Esperanza:	We have a level, a lower level,
Vittoria:	Oh, because of that's just the way it's worked out?
Esperanza:	Hum no I think
Vittoria:	You were also a BA? what are you doing now?
Hernán:	No, I at the moment I am a developer, programming,…. we usually work in different topics, here usually you work in one area, developing, testing topics

Esperanza: Yeah and is the same with me I am analyst and I used to be business analyst…

Esperanza states that it was necessary for them to start off in lower paid positions given that they lacked local experience but they hoped to return to their pre-migration level of employment in time. It was their intention to gain as much experience as possible and work their way up to positions aligned with their former professional status. The following extracts illustrate this point.

Hernán: That was the main problem here in Melbourne that we don't have local experience but I said to the interviewer, that for example Microsoft Word is the same here, the same in the United States, the same platform, so, but local experience was the difference, so that the problem that we faced at the beginning…..

Esperanza: Now we, we had a lot of technical experience, we had ten years experience but now we have local experience and I think if we have local experience I think we can get better jobs, …

Hernán added that their lack of local experience should not be an issue with their work, but it was nevertheless considered a factor that recruiters focused on when short-listing candidates.

Hernán: Yeah I totally agree so we have different assets in our company, now we have local experience, we had a lot of technical experience, we had ten years experience but now we have local experience and I think if we have local experience I think we can get better jobs,

Like Felipe, Hernán believes IT work roles are more narrowly defined in Australia than in Mexico where positions are more diversified; consequently this experience can be difficult to capture in a résumé. As Esperanza explains below, this was a source of frustration when she first began to look for work in Australia.

> Esperanza: At the beginning it was hard for me to find a job because I used to work from the beginning to the end and here you have to work in only one area. I had a lot of experience, as a programmer, as a…. people didn't understand my CV very well (gives her background) but here in Australia it was difficult to put all my different experience and all my background in my CV and that was absolutely frustrating for me, because I couldn't find exactly how to put my experience, so it was very difficult… so we bring our résumé from Mexico but here it is completely different….

Another difference Esperanza commented on was the tendency for interview questions in Australia to become too personal at times. She gave the example of being asked during one interview if she liked Australia. Surprised by this question, she was not sure how to reply as she thought that the interviewer was trying to determine whether she intended saying in Australia or returning to Mexico. When we discussed the possibility that the interviewer might have been trying to elicit some small talk by asking this question at the start of the interview, Esperanza disagreed, indicating that she believed the way she responded to this question was crucial to determining the outcome of the interview. In addition she commented that some interview questions appeared d to be aimed at eliciting information about her long-term plans or determining whether her interest in the position was genuine. Esperanza discovered that stating her long-term career plans was not desirable in an interview. In her first interviews she was very

honest about her career intentions but learned this was not always an advantage. This is highlighted in the following extracts.

Esperanza: The course, it was very useful, (the courses in CV writing)…so we rewrite the CV and also we had a lot of practice in the interview, because also the interview is very different here in Australia. For example I used to say oh I would like to be here and I would like to be a manager in 2 so, or 3 years"

…

Esperanza: Yeah, because in Mexico that is a good thing, for you because you are interested in the next level, because you really want to grow with the company but here in Australia you have to…

Apart from their lack of local experience, Esperanza and Hernán believed they needed to improve their English in order to find employment in Australia in their pre-migration roles as business analysts. Esperanza believed that with ten years of work experience behind them they would likely succeed in the future in Australia. She was optimistic about their chances of gaining highest level positions and believed they had to begin in a lower position because of their English level stating:

Esperanza: I think we are confident that we can get the next level because we know that level, I think the only problem or the big issue is that we cannot speak very well,

Esperanza: Everyday, I sent, like 58 résumés, after my 58th résumé, to companies like X, Y, M, finally I found, well, they interview twice,

> the interviews were very difficult, I think that was the first thing, the first difficult thing for us to speak in English this is different

As was the case with Suresh (Example 1) it was difficult to encourage Esperanza to elaborate on which aspects of her English language competence she felt needed to be improved. However there is no evidence from the interview that Esperanza's English was lacking; in fact, as an experienced teacher I concluded she was a competent and highly proficient speaker throughout the interview. Her speaking style was confident and she had a wide range of vocabulary. She had no false starts nor did she display having to search for appropriate words. In addition she made no mistakes either with syntax or vocabulary. . Like many of the students I had interviewed in my teaching practice and placed in the advanced ESL classes, she simply lacked confidence and evaluated her English in negative terms, perhaps motivated by the misunderstanding that as a new arrival to an English speaking country and workplace, she should have some problems with English use.

Example 5: Kaveh

Kaveh is a network engineer who like Miguel, Hernán and Esperanza, had extensive experience in his field prior to migrating from his native Iran. In addition he has worked in Malaysia and Singapore. He completed a Masters degree in Computer Science In Australia on arriving and although he found work relatively easily compared to some of the other participants, he believes that some difficulties exist for NESB job seekers in Australia.

First, Kaveh found that job interviews are a lengthy and complex process which he regarded as a potential barrier. He recognises that in Australia, regardless of your

technical skills, it is how your present yourself in the interview that leads to success in obtaining a position. In stating this, Kaveh is showing his awareness of the complexity of the job interview process, not least because it requires navigation of pragmatic competence or 'soft skills' issues rather than proficiency itself. Emphasising how much more difficult it is for an L2 speaker to perform well in an interview he says:

Kaveh: Of course, not only in Iran, even ?? if you present yourself, fluently you can get a job, even if you don't have technical language, ??? If you can easily get past the interview, … they are not going to ask super difficult questions, but if you can present yourself well then you will get the job, more than likely,

Kaveh believes the series of interviews he had were actually more like a series of informal English tests than genuine interviews. As the excerpt below indicates, Kaveh believes the process of applications and selection indicates that a further step is required:

Vittoria: What differences did you find in the job seeking process in Australia?

Kaveh: Of course, actually yes in Australia you have to apply, to pass at ¨least 3 job interviews, if there is an agency in between, uhm, they give you a call and they will talk to you on the phone, so you have to speak clearly (yes) and you have to understand all the questions and answer all the questions, hum, if one is from Australia it would be about previous work English speakers, and we are not native English speakers definitely they want to know how well we can speak English (yes) so that's the first thing, then they will ask you to come to their office (which is an agency) turns out that will be a second test and if you're lucky enough they will

send you off to the actual hum employer and that will the last and the most important one and definitely at all stages you have to pass technical tests and language test which is implicit tests

Kaveh also identifies the role of recruitment agencies as a potential barrier since they sometimes use telephone interviews to screen potential applicants. In such cases, the decision to allow a candidate to advance to the next stage or not is based on their speaking skills. Kaveh provided an example from his wife's experience:

Kaveh: Yes, of course, hum, hum, I think I can give you a very good example, my wife, my wife, a different role she is applying for a job, she's a engineer as well, and her English is not perfect, not too bad but most of times, maybe 90% of cases she misses jobs because of her communication skills and nothing, actually don't tell you and after I think about 4 or 5 sentences they say, 'oh ok I'll call you later' and this is really disappointing especially if this is one of your first job, yeah,

Certainly other participants (such as Felipe) in this study cited speaking on the phone as a source of tension and something they had to consciously work at. In my teaching practice I often found that students avoided speaking on the telephone and it was one area in which they routinely sought help. For example, Felipe mentions that he avoided using the telephone in front of his colleagues and preferred to make calls from the meeting room whenever possible (Felipe Interview 2).

This section has outlined the first barrier which the participants identified as problematic in the job search process: lack of local experience, unfamiliarity with CV presentation and the job interview process as well as the belief that lack of English language

proficiency is the reason for lack of success in the labour market. The next section will look more closely at a language-related issue and explore one area of English language proficiency singled out as problematic by the participants - accented English.

4.3 Barrier Two: Foreign accents and what they indicate

Accents are an important indicator of group membership and an easy target for stereotypes and 'otherness'. Numerous research studies have shown that negative evaluations of certain accents can lead to workplace discrimination in the US (Lippi-Green, 1997; Hosoda, 2010) and in Canada Creese, (2003) are key studies which provide accounts of accent-related workplace discrimination. In the Australian context, reports that accented English is negatively assessed in workplace contexts have also been documented (D'Netto, 2008; Lakha, 2005;Alcorso, 200; (Booth, 2002). An interesting example which highlights the importance of accents as an in-group marker in Australia appears in the following statement made by US-born Kristina Keneally when she was appointed Premier of New South Wales. In her first media interview she attempted to minimise the impact her accent may have had on the public's perception of her:

> I have an accent – you noticed? But I am first and foremost a proud Australian (Jerga, 2009)

Clearly, the US-born NSW premier felt she needed to prove her credentials as an Australian even though she had been selected by her party to the position. According to Blommaert, accent is a sociolinguistic feature which indexes far more than the place you come from "... accents thus suggest places and rankings on several other highly sensitive scales in society" (2005, p. 222). The issue of accents in language learning is also discussed by Davies who states that whilst some language learners may wish to become indistinguishable from native speakers (NS), having a foreign accent should not

be seen as a disadvantage since " ...what it can also mean is a choice of identity and they have chosen not to belong to the native speaker (NS) community of the speech community they now reside in" (1991, p. 70). Similarly, Jenkins (2009) states that for some EFL speakers, having a non-native accent was part of their identity. However, other research shows that in EFL settings teachers of English strive towards what they perceive as native speaker models (Jenkins, 2006) and for some learners 'passing as natives' is an explicit goal of their language-learning trajectory (Piller, 2002).

The issue of accent is highly relevant to this study because participants regarded their accented English as a potential barrier to employment success. Whilst it can be argued that accents are difficult to choose or modify given factors such as age, it is true that many NNS attempt to modify their accents or are obliged to do so for work purposes. This phenomenon is best illustrated by the accent modification courses offered to Indian and Pakistani call centre workers who are trained to service the US market and who receive financial rewards for achieving this (Rahman, 2009; Pal, 2008). This section analyses data gathered during the study regarding this topic and in making the point that accented English is a marker of foreignness, it argues that attitudes to accented English raise issues of ideology.

As stated earlier, an important theme that emerged in the interview data was the participants' assessments of their own English. In particular the way they rated their own proficiency and the measures they used to do so revealed a prevailing deferential attitude towards native speaker varieties. In particular, accentedness was one of their greatest concerns. What is of interest is that whilst participants such as Lia (see Example 1 below) and Claire (see Example 4 below) were concerned with what seem to be idealised NS accents and varieties of English, they acknowledge that there is no single variety. Data from the interviews and my interactions with the participants reveal a

desire not to sound foreign. Participants stated they wanted to ‘sound’ either like Australians (Lia, Claire) or like a British native speaker. Lia and Kevin had made attempts to alter their accents whilst Claire and Nicolas were seeking to do so as the examples below highlight.

Some of the participants state perceptively that working in Australian multicultural workplaces requires the ability to understand *variety* of non-Anglo accents. Hernán for example reported that getting used to his Vietnamese colleagues’ accents was something he was not prepared for as he had never worked with non-Mexicans. Like Hernán, Ricardo stated that in his first job he had colleagues from a variety of nationalities and he had to get used to their ways of speaking English more so than adjusting to so-called native speakers. The multilingual nature of Australian workplaces is perhaps overlooked in English language training where models and materials used for teaching are not truly representative of the diversity of accents likely to be encountered. This section outlines how the issue of accent and English language proficiency represented a problem for the participants in the workplace.

Example 1: Lia

At *SolutionsPlus* many of the participants said their accent was sometimes the subject of comments by the customers who thought that since they were calling an Australian company, they should not be hearing a ‘foreign’ accent. Customers questioned whether they had reached the Australian call centre they were calling. Like many other participants, Lia from China considered this attitude to be ‘their problem’ (i.e. the customers’) but at the same time she thought that she should be able to sound more ‘Aussie’ given that she had lived in Australia since Year 10 (about age 16) and had completed her university degree in Australia where she had lived and worked since.

Lia reported that many of the clients, in their efforts to assign her a particular nationality, asked her if she was Irish because of her accent. The fact that her accent is still the subject of comment bothers her (like Claire). Lia believes she should have acquired a recognisable 'Aussie' accent after living in this country for so many years, but she has not. Lia was quite surprised and disappointed she did not sound more 'Aussie' and perhaps never would. She was now married to a Chinese speaker and spoke mostly Chinese at home. Lia's experiences highlight the fact that in spite of leading a bilingual life living, studying and working in Australia for many years she has a second language speaker identity (Fieldnotes, 09). Like other participants from a similar background including those who have lived in Australia as international students prior to migration here, this example of negative self-assessment highlights the fact that barriers to employment are not always clearly identifiable and proficiency based. Lia is a successful, experienced and competent professional who nevertheless perceives she is an incomplete speaker, much like those who have only recently arrived in Australia.

Example 2: Jennifer

In the following excerpt Jennifer, a network engineer at *SolutionsPlus*, states that some customers have identified her foreign accent as a possible source of intelligibility difficulties. She also explains that her strategy is to ignore their comments and focus on the work problem.

Vittoria: You were saying that some people were complaining about the accent and they wanted, uhmm, uhm, how, how did that affect you?

Jennifer: I was feeling very nervous, I was doing my training and in the careers dept and someone was sitting next to me to mentor me,

Vittoria: Yeah

Jennifer: And that guy ???Say ‘do I have accent?’ and uhm ‘yes’, so you fix the problem, that is good enough they are coming in to get help and you can give them the help

Vittoria: Yeah

Jennifer: They are worried about the accent will affect your work, you don’t need to worry about it, just ignore what they are saying

Vittoria: So now do you think it’s improved or do you ignore it?

Jennifer: Yeah now I think it’s improved a lot, I’m not ashamed about asking, I can’t understand, can you repeat it again and for certain words I will check the dictionary and I will ask them directly,

Vittoria: Yeah

Jennifer: Most people are very helpful, I think the first thing I need to go through is myself, not other people.

Vittoria: uhm

Jennifer: So I must give myself a chance, to start the first

Example 3: Kaveh

Kaveh believes that recruiters focus on foreign accents as they form judgments about the applicants’ suitability for positions. Kaveh had experienced some difficulty finding work in Australia in spite of extensive work experience in Malaysia where English was the lingua franca of the workplace. At the time of the interview he had recently begun working at *SolutionPlus* as a network engineer. Previously he had been working in another role in the same company. In the interview he reflected on his experiences in the job seeking market and observed that in Australia what employers or recruitment agents stated was needed was not always the case, as the excerpts below illustrate. He also suggested that communication skills were not always assessed fairly.

To support his view he spoke of his wife's experiences. He explained that his wife had consistently failed to gain a face-to-face interview in spite of holding high qualifications in her field. He believed this was due to the fact that the recruitment agencies she was dealing with made judgements about her abilities based on her speaking skills during her initial phone interview.

Vittoria So when you say communication skills, do you think they're not telling her that that's the problem?

Kaveh: I think there are two different problems, I think it's not bad at all, they just want to hire people who are able to hire people who speak properly and are still able to present their skills and sometimes present their product to the customers, (yeah), that's fair enough, sometimes people unfortunately are very sensitive to your accents, but in this case, in second case you really can't do anything about it, because it's too late for us because, if I was 5 or 10, yeah I could do something about that, but it's too late for us, to change the accent, in hum, to get a full 100% British accent for example (vittoria :yeah yeah) oh, yeah, if she's lucky enough, she's I think, after studying she might be able to get a job after but she has to study more

Although Kaveh was successful in gaining a job soon after arrival, he also encountered some reluctance on the part of recruiters to recommend him based on their perceptions of his communication skills.

Vittoria: Do you think there are unreasonable expectations in Australia about what you should sound like to get a job?

Kaveh: For some positions yes, for example when I wanted to get a job, I worked in (Company Name) and I got that job through an agency and hum, the agent she was very very sensitive to my language and I was very lucky to get that one

Vittoria: What do you mean 'sensitive to your language', uhm

Kaveh uhm, I just felt that definitely she preferred to hire someone much, much better skills in English

Vittoria Oh really?

Kaveh was unable to easily cite the reasons the recruiter was reluctant to recommend him to the company but it is likely the recruiter would be unable to provide more than a general impression of his language competence either. Kaveh comments — 'I just felt that…'. He explains that as a result of this negative perception of his skills the agency staff member emphasised the importance of high-level communication skills for someone in the position and in particular, the ability to give presentations. However, Kaveh explains his job in the company was rather solitary and in fact it involved very little speaking.

Kaveh: Yes, the thing is when I got that job, (hum) hum, after a couple of days I was only the only one ???, I worked there for a couple of years and I didn't find anyone to talk to, there were 50 or 60 people on computers and no people at all, why did you need that sort of high presentation skills, I couldn't believe it myself, I thought it would be a customer facing role, ?? But it was not!

Vittoria: Did you feel it was a backroom job

Kaveh: Yeah I had a room to myself, I spent two years in that room, talking to maximum 5 people!

This example highlights the difficulty participants experienced when being interviewed by a consultant who may be unfamiliar with the advertised position. At the same time, it shows that the communication skills which are so highly sought after in the marketplace are in fact not uniform but vary according to the position. However, they are still prized at the entry level. Therefore if recruitment agencies were to adjust their expectations to match actual workplace requirements, this would benefit those who are technically able but whose linguistic skills might not convince recruiters that they are capable employees.

Example 4: Claire

For Claire the fact that she is still recognised as a foreigner due to her accent carries more significance than simply preventing her from fitting in to her workplace. In fact, she views her 'marked' accent as a symbol of her not fitting in with her social group as well. Claire's ongoing concern with her accent and pronunciation, which she claims is 'crap' was articulated early on in our meetings. Like Nicolas (see section below) Claire had hoped that participating in this study might be a way to help her change her accent. Claire and Nicolas had both approached me about how they could 'improve their accents to sound more 'native-like'. Nicolas wondered if it was possible to be taught to sound 'more British' than Australian and thought that as an English teacher I would be able to help him achieve this. Other participants asked my opinion of their English level and believed I could help them improve; however the participants were more concerned with accent training than with other aspects of their English language performance. Because of her accent, Claire's colleagues assigned her a nickname which signalled her 'bad' pronunciation. Whilst these comments were intended as mere banter, they nevertheless help maintain Clare's position as someone whose accent signifies that she is an outsider, thereby confirming her L2 status. Claire joined in the jokes but clearly felt

marginalised by differences between her pronunciation and that of her colleagues.

In the following exchange between Claire and her subordinate Gia, the latter highlights Claire's L2 status by alluding to the fact that as an L1 speaker of English, Gia should be better at spelling.

Gia: Gee my spelling was shocking wasn't it?
Claire: Yes.
Gia: Because I was in a hurry because I had to go to that funeral on the Monday.
Claire: Yeah I know. I remember that one.
Gia: Thanks for correcting it!
Claire: I corrected some but I still leave some for you to have a look yourself.
Gia: I can't understand this any more, environment look, services redefined, corporate gee what is going on here? Views everything, environment.
Claire: Don't worry some people, they just can't spell. (jokingly)
Gia: It is pretty bad. Yeah who is the foreign and who is the Australian, English is their first language?
Claire: Need a foreign tutor!
Gia: There we go, done. Okay.
Claire: Okay, yeah so we get this stuff out.

(Claire and Gia Meeting 09)

Claire also feels 'different' to others in her social circle who are mostly Australian-born Chinese or Australian friends:

> "Wherever I go people ask me where I come from and it bothers me, I have to explain it all the time and I know they ask me because of my accent. When I first arrived in Australia and I was at university I had US accent and people asked me why I had an American accent, I said 'that's what they teach in China'. At least when I had an American accent people said it was cute. But now I have lost my American accent and I would like to change it to a 'neutral' accent. (Fieldnotes August09)"

Claire had just become an Australian citizen but did not feel she would belong in Australia until she *sounded* like an Australian. When asked what she meant by a 'neutral' accent, she was unable to explain.

This self-reporting is interesting in many ways. Claire's comment "At least when I had an American accent people said it was cute" - shows that what she is seeking to emulate is an accent that is recognisable, which clearly reflects one's country of origin. She was much happier when she had an accent that could be attributed to a particular place, and regarded this as preferable to having an accent that which was not recognisable or attributable to a particular place.

These examples indicate that the participants evaluate their own English language skills negatively and position themselves as individuals who still need to improve their English. They see themselves as learners who may never reach their desired level of proficiency. According to Grosjean (cited in Cook, 1999), this self-criticism is typical of L2 speakers. As this is a small scale study these attitudes cannot of course claim to be representative but the study reports the participants' viewpoint which generally supports Grosjean's assertion. A larger scale study might identify address other factors that lead to

positive/negative learner self-evaluations and these must be considered within the wider context of their learning circumstances and professional lives. This context incorporates social and ideological factors that determine which 'ways of speaking' are more highly valorised than others. Therefore the learners' perspectives on their English language competence present only part of the picture. This issue will be further discussed in the conclusion (Chapter 7) when I discuss the need for teachers and members of the local community to move away from NS models of English towards English as an International language.

4.4 Barrier Three: Other perceived linguistic problems

The third theme that emerged from analysing participants' discussion of barriers to their access to employment was the way in which they constructed their knowledge of English in terms of deficits or 'gaps' in their oral and written skills. These gaps were evaluated as deficits or incomplete knowledge of English and confirmed their non-native speaker status. The examples from the data below highlight the participants' view that their English level is somehow below what is required for full workplace communication and participation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, participants reported feeling unable to take part in or understand aspects of small talk and jokes; both these genres are regularly highlighted as frequent in the Australian workplace, as has been pointed out in previous studies. For example in Booth's study (Booth, 2009) recruiters listed small talk and the ability to share a joke as two of the preferred characteristics of the ideal candidate. However, apart from self-reporting in the interview data, there is no evidence in the data that social talk is problematic for the participants. Therefore if it is indeed a problem, it occurs only infrequently making the impact on working relationships minimal rather than critical. Reporting a lack of competence in this aspect of communication as a deficit is indicative

of two factors. First, as stated above, L2 learners tend to be critical of themselves and therefore overestimate the problems they experience. Second, it lends support to the view that L2 learners have an idealised and sometimes unrealistic view of what it means to acquire a second language, and that small talk and joking are imagined on the basis of an assumed lack of fit.

A greater understanding of the participants' ability to participate in interactions can only be achieved by analysing instances of social talk in which they participated and identifying the absence of social talk in their contributions. This type of analysis is made possible by closely observing participants as they take part in interactions rather than by relying on self-report data, as the next section will demonstrate.

Genres: Jokes and small talk

This section considers how participants evaluate aspects of their English other than their accents. The data shows that participants view themselves as ongoing learners who still need to fill in gaps in their knowledge in order to achieve full competency. Jokes and small talk have been highlighted as genres that are highly prevalent in workplace talk, that serve a variety of functions (Holmes, 1999) and which can be difficult to acquire. Hence, instances where they occurred in the study were paid special attention and participants' perceived lack on competency in this area is significant.

For Suresh, using English at work does not present any problems and he reports that cultural differences are not a factor he encounters in his job. He feels he can confidently manage most interactions but jokes and small talk can sometimes marginalise him in conversations.

Suresh: Jokes is something I need to improve on - sometimes you just don't get the depth of it and if I can be bothered I ask, if not, I don't.

(Fieldnotes 09)

Claire believes that some of the interactions she takes part in present difficulties because she does not share her colleagues' background on certain topics. She manages this situation by asking questions and alerting her colleagues to the fact that she is not following the conversation.

Vittoria: So apart from your accent, are you confident you feel you can use English in all interactions? Are there interactions you feel are more difficult than others?

Claire: Oh yeah, for sure hum so there are difficulties comes from two parts, one is cultural one, so even though you understand every word they are saying but they are talking about something you are not familiar with (yeah) like a history or a person who is famous in Australia or a football player that's always a long time ago, sometime we like to play 'who wants to be a millionaire' so (V: haha) so there are lot of questions which I was not be unfamiliar. The other thing might be a certain kind of words, so vocabulary, also slang, and also using kinda of Australian and I didn't get it?

Vittoria: Does that happen more outside of work or at work, in the pub or something?

Claire No, slang might be in the conversation with the colleague, they might use some of the words which I do not understand but culture thing they happen both inside and outside as well and vocabulary yeah can happen (yeah)

Similarly Hernán found that jokes were ubiquitous with some of his colleagues and signalled that this was a source of tension for him. As he states below, while he recognised jokes, he found them difficult to understand and react to appropriately.

Hernán: The director of the company is a person who usually talks with all the employees, (yeah) sometimes he makes jokes and it's difficult for me to understand sometimes

Vittoria: How do you deal with that ?

Hernán: I say' sorry' or' what do you mean?' or something like that because for me it's very difficult to understand, I think he is an Irish and because he talks very fast and even jokes (a lot of people find the same)

However Esperanza reported that jokes and small talk were used less in her workplace in Australia than she was used to. When compared to her experience in Mexico, she finds that jokes and small talk are used only rarely at work in Australia, so she has now adjusted her expectations and anticipates that most non-work exchanges will be brief.

Esperanza: Compared to Mexico here they are not talking at all, there you talk to your co-worker about your husband, your mum, your pet, your that, your hum neighbour your shoes, all the things

Vittoria: And here you don't?

Esperanza: No, usually people just say 'hello how are you how was your weekend? Good and bye" and that's it and,

Vittoria: Very short?

Esperanza: And maybe in the lift or in the kitchen when you are preparing your coffee and that's it but usually people don't.

Regarding the amount of non-work talk at work she says:

Esperanza:	Yes a little (small talk) bit but in my company people usually talk about work, I think 80% they are talking about only work
Vittoria:	Is that something you miss about Mexico……
Esperanza:	I think in the beginning for me it was very difficult because now I can understand why because we have to work only 8 hours and we have goals and we have targets and we have to meet those targets and we don't have much time, here usually people arrive on time,

Esperanza's observations contrast with other data gathered during this study and in particular the data presented in the following chapter (Chapter 5) where I show that workplace talk in these Australian companies is not clearly separated from non-work talk in close teams. Here Esperanza is describing not only her experience of working in Mexico but of working in a close team there over a long period of time. Therefore her observations about the Australian workplace are those of a newcomer who has not yet established the close personal workplace relationships that she enjoyed prior to migrating to Australia.

This section has highlighted aspects of workplace communication that are perceived as problematic by the participants, including the frequency of small talk and the ability to understand and share jokes. Being unable to participate in some of these workplace conversations can lead to participants evaluating their level of English as 'incomplete'.

NS authority and learner identity; two perspectives

An aspect of perceived linguistic problems stems for the learners themselves and how they view their own English competence. Therefore this section considers the issue of NS authority and the L2 identity reported by participants. The section draws on data from interviews with seven participants who fall into two groups. The first group, made up of, Andrew, Lia and Nicolas displays what I will refer to as a less confident L2 identity. I interviewed Jim twice in 2008 and 2009. Andrew was interviewed once in 2009. Nicolas was interviewed once but we corresponded regularly from the time of the interview until 2010. Lia was interviewed once in 2009. (see Appendix VI for details about participants). The second group consists of Amir, Vadim and Kaveh who were interviewed once each in 2009. Of the seven participants whose perspectives are discussed here, Amir was the only key participant who I was also able to observe and whose team interactions I recorded. The views expressed by the first group, Jim , Andrew, Lia and Nicolas contrast starkly with those of Amir, Vadim and Kaveh, the second group, who have a much more positive and relaxed attitude about their English level and how they would improve it. The second group of participants however also focus less on individual ability and more on exposure and experience as factors that will lead to greater ability.

Group 1 perspective

Jim arrived in Australia approximately 4-5 years prior to the study as an international student and completed a Computer Science Degree in 2007. After graduating, he gained Permanent Residence and found work in the IT department of a tertiary institution. Jim displayed some insightful aspects of L2 learner identity which I report chronologically.

In the first interview Jim stated that he could participate in all workplace and after work

interactions. He also reported that although he was fairly confident about using English and could not remember any misunderstandings that had occurred with colleagues or clients, he believed his English was ‘poor’ and he needed to keep improving. In order to do this he had enrolled in an ESL course even though it was becoming difficult to attend as his work hours increased. He also tried to speak English as much as possible and to avoid Chinese friends. At work he avoided using Chinese with clients unless they initiated conversations in Chinese. In order to target vocabulary learning he watched movies with subtitles and tested himself on the meaning of certain words by guessing and then checking the meaning. But in spite of these efforts and his workplace success, Jim believes English will never be a language he can speak ‘well’ and confidently because he is not a native speaker.

Another issue that arises from the data from this group of participants is that NS have greater authority in NS-NNS interactions. Jim’s view that native speakers cannot be questioned when misunderstandings arise highlights other issues. For example the issue of accommodating to L2 speakers in multilingual contexts is relevant here. Like other participants in the study, Jim believes it is his responsibility to learn the target language. His ongoing strategies to improve are a quest to reach a target standard. In effect he is placing the success of NS-NNS communication entirely on the NNS and does not require accommodation by his interlocutors, although many of the NS participants claim they happily accommodate to perceived difficulties by restating, repeating and slowing down. For instance, slowing down their rate of speech is a technique that participants such as Oliver and John used when they believed their interactants were not fully engaged (Fieldnotes 09). Nevertheless Jim says he would not ask speakers to repeat what they have said as he believes this would impact on their message. Likewise, Liam states emphatically that he would never ask a speaker to slow

down as it is the responsibility of the L2 speaker ‘to learn English properly’ (Fieldnotes 109).

Prior to my second interview with Jim at his workplace, I had the opportunity to observe him interacting with colleagues in a customer service role. During the interview Jim recalled a misunderstanding when his supervisor had asked him to do a job and Jim believed he had carried out the instructions correctly. However the supervisor subsequently asked Jim to re-do the job that required him to download software onto particular computers. The supervisor had added further details and Jim did not question the clarity of the instructions, partly out of the desire not to cause trouble but also because he believed that it is inappropriate to question the clarity of a native speaker’s instructions.

Vittoria: Did you ask him what he meant by that? Did you say no, no you have to tell me the number, did you talk about it?

Jim : Because English is not my first language, that’s why.

When asked why he would not ask the supervisor to clarify his instructions, Jim added.

Jim: No. Because they are English first, they are English first language so I am scared to argue something with him.

He also added:

Jim: So how can I, I think somebody with other English with English as my second language but English is the first language?

(Interview 209)

Another example that illustrates participants' views on aspects of L2 identity and NS authority is provided by Andrew who is Vietnamese and has lived in Australia since the age of eleven when he arrived with his family as a refugee. Andrew is the first person in his family to enter university which is a great source of pride for his family and himself. The extract below from fieldnotes illustrates Andrew's perception (similar to Jim's) of his L2 identity when compared with native speakers of English.

> I am surprised at his opinion of his English level and/or proficiency. He says he is sometimes nervous when he speaks to people like John (the manager) who are 'native' (not sure he uses this term, I think he says they are 'English speakers'). However, when he interacts with team members who are also NNS and whose English he perceives as being lower level than his then he says he is more confident if he feels he has better proficiency. I try to probe this point, to ask about what makes the others' English lower level but we don't get far. I am left wondering though if the native /non-native notions of English are something he is using to measure his own standard of English? How can someone who has been to high school and uni educated here (like me!) think he is not fully proficient? Are these perceptions he has of himself because others have made him feel his English is "bad". He admits there are some personal reasons why he might be so negative about himself at this time, about his accent but does not elaborate much and that 'I should not have that problem'. (Fieldnotes, 09)

Andrew expressed a willingness to speak more about his experiences but unfortunately he left the company to work in an offshore office the day after I arrived.

Similarly, Lia believed she should speak ‘better’ or sound ‘different’ and ‘more Aussie’ given that she had lived in Australia since the age of fifteen when she came to Australia from Indonesia to attend Secondary School and had resided in Australia for over fifteen years at the time of the data collection. Lia reported feeling that after all these years her English should be better. She also said that her university friends felt the same (as Lia) about their own English indicating a collective NNS identity. At university she was ‘quiet and hung out’ with the other Chinese-Indonesians and avoided hanging around with Australians, (‘locals’)[2] since she didn’t feel she spoke English well enough to do that. It was not until she started working that she began to feel her English really improved. At times however, her customers asked her about her accent and tried to guess her nationality with many thinking she is Irish when they are unable to assign her accent to a particular country of origin.

Lia reported that there are some areas in which she feels she could improve such as formal email writing. In this area she feels she uses the same vocabulary all the time and has tried to change this by using the thesaurus with the result that she now believes her emails don’t ‘feel’ natural. She also assesses her spoken language as inadequate, claiming:

> Lia: After all these years I should speak better English, I should speak more like an Aussie, with an Aussie accent
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

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[2] In referring to tertiary students the distinction between ‘local’ and ‘international’ student is common in the Australian tertiary sector.

Lia believes that the longer a person lives in an English-speaking country, the better their English should be. She spoke about a colleague, Liam, who likewise felt he was not improving in spite of his length of stay in Australia and adopted different strategies to try to address this. When I interviewed Liam he said that he had been so frustrated that he was not improving that, for a time, he had set out to learn 'real Aussie' by talking to truck drivers and people outside of work. As with Andrew, Lia reported feeling more relaxed about using English when speaking to NESB speakers as she feels less pressure.

The final example of a participant who feels that his English language proficiency is inadequate is that of Nicolas. I met Nicolas when he enrolled in an ESL course where I was teaching. Nicolas had migrated from Russia and was studying ESL until he found suitable work. In spite of already having completed the same qualification at a similar institution, he felt it was preferable to continue studying in an ESL course until he found work. When I first met him he asked if he could change his accent and speak with a British accent which he felt would help in job interviews (like Claire above). Even after he found work, he contacted me to get advice about how to improve aspects of his conversation skills. The following observations were made in the fieldnotes I wrote following our conversations and email communication in 2010.

> "In 2010 Nicolas contacted me requesting help with improving his English further. He had found work but was finding aspects of his workplace communication difficult and wanted to improve in areas such as conversation skills, how to talk to people at work about different topics. He wanted help to speak about a variety of topics at his work and wondered how to go about this. He also wanted to know how to address aspects of his grammar he believed he still had difficulty with

> some past tenses. He asked if there was an advanced book he could buy to address this problem. Another problem he felt he needed to address was his vocabulary. In particular he was concerned that his range of vocabulary was not sufficient when talking at work or that even if he knew words he would not remember them at the time he wanted to use them."
>
> (Fieldnotes 10)

Responding to Nicolas proved to be difficult as he seemed not to accept any of the suggestions I made about how to improve, such as using English as much as possible, increasing or maintaining exposure to spoken and written forms but mostly by pointing out he was placing unrealistic expectations on himself. I gave examples of my own workplace interactions where I was unable to contribute to general discussions as I did not watch the same TV shows that some of my colleagues followed, enjoyed and discussed at work. In the end I said I would ask my colleagues if they had other suggestions.

What stands out about Nicolas' self-assessment is his expectation that his English competence should represent a complete set of skills on entering the workplace. For example regarding his ability to conduct conversations at work, he thought he should be able to manage conversations on various topics as they came up. He reported that his goal was to reach native-speaker standard and that he believes native-speakers would be able to participate in conversations about all the topics that came up in workplace talk. However, as Charles (2007) points out, just as NNSs may have difficulties communicating in a new language, so NSs may also have somewhat less than

adequate communication skills, and thus may not be able to take situational factors fully into account in interactions.

When I asked Nicolas if he believed all NSs would be able to navigate the communicative situations he was describing, he replied that in his view they would. He would not be persuaded otherwise on this point even after giving examples of situations where it would be impossible to take part in conversations unless there was prior and ongoing interest and knowledge. I cited sports as an example where many people would be at a loss unless they were players or spectators of that sport. After a few months I asked Nicolas how he was dealing with conversations at work, and he reported that he no longer had any difficulties and seemed somewhat more relaxed about the range of topics he could confidently contribute on and the number of colleagues with whom he could comfortably converse. When asked to explain how this improvement had come about he explained:

> Nicolas: Probably just practising in talking, also having a habit to talk to the same people during long time'.
>
> (Fieldnotes 10)

I asked Nicolas if he attributed this newfound 'success' to any particular factors and suggested he may by now have formed relationships with like-minded colleagues and be feeling more comfortable when interacting with them. However he disagreed and said that his improved communication skills were attributable to his efforts in listening to others, explaining:

> Nicolas: I would say it's a matter of habit to speak with the same people many times and to get familiar with their speech patterns and accents.
>
> (email communication,10)

In my view, some of the difficulties Nicolas experienced may be typical of those encountered by any newcomer to a workplace. Furthermore, when he says he became 'familiar with speech patterns and accents', he is in effect getting accustomed to other people's communicative styles. However the fact that Nicolas focused on his migrant and NESB status may have been because prospective employers did this. He regarded that his name and his ethnicity (a Russian minority) had been problematic when he was seeking work (see below).

To summarise, the two groups of speakers highlight different attitudes towards English language learning. Whereas the first group of speakers describe themselves and their English in deficit terms in opposition to NS varieties, the issues raised by the second group of participants, the semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix V, Questions 7 and 9,) were aimed at discovering if some or any workplace routines were considered problematic by the participants. However it became clear that these questions only partially elicited the possible answers. It is not sufficient to discover which linguistic routines are problematic for newcomers; in fact it is important to also investigate the circumstances that render these communications problematic. These circumstances may not be related to linguistic factors, despite teachers' preference for focusing on these. Rather, Jim and other participants appear to experience a form of silencing in the presence of native speakers which results in the fact that they attribute significant authority to native speakers. The issue of silencing was observed in a study by Aritz and Walker (2009) which analysed participation rates among mixed groups.

This study found that when participating in mixed NS-NNS interactions, NNS felt ‘silenced’ due to the issue of ownership of English in the cultural context in which they were operating. This study, although limited by the fact that it was a simulation, is nevertheless insightful. The apparent lack of ease which some NNSs experience when interacting with native speakers of English was also identified by Nakane, (2006)whose participants (Japanese students enrolled in Australian universities) reported feeling more at ease when they were speaking with other international students than with native speakers as this reduced their anxiety about their English level (p. 1817).

Group 2 perspective

On the other hand, the second group of participants - Amir, Vadim and Kaveh - reported a greater sense of confidence both in their current ability and in their ability to improve English over time. In addition, these participants did not report feeling inadequate but reported that they coped with any perceived lack of linguistic ability by attributing some of the communicative responsibility to their interlocutor, as is demonstrated below.

Amir arrived in Australia on a Skilled Migrant visa sponsored by his company the week before the interview took place. Amir had used English extensively at work in Israel when working with remote teams, yet he reported that he had ‘bad grammar’. When asked to elaborate, he explained that he had some confusion with verb tenses especially when he was writing reports. However he was a confident speaker, which was evident in his active participation in different interactions. His confidence seems to derive from his assessment that he has improved over time as a result of exposure and his increased use of English. What has helped Amir is the change from using English only at work in Israel, to using it every day in Australia.

Amir: I just give it time, I think also my English will be improved as time will be here, also my listening skills will be improved first of all there were a lot of time when people said to me what? Come again? Or sorry (V laughs) yeah there was it happens to me of course I notice but it improves Over time because that's it because I speak only English here, I don't have anyone to speak I only have once a week or twice a week I am calling the family and speaking Hebrew but that's It (yeah) and also the thing that helps is that my work takes place English and even when I was in Israel though I believe this will improve now I am in an English speaking country

Vittoria: But you're aware and you're putting effort into that?

Amir: I don't think I put effort, just have to, I live here I need to to to go to Coles to buy myself what I want some groceries, I need to listen to speak that's it, it happens, this is life, I don't need to put in an effort this is life, I don't feel like breaking my teeth or something like that, (no no) I just I enjoy,

Vittoria: You don't see it as a big huge problem or anything?

Amir: Sometimes it is if I'm looking for a word to express what I wonna say (clicks fingers) and it sound the other way well that's ok it's part of the thing

Vittoria: But you can find that

Amir: No I never look up the dictionary, sometimes when I'm reading emails and before I read and I really understand I will fire up the translator just for one word or something like that or if I want to articulate myself better than I will look up a word

Amir believes that his English will improve by living in an English-speaking country where he does not use his native language, Hebrew. Amir's strategy for improving his English is presented as an external factor rather than an individual one. In this way, he views his experience with the English language as one element in the context, rather than viewing himself as the sole element in that context. Amir's confidence can also be explained in relation to other factors emanating from his personal life. At the time of the study Amir seemed enthusiastic about moving to Australia and described this move as life changing. However, in our email communication he often said he found living in Australia lonely and was having second thoughts about settling here. He missed his family and social networks and the last time he wrote he said he was returning to Israel. Unlike the Group 1 participants who expressed a strong sense of wanting to belong and settle in Australia, Amir was not as committed to staying, so he was perhaps not investing less effort into learning more English. Amir did in fact decide not to stay in Australia and returned to Israel before qualifying for his right to Australian PR, something that surprised many of his colleagues.

Vadim is a Russian speaker who arrived on a Skilled Migration visa and had been living in Australia for four years at the time of the interview. He also believes his English has some problems but like Amir he considers that these will either be resolved over time or that interlocutors will have to do some of the work to facilitate comprehension. He says of his trajectory using English that in spite of some difficulties when he first moved to Australia he can comfortably communicate with both clients and colleagues and has learnt to deal with unfamiliar phrases:

> "At the very beginning I didn't understand slang phrases 'what are you up to?" I just said 'what?" from that time I know that phrase."
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

The following comment however reflects Vadim's impatience at being corrected. In effect he is alluding to the notion in accommodation that occurs in interactions when misunderstandings or inaccuracies appearto be inconsequential and speakers make a decision to 'let it pass' (Firth, 1996, p.243. Vadim recounts that soon after beginning in his position at *SolutionsPlus* he was speaking to a customer and asked "is it comfortable for you to start to talk now" and his colleague corrected him saying he should say "is it a suitable time to speak now". Vadim believes that his choice of word, 'comfortable' instead of 'suitable' did not compromise meaning. (Fieldnotes 09)

Vadim also believes that he uses socio-pragmatic features from Russian when he speaks English such as what might be termed 'directness' strategies or differences in socio-pragmatic rules. Vadim is emphatic that his interlocutors should also adapt to his style of speaking when they understand his message. This can be considered another accommodation strategy that calls for interlocutors to focus on *message content* rather than *form content* (Rogerson-Revell, 2010). Vadim gave another example of an L1 feature he uses which he does not change in spite of acknowledging he may be flouting pragmatic English rules. He states that he is aware he uses 'please' less frequently than Australians do since he considers it 'too polite' and unnecessary.

Vadim: In Russia it's done in more direct way, here it's all please, please, you don't need to add these words, for me it's all too much sugar, too polite, so maybe I sound a little bit rude, if a customer asks something I hear native speakers they say 'yes please' but I say, 'yeah yes'

Vittoria: Has it led to any problems?

Vadim: No, but maybe it is still brewing, I would say it is not a huge gap, I try my natural cultural way is to say please less frequent, if it was a huge gap I would be told several times but no,

Vittoria: What about In terms of talking in your team

Vadim: At least I don't remember anything, I am pretty maybe thick-skinned, actually in team I didn't have any problems, we had one guy and people felt with him he was too bossy, I didn't feel any frustration I didn't get any offence,

Vittoria: Do you feel these are cultural or personality issues?

Vadim: Yeah, yeah, I would say it was personality

(Interview 09)

Further, he recognises that in spite of wishing to speak in what he calls a more' sophisticated way' as he would in Russian, his peers understand him well:

> I try to utilise more colourful but I have never heard anyone say 'what are you talking about?'
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

I interpret Vadim's self-evaluation as having a dual function. First, it works as a form of self–reassurance, signalling that in spite of some of the shortcomings Vadim perceives with his English, he recognises that he is able to communicate effectively in his L2. Because Vadim focuses on the content of messages rather than their form, he is able to evaluate his communication as effective. This attitude is in stark contrast to Nicolas' who is so highly focused on correct grammatical forms — often minor points that do not interfere with the message — that he loses control of the actual message. Also, unlike other participants, Vadim assesses his L2 performance according to how it is received by his interlocutors, thereby attributing successful communication to interaction strategies, not just to production strategies. Vadim also expects a certain amount of accommodation from his interlocutors; this position contrasts starkly with that of other L2

participants in the study who focus principally on their individual performance and the language they produce.

Kaveh is another participant who believes his overall language performance and confidence have improved since he arrived, despite some problems with English proficiency. He believes that his exposure to English and his experience using the language in different contexts have led to his greater confidence. In the excerpt below he reports how his prospects have improved over time.

> Kaveh: Hum, yes of course, but obviously we are talking about 3 years ago, we just left Malaysia and we just came to Australia, (hum hum) and my English was, not perfect, it's not perfect now (well no one is) well i applied for many positions, i had enough experience, I had 8 years experience (yeah) and hum almost all international certifications that they wanted, (yeah) and how and I think I applied for maybe 60-70 jobs (in Melbourne) in Melbourne, I had, 10 interviews and hum, 2 of them were successful, and I chose the (Fieldnotes 09).

Prior to obtaining his position at the *SolutionsPlus* call centre, Kaveh was working in a sales role which was a face-to-face customer role with the same company — a role he finds easier than working on the phone.

> Kaveh: Yes yes exactly, exactly yes, yes, sometimes, talking to customer face to face, sometimes it's easy, but sometimes, (yeah) i found , you know customers on the phone much much more difficult than, sort of in person,

Kaveh also reports that many of the customers he dealt with in his sales role were native speakers and his ability to understand and deal with them has given him greater confidence:

> Kaveh: Oh yes, i really liked it it was ok in many cases, i had native speaker customers, in many cases, i'm not going to say 90% but i can say 50% in most cases

Like Lia and Andrew, Kaveh believes that speaking with native speakers places a greater burden on him during interactions. Therefore being exposed to perceived NS styles and feeling that he has managed this challenge contributes to Kaveh's greater confidence.

When Kaveh was asked whether any particular workplace situations (such as negotiating or disagreeing) were difficult, he replied:

> Kaveh: after three years it's not so hard!
>
> (interview 09)

Kaveh's response indicates first that his confidence has increased as a result of three years' experience and second that his initial experience was not necessarily unproblematic.

This section has outlined the linguistic and socially defined factors that participants identify as potential difficulties in their efforts to enter the labour market in Australia. These barriers are based on participants' perceptions of their linguistic abilities which they self-report in negative terms, and which focus on gaps in knowledge based on NS standards. The second group of participants however were demonstrably more

confident in their self-assessment due to personal factors, their level of investment in language acquisition and their experience over time in workplaces that provide enhanced opportunities to interact. An important difference however, is that the second group believed that responsibility for successful communication is shared with interlocutors.

The next section of the chapter discusses the fourth barrier to employment identified in the study - the way in which foreign names can be seen as problematic.

4.5 Barrier Four: Foreign Names

Just as a foreign accent can index an outsider, so too can a foreign name. Tabouret-Keller (1997) argues that in/exclusion from a social group may depend on a phoneme, linguistic features, or even a name. That ethnic or foreign names constitute a barrier in the labour market at the job entry level is well documented in multiracial and multicultural societies. Carmichael and Woods (in Wilson, 2005, p. 66) have termed this ‘ethnic penalty'. The technique described as a correspondence test has been used to show that discrimination takes place at the job entry level. Research in Sweden (Carlsson, 2009) concluded that the name of the applicant (Swedish or Muslim) and their country of birth were determining factors in gaining call backs from employers in that country. A study conducted in New Zealand (Wilson, 2005) found that Chinese migrants were more disadvantaged in the labour market in that an ethnic name decreased the likelihood of being shortlisted for work, especially if the applicant had no local experience.[1]

In Australia this kind of employment-related discrimination is also well documented. The political commentator Waleed Aly joked that the owner of the giant Australian mobile

phone company *Crazy John* would not have become as successful if he had used his real name Mustafa (ABC TV, 2009). The literature on this topic has shown that name changing constitutes a form of accommodation to dominant culture models and can lead to greater economic and social benefits. Pauwels (1995) reports that some migrants to Australia have adopted the practice of name changing to conform to Anglo standards with regards to the order of family name . The authors cite an example of Sikhs and Chinese who accommodate to Anglo order of first/family name. More recently an Australian Human Rights Commission report found that African Australians attributed difficulties gaining a job interview and work to their accent and name (but also their skin colour and other visible differences) (Human Rights Commission, 2010).

Empirical evidence of this phenomenon was also found in an Australian study by Booth, Leigh and Varganova (2009) who conducted an online experiment to see if potential employers discriminated according to the ethnicity denoted by the job applicant's name. Bogus applications submitted by individuals with Anglo-Saxon, Indigenous, Italian, Chinese and Middle Eastern names were used and the results of un/successful job applications for low entry service jobs were recorded. The study found that those with Chinese and Middle Eastern names had significantly less chance of gaining a job interview as they had to submit at least 50% as many job applications to get the same callback rate as applicants with Anglo-Saxon names. Findings by Almeida (2010) confirm that foreign names are viewed unfavourably by employers.

In one of the companies which participated in the study, some of the recruitment staff responsible for sifting through the initial job applications said 'long names, probably from overseas' were a factor in selecting or rejecting potential candidates. In the course of conducting interviews for this study it seemed that many of the participants had heard of a story where as soon as an applicant modified their foreign name they were successful

in gaining an interview and a job. The companies where I conducted fieldwork placed no pressure on their workers to change their names but many individuals had already taken this step. For example Nicolas made the decision to substitute an Anglo-sounding name for his Russian one after noticing that people struggled with saying his name in interviews and when he phoned recruitment agencies to follow up on applications. Nicolas attributes his subsequent success to this change. In particular, Chinese participants often had 'an English name' and it seemed to be expected by the prospective employers that they would. In one of the companies which participated in the study, a manager said in response to my question that it had not occurred to him that the Chinese staff were using an English name because they felt they had to. He was also unaware that many Chinese adopt an English name when they study in Australia. In the teaching contexts that I am familiar with, teachers routinely expect Chinese to have 'an English name'. At another company however the staff were aware that Chinese employees sometimes chose to adopt an English name and felt that this was their choice. When I asked the participants to choose a pseudonym for me to use in reporting the data, one of the Chinese participants said I could use his English name, as it was not his 'real' name. The practice of anglicising their names was seen by some of the participants (Nicolas, Felipe, Jim) as necessary and beneficial in the job market although some viewed this as an unfair expectation (Mia, Felipe, Nicolas). For these participants, having to change one's name represented a loss of identity and a denial of one's origins.

Example 1: Accommodating to 'sameness'

Some participants believed that migrants should change their names in order to gain employment and to make communication easier in the workplace (Felipe, Sunil, Jim, Nicolas). They held this view even if changing one's name was seen as undesirable and

was resisted by some of the participants (Felipe, Nicolas). Mia recounted how her husband was told to change his name at his previous workplace but now that he was about to launch his own business, he was changing it back.

In the following extracts participants reveal different attitudes towards the practice of changing their names. The first extract comes from an interview with Jim who believes that having an English name facilitates communication and that changing it is according to him ‘ no big deal’. He does stress however that “Jim” (his English name) is not his real name.

Jim: Its not a very special feeling it’s just a name, as long as the people can calling you short and very clearly understand what they are talking about so it doesn’t matter.

Vittoria: It doesn’t matter, no. You don’t feel upset that?

Jim: No.

Jim: For Australian people very difficult to pronounce the Chinese name. (Jim108)

A conversation between Mia and Sunil, both of whom are Indian, illustrates two contrasting points of view about changing names. Mia believes asking migrants to change their names constitutes a form of unfairness and is in the end a form of discrimination. Sunil on the other hand, believes that this is necessary given the length of some Indian names. In general he thinks it is up to the migrants to adapt. The topic of name changes was prompted by a discussion following a newspaper story which published the results of Booth et al’s (2009) study:

Mia : I never thought the first name mattered?

Sunil: It was big news.

Mia: I know, I couldn't understand why now …

Vittoria. You were going to say something more?

Mia : About my brother-in-law. Yes, he was a Chef and then he became a driving instructor. And he didn't start off on his own, he joined (Name of company) Driving as a – that's a big company just (Name of the company) Driving. He worked for them and he changed, that guy made him change his name from Sanjiv to Sam.

(Interjection by interviewer)

Speaker 6: Because he said Sanjiv is too big, people will have trouble pronouncing it.

Sunil: My name is like [01:13] (FULL NAME), they call me Sunil.

Vittoria: Did you choose that, or did you find that you had to …

Sunil: No, I just chose myself and one of my friend his name is [01:13:08]

Mia: Because in India they put the Village name and family's name.

Sunil: Another friend which his name is [01:13:20] it's about 20 letters so …

Mia: It's understandable for such a big name.

Mia : But my brother-in-law is back to his own name now because he's opened his own business.

Vittoria : Did he feel that that was an important thing for him to do?

Mia : He had to do it, I think. He was happy doing it.

Sunil : And sometimes …

Vittoria : To change back to Sanjiv?

Mia: He was happy to move back to Sanjiv.

(Mia's Team,09)

While Mia is prepared to admit that 20 letters is too long for Australians to cope with, she believes that the practice of encouraging a name change should not be imposed as a rule.

Felipe struggled with the name change when preparing this aspect of his CV. He did not feel it should be necessary but said he would do it. This was clearly a last resort decision but one that he believed would make a difference:

Felipe:	So actually, next, next application, I am Phil not Felipe, (ha ha) I'm gonna paint myself or something, or contact lens ha ha,
Vittoria:	Hahaha don't do that!
Felipe:	I'm gonna be blue eyes, green eyes, why not!
Vittoria:	Do you feel that it's very subtle, not obvious but it's there?
Felipe:	Yeah, I don't even say it and I do it

While he was working as a volunteer, Felipe found himself in the position of putting to one side the applications of applicants who had long or difficult names. In commenting on this practice, he reported that he felt so embarrassed about calling people on the phone when he was unable to say their name that he would take the phone to the meeting room to call them, or avoid these candidates by opting not to call them at all. Felipe cited his own behaviour as proof that this practice was common, eventually leading him to change his own name. On the other hand, Ricardo, also a Spanish speaker, felt fortunate that his name had a close English language equivalent so this was not an issue for him as he ended up calling himself Richard. However, he was of the view that Australians as a rule coped better with Latino than Asian names.

Example 2: Customers dealing with foreign names

Data from participants who dealt with external customers suggests that customers notice and make assumptions about individuals who have foreign names as well as those with a foreign accent. In the following excerpt Maya, one of the few female network engineers I was able to interview at *SolutionsPlus,* reported feeling that at times her expertise was questioned because of her ethnicity and that her gender added an extra layer of complexity.

Vittoria: So have you ever had a complaint, or not a complaint but someone expressing that?

Maya: Oh yeah I have had, I had this customer and she was like, cause my name is Maya and people think I'm Indian right? Just looking at the name right? And this customer was saying like she wouldn't reply to my email right, and then she, how can you close it I still have the problem and like she calls and she's like 'oh I still got the Australia Team 1I don't wanna work with the Australia Team and then she called and hung up and she called and got one of one of my colleagues from here and she said oh no 'first I got the Indian girl now I call and I got you" It's crazy, maybe she must have had a bad day!

Vittoria: She wants a white male?

Maya: Yeah! …..(agreeing)

Vittoria: So there'a bit of that?

Maya: There is yeah, you know that but you shouldn't, but you don't mind, it comes and you just put it away you just laugh it off

Vittoria: Is it a minority of cases?

Maya: It's only happened that once, once or twice

This section has discussed some ways in which otherness is indexed including by the use of foreign accents and names. The perception that a foreign name was a barrier to gaining employment led some participants to anglicise their names and consider modifying their accents.

4.6 Summary and discussion

One of the aims of this study was to discover how IT professionals who consider themselves highly mobile fare in the labour market on arrival and in their actual workplace in Australia. Prior to undertaking this study my experiences as a teacher suggested that professionals experience a number of difficulties such as those that this chapter has highlighted. Many of the participants reported a lack of success in their efforts to gain employment as a result of three factors that set them apart as 'others'. The first of these factors is their lack of local experience; the second is differences in the way the CV is organised in Australia and in their countries of origin; the third factor is differences in the interview process. All three factors are reported as potential obstacles to gaining work in Australia. These factors created difficulties for the participants despite their extensive work experience prior to migrating, sometimes in multinational companies where they had used English at work. Even where English had been the main workplace language, this prior experience was not always recognised in the Australian labour market. The participants' lack of local experience was exacerbated by the lack of written documents which testified to their previous experience in ways that Australian employers could easily interpret. Differences in the way that CVs and supporting documents are presented in Australia were viewed as problematic by many participants who addressed this issue by attending courses, re-organising their CVs and, in some cases, paying for this service.

According to the participants, their accented English was regarded as a marked form of English by gatekeepers and an indication of a lower level of English language proficiency. This was a barrier in the selection process, and, in some instances, with external customers. However interestingly, accented English did not pose a problem to the participants' colleagues in those companies which actively promoted a cultural diversity agenda (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1.4) Foreign names also represented a barrier in the job selection process which led many participants to change at least part of their names. The participants' efforts to remove or reduce these signs of 'otherness' represent attempts to accommodate to what they perceive as a more prestigious and acceptable variety of English, and constitute an attempt to 'pass as a local', or at the very least, to minimise their foreignness. At the same time, this chapter has suggested that participants' negative evaluations of their English show an ongoing learner identity which means that at times they expect to begin at a lower level on the employment and salary scale.

As outlined in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), previous research shows that none of these problems is new, suggesting that social attitudes to migrants have changed little in the last twenty years. Therefore, these findings need to be considered in a way that can shed light on the causes of ongoing discrimination against migrants in a society that continues to rely on migrant labour and one which has had a multicultural policy and a social inclusion agenda at different times.

It is useful to return to Blommaert's orders of indexicality (2005) in considering the origin of these discriminatory attitudes and practices. Blommaert's framework highlights the need to view the barriers through a sociolinguistic lens rather than treating them as deficits in individuals' linguistic ability. It also offers the potential for addressing these barriers at the institutional level rather than rely on individual endeavours to improve the

situation for migrants in the host society. In other words, the migrants' skills and social capital (which were highly valued at the time of migration) lose value during the process of relocating and become devalued in the new space. It is imperative therefore that these barriers be viewed through this lens because only then can responsibility for removing these barriers be shifted from individuals to policy makers and institutions.

In addition, the data reveal that the participants are harsh critics of their own linguistic ability and have a strong L2 identity. This is an issue that needs to be considered in the teaching context as it can impact on language acquisition. Despite the absence of observable or reported problematic workplace communication and the existence of numerous reports of improved English language performance over time, participants portray themselves as poor or inadequate speakers of English, holding up an imagined Anglo-Saxon NS model of English as their goal.

The problematic way that individuals *perceive* their personal English language competence is best addressed by attending to their identity as English speakers rather than focusing on issues of proficiency. The data indicates that the participants in this study index a strong sense of L2 or 'non-native speaker' identity. They seem to view their English-speaking ability in terms of a *learner* identity or an emergent speaker of English rather than as competent and expert users of English. The phenomenon observed in this study of individuals downplaying their English language competence is not new (see for example Piller, 2002). The Piller study is particularly interesting as it reports on the L2 participants' self-identification and self-evaluation and makes two often overlooked points regarding the participants' evaluation of multilingual L2 speakers vis-à-vis monolinguals. The first is that the competencies of multilingual speakers of an L2 differ from those of L1 users of the language. The second is that when the competencies of monolinguals and bilinguals are compared, the comparisons are often based on

phono-syntactic features of language performance while pragmatic and discourse level abilities are ignored (Piller, 2002, p. 186). This point is further emphasised by McCarthy (2010) who argues that *spoken fluency* needs to be seen as jointly produced in interaction and is best reconceptualised as confluence.

Other studies of L2 identity have also been conducted by scholars concerned with the learner identity of international students who are attending English language institutions. For example Park (2007) details the way in which Korean speakers of English evoke NNS identities in their interactions with US native speakers of English. Park's (2009) study of Korean international students concludes that the practice of understating one's English language competence is an important symbolic strategy which simultaneously indexes Korean-ness and repositions the transnational students as illegitimate speakers of English. Park (2009) claims that:

> "The practice of disclaiming English becomes a mechanism for calibrating the system of oppositions in a transnational context, as the ideology of self-deprecation colors those new relations of difference and identity in terms of legitimacy." (p. 209)

The data in this chapter has shown that aspects of the barriers experienced by the participants can be said to be ideological in nature and determine the participants' view of themselves as less legitimate speakers of English. Signs of difference such as foreign accents and names were discussed as indicators of otherness. Also, the participant's perceived lack of legitimacy is evident in their ongoing L2 identity as peripheral speakers; this is evidenced by their perception that their English is incomplete or lacking. Having evaluated themselves as incomplete or illegitimate speakers they are either at a loss to explain the reasons for this or attribute this personal difficulties or

deficit models. The reasons this or allude to native speaker model of what constitutes a legitimate English speaker.

In an international business context one study showed that some learners' perceptions of their English language competence moved from *emergen*t to *expert* following a period of working in EFL contexts (Virkkula, 2010). This study showed that when working in Germany, Finnish professionals gained confidence as they compared their English to that of other NESB individuals who used English as a lingua franca. One important question for educators to address is how migrants can move along the learner-expert continuum. In other words, if L2 speakers are to move from considering themselves as ongoing learners to viewing themselves as fully competent speakers, a change must occur. Perhaps the answer lies in a shift in language attitudes by learners about their own emerging L2 as well as NS and a greater acceptance of non-native varieties of English.

This chapter has described the linguistic and social barriers to employment which the study's NESB professionals reported as a result of their experiences working and living in an English-speaking environment. I have argued that these barriers are best viewed through a sociolinguistic framework and a learner identity framework if they are to be addressed. The following chapter will move from discussing the participants' experiences in the labour market to exploring workplace talk, where linguistic repertoires will be outlined.

Chapter 5 **Communication at work**

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is about how communication takes place at work. It describes key features of spoken communication and explores ways in which communication might be problematic (or not) for professional migrants in the data under analysis. The data for this chapter, gathered from interviews and recordings of spontaneous interactions, is analysed with the aim of identifying the 'ways of talking' at work that are prevalent in the teams I observed. The chapter therefore investigates the second research question, which is:

> *What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?*

The analysis in this chapter is motivated by a desire to understand how workplace interactions are organised and to explore one of the principal tenets of CDA, namely that discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough, 1997). CDA makes a crucial distinction between macro and micro language use where micro refers to the systems of signs that make up discourses at the level of interactions and macro language use reflects the 'power, dominance and inequality between social groups' (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 354) The analysis is also informed by Fairclough's view that analysis of discursive practices ought to involve both a 'macro' aspect which explores . The conditions under which texts are produced, and a 'micro' analysis which incorporates evidence of how these texts are actually produced and interpreted Fairclough, 1992, 1p. 85). Each of these levels of analysis highlights different aspects of the data in complementary ways, as is explained below. This chapter presents a macro analysis of language use in multicultural IT

workplaces and the next chapter (Chapter 6) will present a micro analysis of the interactions.

The analysis identified five key characteristics of the participants' workplace communication and illustrates these using examples from the data which demonstrate the fluidity and complexity of talk at work. The spoken communication recorded and analysed in this study reflects the following five characteristics:

a) much communication occurs in frequent, informal, fluid meetings
b) the language used to accomplish work tasks is informal
c) work and non-work talk boundaries are fluid and unclear
d) both technical and non-technical language are required
e) accommodation is a resource.

The data shows that the partcipants' communication with clients and colleagues includes talk that is informal and fluid and successful communication depends on the use of soft skills which is generally understood as referring to communication skills. The data also shows that, with few exceptions, communication is unproblematic. However, some potential difficulties for NESB professionals are identified. As was the case in Chapter 4, this chapter will provide an overview of the framework that informs the analysis of the data. The literature review which is presented in the following section is thus specific to the present analysis.

5.2 Language in the new work order

As indicated previously, the data for this study was collected in linguistically diverse workplaces where the participants were communicating remotely with customers from within and outside Australia and in an environment where they were expected to be

collaborative and flexible. Consequently, an approach was needed which could account for both the wider social factors within which the interactions take place and the micro level interactions. Analysis of the interactions is largely informed by the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) outlined by Fairclough (1995).

At the macro or broader social level, the CDA approach is concerned with how social change is accompanied by shifts in language use. Fairclough (1992) defines discourse as a form of social practice arguing that:

> "… there has been a significant shift in the social functioning of language, a shift reflected in the salience of language in the major social changes which have been taking place over the last few decades." (1992, p. 6)

The chapter therefore examines the types of linguistic routines in which the participants engage in their everyday working life with peers and, in some instances, with clients. These interactions represent part of their 'communicative labour' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 137). The chapter describes the interactions observed and recorded in the workplaces as a way of investigating how the communication requirements of contemporary workplaces might be problematic for migrant professionals. The thesis began with observations that proficient speakers were judged to be lacking in aspects of that communication labour which is needed in a changed workplace. One of the motivations for observing workplace communication was to determine they routines that might be more problematic for migrants who have proficiency but who may not have experience in using certain communicative styles that are favored in some Australian workplaces.

Fairclough (1992) makes two observations about the changing nature of social life and changes to language use in society that are directly relevant to this study. First he states that the change from Fordist 'mass production' to the contemporary post-Fordist model of work with its emphasis on 'flexible accumulation'— a concept that refers to flexibility at all levels of work — is accompanied by changes in discourses (1999, p. 72). Therefore, those who rely on the so-called 'knowledge-based' economy are also relying on a 'discourse-based' economy. One example of this new type of discourse is that of 'teamwork' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 27). According to Fairclough, discourses and genres are interconnected through a dialectic of 'rematerialization' (2001, p. 29) which he says take place in three ways. Firstly, discourses and genres are *operationalized*, then they are *inculcated* and finally they are *represented* in discourse (2001, p. 29). Fairclough illustrates this process in his studies of performance appraisal interviews specifically in the way that the language required to conduct them is sold by management as a new way of communicating (2001, p. 27). Menz (1999) also highlights the way in which new routines such as meetings become reproduced as new communicative procedures in manuals. Two salient concepts stand out as part of these new discourses. The first is what Fairclough refers to as 'the technologization of discourse' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8;Fairclough, 1992), which refers to the tendency of some organisations to train professionals to use particular discourse styles. He claims that these discourses are being systematically controlled by 'skills training' which treats discourses as context free (1992 p. 8). He states that:

> "… institutional discourse practices are being widely subjected to simulation: in particular, conversational discourse practices which traditionally belong in the private sphere are being systematically simulated within organizations." (1992, p. 8)

This observation is also referred to in current literature on workplace communication which indicates that the fusion of work and non-work talk is a feature of contemporary workplaces (Koester, 2004). Research shows that distinctions between the public and the private spheres are more blurred in particular industries (such as in the IT area) and that this phenomenon is facilitated by technology (English-Lueck, 2002). Further, modern work practices rely on employees' ability to move from one sphere to another. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) state that:

> "….the modern workplace, with its typically flattened hierarchies and greater diversity than in the past, arguably, places increased demands on interpersonal communication skills of workers." (p. 177)

The second observation Fairclough makes is that late capitalist society demands that individuals possess 'highly developed dialogical capacities' (1995, p. 137). In the workplace this may mean that workers are required to employ styles or genres they consider additional to their professional expertise. He also argues that there is a shift within institutions from formal styles of (written and spoken) communication towards the 'conversationalization' of institutional talk (1995, p. 138), which he defines as a move towards the 'informalization' of public discourse. Fairclough regards this shift in expectations and discourses as ambivalent arguing that it can either be seen as 'the colonization of the public domain by the practices of the private domain' or as 'the *appropriation* of private domain practices by the public domain: the infusion of practices which are needed in post-traditional public settings for the complex processes of negotiating relationships and identities' (1995, p. 138). These changed practices are evident in the interactions examined in this study and in some instances they are considered problematic by some of the participants.

One problem with the push to 'conversationalization', according to Fairclough, is that

whilst at first glance the use of less formal structures can be interpreted to mean that modern western societies are promoting democracy and equality, the fact remains that power structures are still present in encounters such as job interviews and interactions between subordinates and their superiors. However the power dimension of such encounters is hidden by the informality of the interactions (Cameron, 2001); (see also Cook-Gumperz, 2000 for examples of how personalising work is a form of control). The notion that workplace communication may itself be a form of control and not as democratic as it first appears are issues of particular interest for this study which considers how workers from NESB backgrounds might perform in these highly ritualised encounters which favour certain types of practice and which might differ cross culturally. In this chapter the term *conversationalisation* is used to identify and explain the variety of interactional styles that form part of the participants' language work in these companies.

Having introduced the framework that informs the analysis of the data, this chapter will now provide an outline of each of the five key characteristics of communicative behavior. The chapter concludes that in order to participate fully in all workplace interactions, the participants must negotiate a variety of styles that correspond to the demands of the new work order. These new discourse styles may pose particular challenges to professional migrants. In both spontaneous interactions and in meetings these styles are characterised by informality or features that fit the 'conversationalization' of language in the new work order. However, in contexts such as those where the study data were collected, where there is a highly developed collaborative culture, negotiation of communicative styles is generally unproblematic.

5.3 Key Characteristic 1: Meetings

This section presents an overview of the meaning and nature of 'meetings' and reports

on key studies that have investigated this type of workplace gathering. Then, the section describes the different types of meetings observed and recorded for this study, as this is one of the main ways that interactions were organised. The examples demonstrate that a ‘meeting’ is not a uniform genre but that workers must manage a variety of linguistic repertoires as they participate in meetings.

In her seminal work Schwartzmann defines meetings as:

> “a communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organisation or group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinion, to solve a problem, to make a decision or negotiate an agreement, to develop policy and procedures, to formulate recommendations, *and so forth.* A meeting is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature and participants either develop or use specific conventions.” (1984, p. 7) (emphasis added)

This definition adequately describes the meetings observed during this study except that ‘agreeing to assemble’ does not always refer to a ‘prearranged’ agreement to meet to discuss a problem. Therefore the modified definition I propose to use is closer to the one suggested by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) who claim that a meeting can, in fact, be the result of any interaction between two people and observe that work is often carried out during informal meetings. In their definition Holmes and Stubbe (2003) include a range of features of meetings such as formality, goals and purposes. In their terms, formality depends on the number of participants and the location in which the meeting is held, as well as the presence or absence of formal features such as an agenda, a chair and a minute-taker. In terms of meeting goals, the authors identify three types: planning,

reporting and task-oriented. This classification of meeting types and goals holds true for this study's data also. Of the numerous numbers of types of meetings I observed at *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact*, most fit this pattern in that the way they began and where they began varied so that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between a meeting and a sustained conversation where two or more people were engaged in problem-solving. However, informality prevailed even in the most highly organised and pre-planned meetings observed.

Indeed during my fieldwork I even observed problem-solving and task-oriented meetings which began as impromptu or informal gatherings. Therefore, my definition of meetings includes spontaneous interactions that involve problem solving or discussion even if they are not necessarily as prolonged as a formal meeting might be. As Asmuß and Svennevig (2009) point out, informal meetings also play a great role in organisations. They state that

> '…informal meetings seem to play an important role too, because they are used for a significant amount of decision making I organizations and many social relationships are established" (p. 10)

From my observations in the companies I was able to see that these informal situations, where the participants negotiate the extent and depth of the meeting in the course of their interactions according to the nature of the problem and time constraints.

Meetings and spontaneous interactions

Participants who occupy different positions in the companies under observation all referred to meetings as a means of getting work done in their respective workplaces. Claire described her jobs as follows —

> “I think and I go to meetings, that’s my job”
>
> (Claire, Fieldnotes 09*).*

Similarly, when I explained that I was interested in meeting talk, the CIO of *InfoContact* responded —

> “if you want to know about meetings, you’re in the right place!”
>
> (Fieldnotes 09).

These examples echo the view expressed by language in the workplace researchers such as Holmes and Stubbe (2003) that meetings are ubiquitous in white-collar workplaces and that they are important in companies where the culture is team-oriented (Urry, 2007). It is thus not surprising that meeting talk is a subject of major interest in the workplace communication field and which has grown in recent years (Asmuß and Svennevig 2009). Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to provide an overview of these studies, I will refer to key studies that deal specifically with meeting talk which focus on relationship building strategies such as those which will be described in the second part of this section.

One approach is the study of politeness strategies and power relations in meeting talk (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003).

This kind of close collaboration can be seen amongst the engineers at *Solutions Plus* who valued the connections amongst them, engaged in problem solving with the clients, and designed the products in their own organisation. Likewise the staff at *InfoContact* were connected to and interacted freely with those who solved problems at a higher

level. These participants believed that close collaboration between the engineers who diagnosed the problems and the designers who fixed the bugs allowed for greater overall product knowledge (Fieldnotes 09).

This section begins by describing the types of meetings observed and recorded. This demonstrates that 'meeting' is not a uniform genre but that in reality workers must manage a variety of linguistic repertoires in meetings. However, informality prevailed even in the most highly organised and pre-planned meetings observed.

Whether pre-arranged or spontaneous, meetings were frequent and informal. In addition, there were a number of different types of meetings that were held in each company. The table below describes the types of meetings observed and how these were organised in each of the sites.

Table 5.1 Types of meetings

Meeting type and company (Not observed at *Its.It*)	**Purpose**	**Characteristics**
Branch meetings or whole branch meetings. (*SolutionsPlus*, *InfoContact*).	To bring together people from all areas of the organisation who would not otherwise meet. To update and communicate new and significant developments.	Conducted by senior staff appointed as presenters. Conducted in a prearranged venue to accommodate all staff. Pre-set agenda. In spite of being attended by large numbers of employees

		(*SolutionsPlus*), the presenters maintained a casual style.
Team meetings (*SolutionsPlus*, *InfoContact*)	To update team members who may or may not be working on the same projects.	Attended by team leader or local manager. Pre-set agenda. Led by team leader.
Project meetings	To update members of different teams and raise issues, usually those that impact on meeting deadlines.	Led by the project manager, held in pre-arranged meeting rooms. Pre-set agenda (not circulated).
(Weekly) Catch-ups (*InfoContact*)	To update supervisor on project progress and expected job completion.	Attended by supervisor and one staff member. Held in pre-arranged meeting room. Typically brief interactions.
Case reviews (*SolutionsPlus*)	To encourage collaborative practices by sharing problem solving techniques and to reach faster resolution of problems. To share new information or new ways to problem solve technical issues.	Pre-arranged daily meetings.
Spontaneous meetings	Initially to interact socially, but eventually to discuss work related issues.	Pairs/groups of workers. Located in workspaces, not previously arranged. Time spent varies according to the time of day and the nature of problem discussed.

The largest of the gatherings observed across the three companies were ‘branch’ meetings, followed by ‘whole team’ meetings chaired by the local manager or supervisor. In some instances managers preferred to hold a regular ‘catch- up’ meeting with individual staff members. Other supervisors also referred to their meetings as ‘quick’ or ‘catch-up’ meetings. At *SolutionsPlus* a ‘case review’ meeting, on the other hand, was a daily meeting held for the specific purpose of collectively resolving pending technical problems as well as sharing unusual or successful problem solving stories. At *InfoContact* similar meetings were scheduled weekly but staff often discussed issues as they arose in a more informal manner. Thus meetings were often sites for learning and knowledge building and not simply problem solving opportunities. The participants at *SolutionsPlus*, who thought the word ‘meeting’ conjured up proceedings too formal to describe what happened in their workplace, did not, in fact, refer to the case review, as a meeting. For these participants a ‘meeting’ was an event associated with the work conducted by managers. In addition to the different meeting types outlined in Table 5.1, impromptu or incidental meetings also occurred. However, after observing a number of these, I decided they could more appropriately be described as training sessions. This last type of meeting, which often began with two people, at times engaged more participants over time. Lastly, some meetings typically began as conversation-like exchanges but over time developed in length, topic, scope and number of participants. A common feature of all meetings was the informality with which they were conducted even if they incorporated formal features such as an agenda, a chair and a minute taker. Further, even structured meetings could take place at a moment’s notice, as the following extract from Alan’s team shows:

Male looks like we have a meeting, at 10.30

Alan what’s that?

Male seems like we have a meeting,

Alan team meeting?

Male yeah, team meeting, this morning is it? (surprised)

(background talking) that's now, isn't it?

Alan which room is it?

Male2 hum, large conference room

Male not cool enough to be in that list! (he is new and not on the meeting mailing list)

Alan no have to ?? to update

Male2 ??? are we going to the conference room?

Alan yeah, that's right, I'll, I'll tell Vittoria as well

(Alan's team Meeting 109)

Other meetings were serious in nature but took place in unscheduled places, as the following example shows. The following exchange occurs between two senior staff in the kitchen.

Frank Tidying up the papers, are you Elisa?

Elisa Well, I'm waiting for my lunch to warm up

Frank I need to talk to you sometime

Elisa Talk to me now!

Frank Well about the steering committee ….

The ensuing discussion explores whether a customer is expecting to be included on a steering committee the employees are setting up, and whether this is desirable.

Elisa NO way, of course not! who are the customers and <u>who</u> do they think they?? are anyway (exaggerating, using humour).

(Fieldnotes *InfoContact,* 09)

In spite of Elisa's initial humorous reaction this conversation did become a serious discussion and, in effect, Frank and Elisa resolved the issue at hand during this impromptu meeting. Impromptu meetings such as this one can dissolve as quickly as they begin. For instance, when someone else entered the kitchen, Frank and Elisa turned to small talk focused on the unusually cold weather conditions at the time.

This section has provided a definition of meetings that captures the nature of these varied gatherings as they occurred in the data. It has also described the different types of meeting in which the participants took part and highlighted their informal nature. The following section explores the informal nature of the talk that occurred in meetings and interactions. The discussion will also demonstrate that workplace talk is a fusion of work and non-work talk.

5.4 Key Characteristic 2: Informality

The second key characteristic identified in the data is informality. Informality is evident in the language used as well as in the fluidity of work and non- work talk and the blend of meeting and non-meeting talk. Although features of informality are evident throughout the data, the examples in this section have been selected for analysis as they highlight the main features. This section demonstrates how participants interpret informality and illustrates the way this is achieved structurally and manifested in linguistic interactions.

In the participating companies, informality was emphasised by the open plan structure of the working space where employees' work stations were separated by low partitions. This physical set-up allowed for little privacy and made it possible for employees to talk to each other between work tasks without having to get up from their desks. As a result,

informality in these companies was reflected both in the ways that interactions were organised among colleagues and in the way participants spoke.

One of the ways the 'new work order' attempts to increase flexibility and teamwork is by reducing the sense of company hierarchy and therefore the power distance between management and staff; this was the case in all three companies, as the examples in this section will highlight. Discursive flexibility, teamwork and flat hierarchies are produced through informal ways of communicating. The emphasis on flatter hierarchies means that managers and supervisors are not *actively* involved in the day-to-day events in which the employees engage; in fact they exert minimal interference or overt control over how the participants work. Participants in all three companies reported the absence of an us/them attitude between management and staff. One participant at *SolutionsPlus* stated that "*Managers here really work, they don't just sit around and tell us what to do…. we never see them" (Fieldnotes 09).* Another participant referred to the autonomy that staff in this company enjoyed:

> "the good thing about *SolutionsPlus* is that you are trusted, if I say I want to order a box of nails I will get a box of nails, no one will question that is what I need to do my job and that does not happen in other companies. In other companies I have worked in people say why should I do this and that? Why should I learn something new? What's in it for me? Here it's different. You really are appreciated for what you do and you do it because you want to"
>
> (Fieldnotes, 09).

One contractor at *InfoContact* stated that one of the reasons he returned there was the easy relationship between staff (whether they were in a continuing or contract role) and management:

> "Everyone is very easygoing and welcoming. Management are chatty and friendly, even the CIO, sometimes a bit too much, not what you would expect from a CIO but they chat and talk and you just get on with the work"
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

Amir confirms that informality is a feature of the workplace he appreciates in his company:

> "It's quite informal, everyone just sits around and they discuss, if you have a case to discuss, come to the board, and everybody sits around to discuss and you start to shoot up uhm different answers"
>
> (Amir, Interview 09)

Maya, another participant said:

> Maya yeah over here I do feel that because no one is like, you don't have to worry about oh he's the team lead, he's my manager, everyone is like, we are just working as a colleague, it's not 'oh here comes my manager' right, compared to my previous job right it's like I used to give my staff…. of course people used to be scared of the manager right, I used to be friendly with my staff and that's how I've always been and I'm glad that this place is like that'

Vittoria Do you think that helps you to work better?

Maya Oh yeah yeah, definitely

Vittoria and does that help the team?

Maya I'm sure, I'm sure that the managers are watching, because that's their job, but you don't feel insecure or anything, because you know you are doing your job and there's nothing nothing… ..

(Maya, Interview 09)

Amir also thinks this informality is conducive to teamwork as it facilitates collaboration among team members:

> "….and if you are on a case and you are stuck and you don't know what to do, I had a case like that yesterday and I had like a had case that was a little bit complicated and I just yelled out to one of the guys here, and and Justin came over and we worked together and we fixed the problem,"

Vittoria and you tell the customer that, don't you?

A yeah, I'm communicating with the customer and look everybody is around me while I am talking to the customer and also watching my screen and dropping me some notes and stuff like that, it's nice.

(Amir, Interview, 09)

The second way in which informality is demonstrated is through the use of register and style that are more typical of conversational talk than formal talk. In the following extract of meeting talk between a manager and her subordinate, informality is highlighted in the linguistic features. In his study of professional talk, Willing (1992) states that when

gatherings are labelled as ‘meetings’ they can assume certain formalities of speech. Some formality is observed in the following extract. The meeting is scheduled in a private room rather than held at the manager’s desk as were many other meetings that I observed. This meeting has some of the formal features of meetings such as the setting, rules of speaking and hearing each other out (Willing, 1992, p. 279). In addition, the meeting is made somewhat more formal by the existence of a preset agenda, namely to discuss all the projects Claire supervises and provide an update. The final feature of formal meetings that is observed during this exchange is that notes are taken by both participants at different times during the meeting. In spite of these formal features, however, informality prevails in the overall tone of the meeting which is evident in the speaking style and register of both participants.

1 Sofia: That’s okay, it’s because it is part of his coaching sessions I need to provide some assistance and guidelines. But he wasn’t presenting that it was done. So, he wasn’t saying that it was a final document. This is his work in progress and I gave him some tips and also told him to talk to you if he you know, for some advice and things.

2 Claire: Okay.

3 Sofia: And I suppose next time he does something like this I’ll be looking at not reviewing the document in draft and be waiting to see what he does by himself.

4 Claire: Yeah, because I guess afterwards he was a bit of depressed or sad.

5 Sofia: Low?

6 Claire: Yeah, low – he said ‘*I give Sofia my communication strategy and then totally been scraped out*’. And I said “*what does that mean*?” And then he showed me the document and then I look at it, I said “*just this part you haven’t completed and of course Sofia can’t comment on this part*”.

And then he put some issues and then he said "*what is the impact of this issue, what is your solution*.' Yeah and I said '*that was pretty fair comments and then the other part and then I said' yes it was not that bad and you just put a little more work and then so you will finish it off."*

7 Sofia: Okay that's good feedback and I agree with that and I think you should continue to give Matt feedback so he obviously asked for your feedback and you should give that and I think it has to be structured in very similar to that. It's like well, this is what you've done and this is the expectation.

8 Claire: Possibly, yes because Matt is someone, he does like to do something good.

9 Sofia: I think Matt likes positive feedback and he really likes positive feedback.

10 Claire: Yeah, he likes positive feedback and then he does like to deliver something good but sometimes he might not be having the ability or the skill or sometimes, he just needs a little bit more help possibly.

11 Sofia: Yeah but I wasn't looking at that as a final document, I knew it was a work in progress but I would rather look at it as a work in progress and say – this is the areas that need more attention than look at it as the final product and think this is completely wrong. So I asked him to go and look at some other communication plans.

12 Claire: Yeah, possibly.

13 Sofia: I think sometimes that will help yourself but also help you in instructing like people like Matt or instructing your BAs or is to say what's the purpose of the document? What is this document trying to help with? And so that's why I said well why have you got issues in there, you know, is it a communication issue and what's your solution. So, you always have to bring it back to what's the purpose? I think Matt sometimes thinks – I'll complete the template without thinking about

what the content is and sometimes the template is wrong. Well, it doesn't give you the guidance, you need to think!

14 Claire: Correct!

15 Sofia: I think Matt needs to concentrate on the thinking of what, [24:20].

16 Claire: I agree.

17 Sofia: Always just say what's the purpose, why do we need this document for this project, what are we trying to achieve through this document?

18 Claire: Yeah so what I get at this, I basically I will focus on the previous part exactly to the mini-charter.

19 Sofia: See, this is where I worry that he is just going to cut and paste and things. So this is why I said well what's the issue in terms of communication? It was that one there.

20 Claire: Yeah, you take it back and then you have a read before I want to circulate. Yes, I add this part and then project meetings and then possibly to get to the next stage – that was my schedule and the timeline, I did it. Yeah that's it.

21 Sofia: That's right. So you just need to follow that up, all right?

22 Claire: Yeah, okay, I will follow it up. Yeah, I haven't reviewed this document, I want him to finish first before I review it.

The examples highlighted in the extracts above indicate that the exchanges are characterised by a conversational and informal register and style. This style includes a number of features. First, the speakers use informal markers of agreement such as 'okay' and 'yeah' such as when Claire replies to Sofia's evaluations and suggestions in lines 2, 4 and 6. The second marker of informality is the use of "*I think*" (7, 9, 13, 15) and "*I suppose*" (3, 8) as prequels to advice giving, thereby giving this speech episode a more tentative and conversational tone.

Another example of informal style and register in meeting talk was observed in Alan's Team meeting (Team Meeting, 09) with the manager of the unit, which I attended. Interestingly, as in the previous example, this meeting reflects some of the typical formal features of meetings such as the setting, the existence of an agenda and standard turn-taking.

23 Paul: couple of things I just wanna go through, quickly, PDRs,

24 Robert: so hum, not good enough haha so I'm pushing back on that so hum: I'll go through the minutes here:, a little bit out of date, hum but there's still some stuff here, I don't believe some of this has, been completed, hum, there's some there…where was it? …..

25 Lyle: I've got I've still gotta get I've still gotta get the actual historical properties over I've helped them with some data they wanted hum and extracted data from our current system, seen what files had come across, so I did that for hum, I think it was XNameXSurname:

26 Robert so that new one will just start putting the stuff in herself?

27 Lyle oh yeah, I'll work with whoever's doing it a couple of days a week at the moment but at some stage they're gonna start typing it in and you know, gradually all the data will be there so that'll be really good

…

28 Robert yeah XXSoftware's gonna go live about January next year and then it'll be dependency on XX for those who don't already know the XX have changed their releases to annually hum, being every February, ?? but there will be service packs each year, so whether we pick those up and run with them I don't know yet, so yeah they'll be a lot of things hanging on XXSystem hum cause the other thing is evaluations↑ that's just signed on the dotted line for that, Friday or today

1 Robert I won't go through each one of these items, I should just get each one updated but current projects, Alex is staying a bit longer cause hum

2 Gus hurray:! (as in celebration)

i. He's seen the light has he?

3 Robert just a little ha

4 Gus or he's seen the money ha

(collective laughter)

5 Alfred do I get a better desk now?

6 Glen work for free haha

7 Robert a better desk now (repeats)

8 Alfred do I get a better desk? (laugher) Everyone concerned about my

9 Robert we've supposed to have had that other desk, XX gonna find out why, someone must've agreed to something why we don't have a better desk!

10 Alfred yeah, especially since those two desks are being used for a printer! To hahaha

(collective laughter)

11 Paul all right, no more questions?

This extract includes several features of linguistic informality. The first is the use of the following contracted verb forms, '*wanna'* and *gotta get' and 'they're gonna'* which contrast with the formal nature of the topics that follow such as the impending PDRs (Professional Development Reviews). Use of abbreviated terms such as PDRs is common and not surprising in this meeting since all staff present were familiar with the related text and its requirements. Another feature of linguistic informality in this extract is the use of informal lexical items such as '*some stuff'* which occurs in the middle of talk about updating projects. Substitution of the abbreviated forms of 'yeah' for 'yes' and

‘cause’ for ‘because’ provides further linguistic evidence of the informality of this meeting.

The second feature in the data which reflects the informal nature of the workplace talk is the use of humour, a resource that can be used in a multitude of ways, including to reduce power differences (Holmes, 2002). In this meeting the humour introduces a more relaxed style of talk that functions as a means of reducing the formality. The joke above (11) about Alfred’s desk provides a welcome break from a long stretch of business talk. The joke is accompanied by additional comments about the desk as well as extended collective laughter.

The third feature of linguistic informality noted in the data refers to the way in which the meeting opening and closing takes place which signals a high degree of informality. The meeting in Alan’s team above began with Paul, the manager, saying:.

Paul: couple of things I just wanna go through, quickly, PDRs,

The largest and most formal meetings I attended at both *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact* were branch meetings. Both were scheduled in large areas to accommodate the number of people and both dealt with reporting and planning themes. In both cases the tone of the meeting was jocular and cheerful. At *InfoContact* the meeting ended, as was always the case, with a group of staff giving a presentation on an aspect of their local Council, in this case the history of the city – a topic unrelated to the business meeting. This sort of presentation was regularly scheduled at the end of branch meetings in order to ‘lighten things up’ (Fieldnotes 09).

Similarly a group meeting at *InfoContact* began informally with the manager, Cecilia, discussing the latest video games with some staff members. Her opening speech acts consisted of the offer of an empty chair to a member of staff still standing and an apology for not being able to find a more suitable room. This was followed by a joke by Sofia before Cecilia turned to the first agenda item listed on her PowerPoint slides.

The informal nature of meetings in the organisations participating in the study was acknowledged by both the employees and managers with the manager at *InfoContact* confirming that all staff expect these meetings to be held in this way. At a post-meeting conversation the manager, Paul, confirms that meetings are often organised in an impromptu manner and that they are generally relaxed and jocular in style.

Vittoria: was that how you would normally:? (Asking if they felt they behaved 'normally' in spite of the presence of the recorder)
Paul: a bit more jocular normally
Vittoria: oh really?
Thank you. How often do you have meetings?
Paul: should be every week but it doesn't happen.

(Interview, 09)

The examples in this section have highlighted the fact that the participants consider the workplace and their work to be informal in the way it is organised. Features such as allocation of topic and turns as well as vocabulary and terms of address were considered as routinised and part of daily interactions.

5.5 Key Characteristic 3: Fusion of Work and non-work talk

This section describes the third characteristic of work talk that was identified in the data.

This characteristic is closely related to the informality already identified and concerns the fusion of work and non-work talk in workplace interactions. This characteristic reflects the linguistic practices commonly observed in these contemporary professional workplaces.

The first example demonstrates the seamless way in which the participants move between work and non-work talk. The excerpt below between Scott, a Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong who is the team leader and Guy, a native speaker of French, takes place during work time.

1	Scott	man did you see this? I can't believe this, this is pretty cool man,
2	Guy	I see so you can talk at home!
3	Scott	actually this is pretty funny↑ it comes with a router ??? but I was thinking right↑people take this on holiday, so if you go wireless right? [g yeah!] You can just jump on your skype account and start ringing people
4	Guy	ah,
5	Scott	or if you're in Japan, you can just call, you don't need a card or anything, [G yeah] it's bloody expensive though man! haha! US man!
6	Guy	oh US, yeah but you're on word website Amazon! Check it out [on]
7	Scott	[actually] I was thinking this thing would be good for you, if you didn't buy your uhm your router, because this thing actually comes from a little package and that, there's a little bit in there that acts as a wireless router ↑which gives you the ADSL right? you get a box that's gonna give you ADSL and Ethernet and you plug the Ethernet straight into this
8	Guy	yeah into this …
9	Scott	yeah I'm trying to find something like this man!

10 Guy but uhm,

11 Scott yeah

…

12 Guy yeah a bit, check it on ebay you find something much cheaper

13 Scott yeah good idea man!

14 Guy cause uhm you can check on Amazon

15 Scott oh yeah Amazon's good is it?

16 Guy [??]

17 Scott yeah cause I jumped onto?? shopsealer, there's a comparison

18 Guy oh yeah!ha they have it in France I saw it as well far out

19 Scott huh!

20 Guy check it on ebay, they have it from Hong Kong or,

21 Scott yeah:

…

22 Scott hey actually I wonna ask you G!

23 Guy yeah

24 Scott the, uhm 3rd DMM, is that hum, it's not set up yet right?

25 Guy it is, it is set up!

26 Scott oh it's set up is it already!

27 Guy yeah

28 Scott yeah cause you know how I wanted to? do one of those away and then??

29 Guy yeah go for it, yeah should be in the page, I put it there, you can check..

30 Scott what page man?

31 Guy I think I put it there (looking for it on screen)

32 Scott oh it is in there! Cool man, I'll break it! (joke)

33 Guy ha

34 Scott cool!

35 Guy the licence, the license is in the team page,

…

(Amir's Team 09)

This exchange begins with Scott inviting Guy to look at his computer screen, and this action appears at first to have the sole purpose of sharing information about a new product. This is not a topic that is strictly related to work tasks. However, since Scott and Guy are part of a close team, this exchange can be interpreted as being motivated out of a desire to share new information about innovative communicative tools, a topic that extends beyond work. This motive is evident when Scott says:

Scott [actually] I was thinking this thing would be good for you,

The first part of their exchange also functions as a lead-in to a request from Scott (following a brief pause) for information from Guy. Scott's question about whether Guy knows about this technology (1) provides an indirect way of his asking whether Guy has completed a particular task. Guy responds enthusiastically, indicating that he has completed the task. Interestingly, Scott initiates his request after a long non-work topic exchange which functions here as an indirect or tentative way for the team leader to ascertain whether the task has been completed. The conversation about the new technology that precedes the request is therefore a form of mitigating device. Koester (2004) identified the existence of combined work and non-work talk in conversational openings and closings in her study of workplace interactions. However, in the present data, relational sequences are not confined only to conversational openings and closings but occur in many different parts of the speech event.

The mixture of work and relational talk in my data does not appear to be problematic and is not reported by the participants as causing difficulties. However, other studies suggest that the combination of work and non-work talk is potentially problematic in bilingual settings (Tange, 2007). In Tange's study of multilingual workplaces in Denmark, English was the language of business. However the non-Danish speakers felt excluded from what they perceived as important aspects of communication which tended to take place while the Danish speakers were talking informally. Those who were excluded from these interactions perceived they were unable to access important information which was communicated informally highlighting that work-talk is not always conducted in expected ways. In contexts where English is the only language used, informal use of English can also at times be problematic if certain styles of language are not familiar for all participants. For example, although there were no problems in the interactions, some participants (Suresh, Lia and Kevin) reported feeling that their perceived lack of confidence in informal talk genres such as small talk and making jokes was a barrier to their full participation in non-work related conversations. (See Chapter 4, section 4.4).

The following extract also highlights the way in which work and non-work talk merge in workplace interactions. The following interaction takes place on a Friday afternoon when, although work is officially over, the computers are still turned on and the team members are drinking wine but still working. The work/non-work talk here is distributed in such a way that it seems almost haphazard. This is highlighted when the topic of Joe's recent holiday leave is raised. This is both a work and non-work topic as his leave had an impact on the team as well as on his personal life. This topic is interspersed throughout the speech episode. The other main topic in this extract — who is working over the weekend — is also dealt with sporadically throughout the exchange.

1 Guy ok guys, cheers guys, *(glasses clinking)*

2 Joe I wish I was still on holidays

3 Guy ??? weekend

4 X Cheers

5 X who is working tomorrow?

6 Scott Me and M

7 (lots of simultaneous cheers)

8 Roy so this is a ?? for you ?

9 Guy M took the case

10 Roy so did you fix the case?

11 Guy well we decided to do Webex, and while we are on the Webex with the guy, he receives a call and says ‘hang on’ they’re another case on the company (laughter)

12 Scott you should have held on to that guy and brought the DM over [on,]

13 …

14 Joe you’re working, did you say you’re working tomorrow?

15 Guy then I get busy this weekend

16 Marty I know you man, you you look forward to your work on the weekend!

17 Joe [I know man]

18 Marty [you take all the cases off me!]

19 (laughter)

20 Guy did you see all the (NAME) cases? There are 3 dispatches for our shift tomorrow already.

21 (laughter)

22 Scott oh that’s all right, we got Marty on tomorrow, he’s working for us for free!

23 Guy who else Marty and Joe? Wow!

24 Roy he’s sick!

25	Joe	I should have taken 2 or 3 weeks to get back into it before working weekends man
26	Scott	man you need the schedule ha
27	Joe	I felt bad because I was away for quite a while I thought I better make up for all the weekends I missed
28	Scott	good you should feel bad!
29	Joe	this comes from a guy who takes a WAAS [report case and goes huh!]
30	Guy	[what's a] what's a WAAS reporting case?
31	Joe	Reports that XXCOName generates.
32	Joe	bludger! Big time!
33	Scott	hey R you still have to do an initial response
34	Guy	just close it, put a note in there, case closed and that's it, I mean put what you did,
35	Roy	open and erode haha
36	Guy	no no
37	Roy	no I know *(more serious tone)* I am doing it now!
38	Guy	is there, when you close is there an option in the menu in there that says hum
39	Male	Mad Customer's stupid?
40	Guy	well I didn't want to say anything because the recording but yes
41	(all laugh)	

(Amir's team 09)

The above extract illustrates the 'messiness' of the talk in terms of topic development and topic mixture. In Chapter 6 this example will be revisited and analysed of the discursive features and their functions. (see section 6.5)

5.6 Key characteristic 4: Technical and non-technical language

As stated in the Methodology chapter (see also Appendix VI) many of the participants are network engineers or IT professionals who have high level technical expertise and describe themselves as being 'technical'. This description functions as an in-group marker and is one of the ways that sets these professionals apart from their less 'technical' customers, both internal and external. Nevertheless, these workers are expected to appropriate and display 'soft' skills such as assuaging the anxieties of customers in times of crisis and supporting colleagues in dealing with difficult clients in order to carry out their work successfully. In some cases the deployment of appropriate 'soft' skills can lead to rewards since this enhances team performance. The working environment demands that participants demonstrate a plethora of communication skills aimed at pleasing and placating customers as well as managing teamwork. The examples presented below illustrate this point.

It is useful to begin with a participant's description of his job in the customer service role at *SolutionsPlus*, which is in effect a summary of the linguistic and social skills he is required to exercise as part of his work:

> "you have to be an engineer, politician, negotiator, peacemaker, pacify the customer and have maximum tolerance and all hats are worn at the same time. It's like being in the military; you're the battlefront'…..the communication skills are learned on the job and those who don't have the communication skills have the technical skills."
>
> (Brendan, Fieldnotes09)

Brendan's assessment is interesting for two reasons. First, he alludes to the multifaceted nature of communication at work and indicates that despite the fact that he and his colleagues are 'technical' members of the team, the other 'soft' skills matter just as much when they are dealing with the frontstage aspects of their workplace, such as when they are interacting with clients. Second, his assessment — '*you're the battlefront'* — alludes to the uneasy nature of the roles played by employees in this company, or at least those who are dealing with customers and for whom language work is crucial. Further, his description indicates the possible conflictual situations that can arise when dealing with customers. This is relevant since participants who take calls from clients are evaluated both on their technical skills and on the way that they handle the calls.

This section outlines three different ways of speaking that the participants are required to master and illustrates each with excerpts from the interviews and interactions recorded for the study. First, the participants need to be able to speak as representatives of a company; second, they need to be able to communicate with team members across a range of professional areas; third, they need to be able to communicate with clients and colleagues using language that participants consider to be outside their participant's expertise. This includes the use of soft skills in particular contexts such as ending calls with clients and is related to the role they play within the company.

The first point identified in the data with regards to the ubiquity of technical and non-technical topics is the need for the IT participants to have access to a range of soft skills which include the ability to contribute to the company image and culture. The example presented below is provided by Jennifer, a network engineer from *SolutionsPlus,* who was asked to recall a challenging work episode. She was also asked to comment on why she had chosen to report this instance. The experience Jennifer reports required

her to step outside her usual role and adapt to new communicative demands. It therefore illustrates how an employee who has strong technical skills and expertise also has to lay claim to a range of other skills for the sake of maintaining positive relations with clients. In other words, her company requires her to display expertise both in solving problems and also in making customers aware of the process.

Jennifer cited her visit to a company as one of the most challenging experiences of her work life. According to the study participants, visits to sites are rare and only take place in extremely sensitive cases where the problem proves to be ongoing. In such cases the clients want to be reassured that their problems are being addressed and wish to be kept informed about developments and timelines as well as how they can keep their businesses operating, usually by adopting temporary solutions. The difficulty for Jennifer was that during her visit she had to manage a non-technical aspect of her job in that she was required to deploy 'soft skills' in order to reassure the client that progress was being made. She explains:

> "Jennifer yeah the hardest for me was the critical case and no one has been working with us for …. The pressure to work with a customer, I feel the pressure, it's the first time work with critical one, I'm working on the weekend, a lot of pressure and the worst thing is ha my director bring me to the customer, and
> Vittoria so you went on site? Why was that necessary?
> Jennifer we really really really need to calm down customer, I don't think I express very well, since I feel that that's the right way, but also need to think about the business side, I'm only thinking about the troubleshooting side and ?? high level, this one I came with my director from high level, we need to give some generic thing not specific thing"
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

Jennifer signals two difficulties. The first is that this was her first experience of dealing with a critical problem. In order to cope with this challenge, she had to work overtime which in turn created a lot of pressure. The second problem was the fact that she had to visit the customer. The purpose of the visit was not to explain the problem or report on progress but to appease the customer; in other words, it was a customer-building and a customer-keeping exercise. Jennifer considered the visit challenging first because she was accompanied by the Director of the unit and secondly, she signals it as a learning experience for her. For the Director this provided an opportunity to train Jennifer in dealing with non-technical and more managerial matters. This example highlights that the way workers manage new linguistic challenges can vary according to the company culture and their orientation towards supporting and training their staff. Jennifer moved from her usual trouble-shooter role to her business-oriented role. The latter is a role she is less accustomed to but one that she is nonetheless expected to perform. Jennifer reports that she obtained positive feedback on her performance and learned from this experience.

Jennifer	yeah I went with him, yeah he's so so nice and I asked him 'did I do something wrong during the meeting?' and he said no no no you did good but you can do in this way which can be better so he told me how I can do this better
Jennifer	but he said you can give this way so that will keep the customer more happy, but actually I didn't think that much before I just resolve the problem, which is very good experience, to think differently,
Vittoria	yeah, and is that a welcome thing going on site or is it seen as a really hard thing going onsite?

Jennifer that's seen as a really bad situation if the customer is really high level and giving the blame and you need to give them something to make them happy to keep them, so it's a pretty bad situation to go through

Vittoria so that must have boosted your confidence a lot

Jennifer yeah a little bit but it bring me down a lot, you always gain and lose when you do something like that

Vittoria if the Director let you do that it means the Director has confidence in you?

Jennifer well if had a choice I would do several but now I would always do, I think it also depends on personality, some people like to stay behind and do the work, some people like to go and do the presentation, I think I'm like the person in the middle hahaha

(Interview 09)

The second way in which technical and non-technical communication was seen to pose challenges to some of the participants was when they were required to communicate with professional team members from a range of different areas. This can result in problematic communication, as the technical nature of communication has to be 'toned' down to allow the non-technical participants to understand the issues. This next example is highlighted in interview data and ongoing conversations with Caleb, a senior staff member from *SolutionsPlu*s, who was present at the meetings and recordings in Anul's team. Caleb, who is from India and a long time resident in Australia, points out the importance of effective communication skills in his workplace and highlights the potential problems faced by participants in this industry. First, the fieldnotes from conversations with participants about this topic indicate that when communicating with customers, there is often tension between those with substantial technical knowledge and the clients who are often less technically knowledgeable. A major issue arises when

clients have to report to higher management and these clients are managers who are not necessarily technical people. In these situations, the stress on staff to problem solve efficiently is often high especially if the business impact is high, such as if an airline ticketing system is malfunctioning. Another difficulty arises when, as is often the case, clients who report problems do not understand the problem themselves but simply want it resolved. Consequently they resist being told to follow protocols and procedures to resolve the issue. Caleb explained that since management structures vary in different companies, problems are not always resolved simply because it is unclear who the problem is assigned to or which department is responsible for it. In some cases *SolutionsPlus* engineers pick up problems that are caused by smaller companies which do not provide support.

Caleb also explained that it was difficult to challenge clients who were facing technical difficulties without intimidating them (or belittling them), yet this sensitive situation was a routine part of their work. Caleb also added that in his experience ninety percent of the problems that arise in the workplace are about communication issues not technical issues, regardless of who is communicating. This observation adds support to the view that language competence is essential for IT professionals, even though they are traditionally identified as technical knowledge workers.

Finally, Caleb indicated that managers from the companies they deal with communicate in different modes such that the level of detail differs greatly. Email messages are sent or calls made to *SolutionsPlus* which the engineers have to make sense of in a limited time and often under pressure, which creates additional stress. These examples of how work is carried out highlight the fact that IT professionals are required to do more than ‘technical’ work and must manage their communication styles to suit colleagues in teams across the company (Caleb, *Fieldnotes 09*).

In addition to identifying the nature of the problems clients were experiencing, participants reported that another potential challenge they faced involved ending calls. The linguistic strategies required involve the use of soft skills and are considered by the participants to be outside of technical language. Ending calls with customers was reported as a challenging task possibly because of the importance placed on the time spent on each call since this is used by managers to calculate individual and team performance. When a call is dealt with quickly, it indicates speedy problem resolution on the part of the engineer and the whole team's performance is rated highly. However, clients are often reluctant to end the call, preferring to add in more questions about related issues. This prevents clients from having to log another call and wait for further technical assistance.

Further, even though logging a new call is always an option for the client, one of the problems the participants reported was communicating this procedure to clients and encouraging them to take up this option. In order for this to happen, engineers need to manage the end of the call carefully so that they end the call on good terms thereby ensuring the client will provide a good report. If the customer feels dissatisfied, they are less likely to write a positive written report after each call. Chandra, a participant who also believed that ending calls can be one of the most difficult tasks, stated that "closing a case can come down to soft skills" *(Fieldnotes 09*). Maya echoes this when she says that every customer service worker is aware of the potential difficulties of ending a call with a persistent customer and the need to handle it cautiously. It is perhaps for this reason that the company provides a scripted template to facilitate a potentially difficult exchange (Interview 09). (See Chapter 3, section 3.2.1) where Maya discusses ending calls).

Vittoria what about getting rid of customers, is that more difficult?

Maya no no no, we just, the template and customers understand, we have an understanding, if they go ‘can I ask you one question’ and I just go ‘hey that’s a different issue hum open another other case, get a different engineer, everyone understands,

(Interview 09)

The use of soft skills is also required with other ‘technical’ colleagues and is considered a normal part of team-focused workplaces, according to Myat, one of the engineers interviewed at *SolutionsPlus*. Like other engineers, she describes herself as ‘technical’. When I first met her she had been asked to come up with a way of promoting team-building at work and to implement it with her team. For Myat, the stress associated with this task consisted not in finding an activity but in presenting it to her colleagues and the general manager. Given the novelty of the task for her, Myat was extremely nervous in the lead up to the meeting and asked her team leader for assistance about how to present the task to the team.

> “I feel very nervous because I am technical and I solve problems but to talk in front of the general manager and to give a presentation, that is something new and I am not confident about that.”
>
> (Interview 09)

Although it was not possible to attend this presentation, Myat reported that the game she had prepared was well received by her team and she was relieved when it was over. Assigning team-building exercises to team members appears to be a management strategy for empowering team members. In order to determine how these activities and roles were received by the employees and to evaluate the extent to which they enriched

or empowered participants, follow-up interviews would be required, as well as longer and more sustained observation of the team response to the exercises.

This section has highlighted the ways in which participants deploy their soft skills with regard to both customers and team members in different workplace interactions. The examples from the data show that participants must navigate a range of different roles in order to carry out their work successfully. At times these communicative demands are unexpected and the participants report feeling unprepared for them as illustrated by the examples provided by Jennifer above. At other times, although participants are prepared for particular communicative events they nevertheless experience them as challenging as was evidenced in the example provided by Myat.

The following section highlights a different type of communication work which includes accommodating to others' preferred styles and language choice, another aspect of soft skills which may present particular challenges.

5.7 Key Characteristic 5: Accommodation as a resource

This section outlines another salient characteristic of the different types of language the participants used in the workplace which can be described as a component of soft skills. Whereas the previous four sections focused on the key characteristics of workplace communication that were potentially challenging for participants in mastering appropriate communicative styles, this section highlights a different type of challenge – the need to accommodate to others' preferred communication strategies. This challenge is more explicitly related to different modes of communication and to less tangible factors, particularly linguistic attitudes.

As stated in the Methodology chapter, the participating companies comprise a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce but also operate with a linguistically diverse client base. Consequently the participants' communication work includes understanding and managing aspects of 'intercultural' communication. In addition, participants deal with clients by email or phone which can add to the complexity of the communication. This section presents examples which demonstrate how the participants manage difficulties by accommodating interlocutors' preferred communication strategies.

The first example illustrates the way in which successful communication among colleagues can depend on accommodating individual communicative preferences. A secondary participant, Domenick, is an Australian male from *SolutionsPlus* who believes that native English-speaking listeners can play a crucial role in achieving listener-speaker success in interactions between native English speakers (NES/NS) and non-native English speakers (NNS). Domenick reported that employees in his company generally made an effort to understand those for whom English was not their first language and who showed signs of not understanding in any given interaction. He maintained that because of this awareness, few instances of misunderstandings occurred in his workplace. However one interesting preference he had noticed in his company was that some staff preferred to avoid face-to-face communication:

> “For example I was sitting near a Chinese colleague and she would write me emails instead of just turning her chair around and talking to me. I thought that was a bit strange, and inefficient , I think face-to-face is more a more immediate and a quicker way to communicate but figured she felt more comfortable writing than turning to face me and that was fine”
>
> (Fieldnotes 09)

Domenick also stated that some clients were reluctant to use voice tools to communicate, preferring email even if the staff member concerned requested a phone call whereas he believed that a phone call would provide a more personal and immediate element in their service. Other participants (key and secondary) reported that some NESB clients avoided talking on the phone due to language difficulties (Fieldnotes 09). Participants from TAFE who were working at the time of their interivews also reported finding telephone communication difficult so they tended either to avoid it altogether or to take advantage of the privacy of the interview room to make calls to clients in order to avoid being overheard (Fieldnotes 09) .

Another way in which the participants reported accommodating to others’ preferred communication styles was by using a language other than English for work purposes. This aspect of communication was only observed at *SolutionsPlus,* the only one of the three companies which had dealings with offshore clients, as indicated in Chapter 3. During my first meeting with a senior staff member at *SolutionsPlus*, I was informed that multilinguals were highly regarded as a resource in the company and that “at some stage these engineers know they will use their native language at work and we value this” (Fieldnotes 09). The use of languages other than English with clients was evident

both in oral and written communication. For example, Anthony reported that after some initial communication with a client, if he sensed the customer was struggling with some aspects of English, he asked what their first language was. If there was no-one on the team who could speak that language, then he tried to translate particular terminology or seek help from a staff member from another team.

Similarly, Manny, another secondary participant from *SolutionsPlus,* reported that when he tried to communicate with a customer and felt he was not making any progress, he asked what the customer's preferred language was and found a colleague who could speak that language. He reported that, in his experience, clients appreciated the opportunity to conduct their business transaction in their native language (Fieldnotes 09).

However, using a second language is not always an easy solution, as the following extract from a team meeting shows. The extract is taken from a meeting at *SolutionsPlus* which highlights the fact that the mode of communication as well as the choice of language can be problematic when a client resists the options presented. In such cases the participants need to assess the client's preferred mode of communication (email, telephone or Webex — a remote mode of communication which allows online users to see each other and gives the engineer access to the client's desktop). In the following instance Anna, the engineer working on this case, was expected to provide a solution while avoiding causing offence to the client. In such circumstances, communicative strategies need to be negotiated quickly in order to address the technical problems. Anna had been trying unsuccessfully to resolve a problem with a client based in Hong Kong. In the team meeting she recounts the history of the case. Her colleagues make several suggestions ranging from using different technologies to switching to the client's first language.

1 Anul ok any other ideas?

2 ….

3 Caleb I mean ask him to compare who gets the problem and who doesn't get the problem, is there anything which he can find?

4 Anna yes

5 Anul In terms of traces?

6 Caleb this guy seems to be fairly typical because he objects, '*I disagree with you XNAME*' (laughter) ' *I did this'*, yeah, '*all the messages should go through the XXX same way'*, but he doesn't know, that how they send, how far/

7 Male1 /just tell him to send you a screen shot, that way you have some evidence of what he's talking about,

8 Male2 can't you just do a WEbex with him? Can't

9 Anna / I asked, I asked (exasperated) to speak to him, I, I wanted to hear what's happening, he just sends an email

10 Anul I think he prefers email right? All the time it's email right That's right, that's part of the reason the case is still unsolved

11 Anna I mean after a number of email communication I understood what the behaviour was but I had not idea what he was talking about!

(talking and acknowledgement of the problem Anna is facing, overlaps and interjections)

12 Anul We've all gone through this with him so don't worry, ha

13 Anna I asked to speak to him but he just replied by email

14 Male1 I think he's Chinese, and he has poor English and so we should involve someone who is Cantonese!

15 Male2 haha , we're all looking at Liam (Cantonese speaker)

16 Male1 is it worthwhile getting him once on a Webex once who speaks his local

		language so the he's comfortable with Webex, so the next time he speaks with someone who says Webex He's not backing off already
17	Male2	I've got the ???
18	Liam	yeah but sometimes he uses???
19	Male1	ok
20	Anul	he used to get angry
21	Liam	he feels better when you use English or Mandarin?
22	Male3	I think English is his best,
23	Liam	because people from Hong Kong they they they would prefer English rather than mandarin so yeah
24	Male	so try to get Webex if you can
25	Male	his written English is perfect
26	Male	yeah! It's pretty good,
27	Male2	better than me!
28	Male	yeah he takes so long/
29	Male	/because the system doesn't support (names the systems they are using)
30	Liam	but you can't tell him it's the, that's' the problem

(talk continues regarding technical aspect of the problem)

The first suggestion made is to use the tool Webex (8). It is evident that while using Webex would provide a quicker means of solving the problem, the client is reluctant to use it, possibly due to his lack of experience with this particular tool (9). Another solution is provided by one of Anna's colleagues who suggests using a Cantonese speaker in the meetings (15). Following this suggestion the team members seek advice from Liam, the Cantonese speaker in this team (15). However Liam suggests that the client would probably prefer to use English (24) since this is the expected business

language of Hong Kong; in essence, Liam indicates that using Cantonese would be inappropriate in this case.

This extract illustrates that the solutions the team are working through are not technical but communication-driven and require managing language choice and face concerns associated with these choices. For each call they receive, participants have to make three communication-related decisions. First they must establish the preferred way of communicating with the client. In addition, they need to choose a language for communication and decide whether to communicate in writing or orally. Sometimes, as Liam indicated in the extract above, the use of a 'local' language is not the answer. There may be issues for the Hong Kong-based client associated with how he wishes to position himself in relation to the Australian team; furthermore, communication in English may be expected in his workplace. In some bilingual contexts where the use of the L1 is an option, some individuals insist on using English despite their lack of oral proficiency because of the perceived prestige conferred by using English. Research shows that international companies use a variety of features to demonstrate their membership of the international business community (Rasmussen Hougaard, 2008). In the case of the Hong Kong client, choosing to communicate in English demonstrates this affiliation with the 'global world of business.' Another example of speakers upholding their right to speak the more prestigious variety is cited by Wodak (2010) who states that some participants in the EU parliament insist on bypassing interpreters and using English, thereby sacrificing efficiency in communicating their ideas.

The work that Anna and her colleagues are engaged in here extends beyond technical expertise and into the area of soft skills management. In this case Anna and her team members have to negotiate a solution using a less efficient mode of communication (email) at the expense of the immediacy afforded by Webex and/or a phone call in order

to accommodate the client's implicit preference. The challenge that this dilemma poses is not about technical expertise but about accommodating to preferred communicative styles. As in the previous examples, this negotiation is part of the participants' language work in a complex and demanding environment.

The participants were observed adopting specific communication strategies as they accommodated to their interlocutors' needs. Whereas the previous example showed that Anna's strategies for enhancing communication were related to language choice, in this example the strategies are related to how NS can adapt to NNS speakers. Oliver is a NS participant who provided some insightful comments into this aspect of communication among his NNS colleagues. Oliver is vision-impaired and regards himself as being acutely aware of strategies he can employ when challenges present themselves which rely on knowledge of visual cues. He believes this experience serves him well for communicating with NESB staff. As one of the few NS in his team at *SolutionsPlus,* he attends the ESL club meetings where he believes he can help NESB colleagues gain confidence in giving presentations. Oliver participates in the club meetings by taking part in conversational English activities, a role that he finds satisfying. In addition he states — "I learn from them'. (Interview 09)

Oliver shared some of his insights into what contributes to successful communication with NESB team members. He reported believing that communication difficulties arise as a result of generational or individual differences rather than cultural differences. He argued that attributing such communication difficulties to cultural differences was a 'cop out' since each situation is unique. In addition he argued that the role of the individual makes a difference since personality is central to how people communicate in groups. In interacting with his multilingual colleagues Oliver reported noticing difficulties in their understanding at times. When asked *how* he notices, he replied — '*you just know they*

don't get it'. Some of the clues he mentioned were their silence and their use of polite or inappropriate responses, as well as their tone of voice and intonation when reacting to what they had heard (Fieldnotes 09).

Amir also reported that he was sensitive to those whose English was not as 'strong' as his own, particularly those NESB colleagues who were new to Australia and/or the company. If he noticed that his interlocutors did not respond as quickly as he expected, or if they did not reply at all, then he tried to rephrase what he had said. Depending on the type of interaction or person he was talking to, Amir also reported trying to reduce his rate of speech, thereby demonstrating his awareness that, although his English is not perfect, he speaks quickly.

Ted, an English member of the team and has lived in Australia for a long time, also spoke about how he manages interactions when he perceives that customers or colleagues have not understood him.

1	Ted	so you can see it's quite diverse area, hum, but hum English, is generally very good, I don't think there's many people who, it might not be 100% but close, (close) you can communicate quite well, sometimes on the phone you might get someone who whose English isn't too good,
2	Vittoria.	customers?
3	Ted	customers yes, so then you've gotta ask the question in a different way and understand what they're saying as well because their pronunciation is quite different, (yeah) so they're thinking of something else they're trying to say (so it's a skill you're trying…) that's right yeah
4	Vittoria	how would you know they haven't understood?
5	Ted	well normally you say something and you can, you can, look you, they

> haven't understood what you're saying so you have to go a different way (but that's with customers you wouldn't) generally here no, you find that that most people in fact 95% speak 100% good English
>
> (Interview 09)

Oliver is a NS who reported that his experience of communicating with NESB speakers in other workplaces and in his present company suggested that if people make an effort and have strong English, then they are included. He explained that if they are excluded it is because they self-exclude. In addition, he believed that the company culture in relation to diversity played an important role in determining how teams communicate and establish collegial relationships. These comments offer insights into strategies that individuals from English speaking backgrounds can adopt in order to establish rapport with NESB colleagues and highlight aspects of language work required by the participants. The examples highlight the fact that successful communication depends not only on levels of proficiency but also on the interlocutors' attitudes and willingness to provide the NNS opportunities to speak. As *SolutionsPlus* is a global company with a large proportion of multilingual speakers it should be expected that NS are accustomed to NNS varieties and are accepting of them. The issue of sharing the communication burden in potentially problematic situations will be discussed in the conclusion.

Accommodating the needs of interlocutors also includes having an awareness of linguistic varieties of different languages, as the following example demonstrates. Ted is a NS of English from the UK who has lived and worked in many linguistically diverse settings. During an interview he offered an insightful view of languages and language variation which he attributes to his travels and exposure to people from different linguistic backgrounds. First, he explained that he was exposed to different regional and

international varieties of English because of his upbringing and work in the British navy and later on commercial ships:

Ted No well English is quite varied isn't it. Have you heard Billy Connelly? You've really gotta struggle to understand him. He's very funny but very hard to understand.

Second, he maintained that different varieties of English are not always easily understood by other English speakers, a fact that English speakers tend to overlook. He cited the example of his neighbour who speaks with a broad Irish accent which some 'Aussies' found impossible to understand at a recent social gathering at the neighbour's home. Ted believed that his family and work background had prepared him well for a multicultural workplace:

Ted I think it's how you're brought up. If you're brought up in? a racist way then that's how you grow up, but if you travel that would take the edge off your bias, the old nurture vs. nature debate I think it's like there is some nature but I would say that nurture is more thing that is predominant and hum yeah, and you know Australia is a multicultural society so hum,

Ted went on to point out that languages change over time, illustrating this fact with a humorous recount of a near misunderstanding due to changes in word meaning during the years he was absent from East London.

Ted and it changes as well, hum I I was I came to Australia in 1988s and I think I came home a couple of times, and visited in the mid 90s and I

was with my two older brothers and we were in a pub and hum they're talking about this other gentleman, this other 'geeza'

Vittoria uhm, a 'geeza'?

Ted and they said 'that geeza's tasty!' hahah and I was, (laughter) and he said 'that geeza's really tasty!'

Vittoria oh, surprise!

Ted and I'm going, 'oh my brother's turned a bit gay, 'what do you mean? Have you gone to the other side?' 'no he's tasty' 'what you're talking about tasty? Tasty meant you can handle himself in a fight, you know don't mess with him cause he's tasty (oh!) well that never existed when I left that was another word that came in, in East London, 'do you know what tasty meant?

(to colleague next to him who is also English. He replies "oh no haha'

Ted just shows you how local a variation of language can be, this is East London, V yeah), I don't know if there's still using the word tasty but (buy maybe they're using something else now, I mean 'geeza' I wouldn't know, is that your part? Other guy= no that's London haha (V. so would you have another word for a bloke? Other guy = we just call them blokes haha)

Ted 'Tasty geeza', and they didn't realize it, it just crept in!

(Interview 09)

Ted's comments and anecdotes about the English language displayed a high level of awareness of how languages vary across regional, political and geographical spaces as well as generations, and also that they change over time. In his anecdote about the term 'geeza', this is evident in both the orientation and the evaluation. Ted's comments show that he has acquired an understanding of some of the factors that shape language

change and is able to attribute communication difficulties to these. His anecdote also indicates that he considers himself an English speaker who is also likely to misunderstand others at times.

In contrast, Bella, who is from the USA, provided interesting insights into what she perceives as the lack of knowledge of non-Australian varieties of English in Australia, both in the general community as well as in her own workplace. The summarised account of her difficulties below, based on fieldnotes, is not dissimilar to some of the difficulties that other speakers of non-Australian English varieties experience when they come into contact with Australian English.

Since arriving in Australia 18 months ago Bella has been surprised at how often she doesn't understand Australians speaking, and how often people don't understand her. She is aware that idiomatic language can be a problem and cites a few examples she has learned after hearing expressions and asking colleagues what they mean. The other problem is speed; she finds Australian English very fast and struggles to understand some things. On one occasion she asked a superior to slow down because she was not able to follow what he was saying. But this was difficult because of his position and she did not wish to appear rude.

Lastly, she says the attitude of some Australians towards Americans has taken her by surprise. One issue is that Australians are surprised she would find some English different. The other is the general attitude of Australians to Americans. She often hears Australians talk about what Americans do and do not do and is frustrated by the generalisations. One example she mentioned was something she heard on a train - 'Americans don't know about Australia, they don't know our geography", which she found rather odd and inaccurate. (Fieldnotes 09)

These two examples highlight the fact that communication problems can arise when speakers of varieties of the same language communicate. In this situation soft skills encompass knowledge of different language varieties; this understanding can lead to successful communication. Whilst this aspect of soft skills is perhaps less explored in the data, it is an issue of which both Ted and Bella are aware and which they identify as part of their own communicative competence. Furthermore, in Bella's view, some speakers of Australian English lack this aspect of communicative competence.

The insights offered by Ted and Bella, both from English-speaking backgrounds, highlight the fact that linguistic challenges are not limited to NESB speakers. These examples demonstrate that in contexts where employers are aware of linguistic diversity there is likely to be more tolerance and acceptance of NNS varieties, as is the case at *SolutionsPlus* and *InfoContact*. These attitudes also show that the responsibility for successful communication should be shared among all speakers, a point that I return to in the conclusion.

Another example of workplace talk that taken into account the interlocutor needs of interlocutor that the participants also demonstrated skill in accommodating others' preferred communication styles when using teleconferencing technology. In the example presented below, Claire explains how she managed what she perceived as a difficult communication situation when she was working on projects with offshore teams in India and Japan in a previous position. Unlike Ted, Claire did not display knowledge of different varieties of English and had only worked with Australian speakers of English in China and in Australia. In her previous position, one of the challenges she faced involved handling misunderstandings while avoiding causing offence or confrontation. Below she describes how the teams in China, Japan and India differed in the way they conducted their work and the challenges this presented for her.

Claire yes we always communicate remotely but also the culture is quite different as well, for the Chinese people they were really struggling because they were very ?? to the detail and they were refusing to sign off and they kept asking for more things to be done on that project they keep on changing their request and they wanted to make it better and better and it's not uhm, we think it's just a cosmetic stuff it's not a functional related, they just refused to signing off and we have to push and we have to try to get them to sign off so we can go live, (oh yeah) uhm while the Japanese people we find are much easier to deal with

Vittoria oh are they? ha

Claire yeah, they are, they're pretty good, they're very and hard working and they do a lot of things that, and they're very polite as well and whatever you do they show their appreciation haha, so it's much easier,

Vittoria oh that's very interesting

Claire yeah that's a very interesting project, hum, so yeah that's just the one that comes to my mind, it's not that technical but it's more business,

(Interview1 09)

Claire attributed the communication difficulties she experienced to different work practices and asserted that the cause of these difficulties was culture-based. Whether this was in fact the case is not at issue here; what is significant is that she perceived herself to be managing cultural differences in her interactions with these transnational clients. In the following extract Claire describes the challenges she faced with the Indian team, attributing these difficulties to her colleagues' Indian English accents.

1 Claire: you talk to people sometimes I struggle to understand Indian's English!

2 Vittoria: was that hard? Was that a challenge?

3 Claire: Yes, it is a challenge, it is a challenge, for Indians usually I feel difficulty even when I talk to them face-to-face I couldn't fully understand, but depends which Indians, some Indians are better than the others,

4 Vittoria: depending on the region, I think

5 Claire: yes depending on the region but over the phone, it's even harder, so you have to sometimes, like the Indian was saying something and they get excited and they put on their India accent and I couldn't understand so I asked my work mate I said 'what did he say"

6 Vittoria: and did they understand?

7 Claire: some of them did understand, some didn't

8 Vittoria: can I ask about that? Did you find that after a while you got used to that accent or not?

9 Claire: (laughs) well possibly after I while I think I understand more words than initially, but still I feel that initially very hard, it's a challenge,

10 Vittoria: so how did you clarify when you didn't understand?

11 Claire: I said 'can you put it what you said into an email?' (Laugh)

12 Vittoria: and did they know do you think they knew that you hadn't understood their spoken English?

13 Claire: I don't know, I can't see their face,

14 Vittoria: oh in the teleconference it's a bit blurred!

15 Claire: oh it's the phone,

16 Vittoria: oh the phone

17 Claire: oh sometimes you can see the teleconference but [web cam]

(Interview 1 09)

Claire reported using two strategies to manage these difficulties. The first involved asking the colleague in the teleconference to explain further. However this was not something she could do more than once during a phone conference without causing disruption and risking embarrassing her interlocutor. More often therefore, she opted to ask the remote team members to email her, which was a more successful strategy. When asked about whether her difficulty understanding these new accents diminished over time (line 9), Claire stated that her understanding increased. Claire's strategy of suggesting written communication as a way of avoiding ongoing communication difficulties is an accommodation strategy that represents one component of her soft skills.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has addressed the second research question, which aimed to identify the types and styles of interaction used at work by IT professionals and to identify potential challenges these pose for NESB professionals.

An analysis of the interactions at this macro level indicated there are five salient features of the spoken language recorded and observed in the study sites. These features include the ubiquity of meetings, the informality of the communication, the constant transition between work and non-work talk, the inclusion of both technical and non-technical language and evidence of the strategy of accommodation in the participants' interactions with clients. All of these ways of working are complex and require participants to deploy a range of soft skills. These skills, although highly valued in the marketplace are not always clearly defined or explicitly identified as target competencies in IT workers. In addition some of the skills valued by employers, such as the ability to placate clients in times of crisis, are rarely made explicit and thus are acquired in a variety of informal ways, including 'on the job.'

The data showed that meetings are central to how work is carried out in the participating companies. Whether these meetings are spontaneous or planned, they represent a substantial component of the interactions in which the participants engage. The data showed that participants took part in diverse ways of meeting so the genre of 'the meeting' is not as rigid as is often imagined by outsiders or indeed as portrayed in training texts (see Williams, 198; Angouri, 2010) for critiques of the language of meeting manuals). This discrepancy between training and practice is relevant in trying to identify potential linguistic difficulties for professional migrants in a multicultural context.

The second characteristic of the workplace interactions documented in this study is that work is carried out in informal ways, both in the way that the work is structured and the way that communication about work takes place. This requires participants to operate in a range of genres. One way that informality manifests itself is through the fluidity of work and non-work talk.

Analysis of the third characteristic of the workplace talk indicates that fusion of work and non-work talk is yet another common aspect of workplace talk that participants must manage. This aspect of communication is tied to relational and team building and varies from team to team. It is not a static form of communication that can easily to adopted or taught to NESB.

The fourth characteristic of workplace talk, showed that participants must routinely switch between technical and non-technical talk. As has been shown, participants reported awareness of a number of potential linguistic difficulties embedded in the non-technical roles they were expected to adopt.

Lastly, participants reported accommodating to others' preferred styles of communication including choice of medium or language. It was shown that the language used is informal and casual reflecting the flatter management style and more flexible atmosphere identified as a characteristic of post-Fordist workplaces in previous research. The communicative styles favoured in these interactions are therefore typically more informal and conversational and, in the case of the IT companies observed in this study, are facilitated by the open plan office layout.

The analysis highlights the informality of the participants' communicative exchanges and adds support to Fairclough's claim about the 'conversationalization' of talk at work. This implies that the participants must be able to use communicative repertoires that include 'soft' skills in addition to possessing and being able to display technical know-how.

Participants must also negotiate ways of communicating successfully with speakers of other languages either by using technology or other languages. While bilingualism is a resource used by many of the participants to facilitate communication with clients, there are times when this requires sensitive negotiation in order to avoid making assumptions about others' linguistic preferences. On occasion this included negotiating the use of bilingual resources in teams that could access these languages for work purposes. The way these options are negotiated forms part of the participants' intercultural competence and is an essential element in the 'ways of speaking' and linguistic repertoires prevalent in these diverse workplaces. As was shown by Anna's dilemma, using a 'local' language was not always a solution as a client's preferred language is often determined by factors other than location.

Another aspect of participants' linguistic repertoires that the data revealed was the need to adopt various accommodation strategies when dealing with clients from non English-

speaking backgrounds. This could be problematic for migrants who, although proficient in English, may lack (or perceive they lack) knowledge and proficiency of the informal features of communication that make up soft-skills. The term ‘soft-skills’ has become a feature of the requirements of workers in the new work era (Urcioli, 2008) and it includes communication as well as social skills (Menochelli in Urcioli, 2008). Contemporary workplaces favour these skills and this can lead to reduced participation or exclusion from informal workplace interactions. For example, as Bertone (2004) points out, in industries where unions are no longer involved in negotiating salaries this falls to individuals. She says:

> “An increasing emphasis on interpersonal skills across most sectors and jobs has posed particular challenges for immigrants from diverse cultures and backgrounds.” (p. 48)

This issue will be further explored in the next analysis chapter, which focuses on interactions at the micro level.

The features of communication discussed in this chapter relate to a macro analysis of the workplace communication which was recorded and analysed in this study. The next chapter presents a micro-analysis of the same data, focusing on the actual discursive strategies employed in team interactions and their functions.

Chapter 6 **: Collaborative Strategies in Workplace Interactions**

6.1 Introduction

Whereas the previous chapter described the types of interactions and language styles adopted by participants when they communicate in the organisations where they work, this chapter presents a micro-analysis of the talk in which they engage. The talk analysed in this chapter includes recordings of meeting interactions and spontaneous interactions, which, as argued in Chapter 5 (section 5.2) can be considered one 'genre' in this data. This chapter therefore addresses the third research question:

What key communicative collaboration patterns can be observed in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges do these patterns of communication pose for skilled migrants?

The previous chapter demonstrated the existence of a strong sense of collaboration and commitment to teamwork among the company participants; this attitude is both expected and encouraged by management. For instance, management expect ESB workers to develop ways of accommodating NESB colleagues' communication needs where necessary. As described in Chapter 3, two of the participating companies actively promoted linguistic diversity and regarded this as a resource. In addition, *SolutionsPlus* promotes practices that allowed NESB and NS interaction. These two companies in particular oriented towards practices of tolerance of NESB English. This way of working is expected and encouraged in the participating companies and forms part of the communication skills required in the new economy. This attitude was typically held by participants as well. This is largely due to the nature of the work, which centres on problem solving. In this area of work where new technologies are constantly developing, it is impossible for all individuals to develop comprehensive knowledge of all new

technologies. Consequently workers rely on each other's expertise and willingness to share their knowledge.

Previous research has shown collaboration is a valued feature of work among professionals in the IT field. For example, Schnurr, Marra and Holmes (2008, p. 138) point out the particular importance of relational work in determining team success. Previous research into the workings of technical teams reveals high levels of interactivity so that the distinction between individual and teamwork is difficult to establish definitively (Engestrom and Middleton cited in Alby, 2008) . Also, observations of workplaces which involve the use of technologies, such as Orr's (1996) study of photocopy technicians reveal that close collaboration and shared narratives are central to the way work problems are solved. Similarly, a study of interactions among web designers (Alby, 2008) also highlights the interactivity and collaborative nature of technical work. In this study the collaborative approach facilitated quick turnaround of projects with attention paid to requests made by the clients, while remembering the constraints under which engineers are working. Alby and Zucchermaglio (2008) argue that collaboration makes it possible for workers to imagine the user of the final product, so that the product creators are performing a technical aspect of work but one that is related to the concept of *participatory design*. They maintain however that collaboration is a commitment, is time-consuming and requires particular social skills (2008 , p. 501). This aspect of workplace communication was highlighted in Chapter 5 where it was argued that workplace communication includes interpersonal or "soft" skills.

The micro linguistic analysis presented in this chapter will show that successful teamwork is a feature of interactions among the participants. Teamwork is achieved as a result of a high level of interaction and collaboration among team members. Collaboration has the dual functions of managing rapport and reducing power

differences. Power differences are reduced when attention is paid to face concerns and rapport management is maintained. The analysis will look at four features of workplace talk. The first aspect of workplace talk to be considered in this chapter is how team building is negotiated through narratives and identifying the “other” is a means of building team identity and rapport-enhancing strategy. Then, it will analyse two types of speech acts — disagreements and advice giving — and demonstrate how these are negotiated in these interactions. The analysis will also consider how floor sharing — an important feature of conversation — is used to enhance or reduce collaborative talk**.**

Analysis of the interactions is guided by two main principles. First, members of speech communities negotiate norms of interactions which change over time (Hymes, 1987). Therefore the analysis will describe the norms of interaction which are characteristic of the speech communities observed in this study. The second guiding principle is that any interaction is potentially conflictive (Watts, 1991; Locher, 2008) where one or more members can exercise power over others as a result of their social status or status within the social group (Watts as cited in Locher, 2008). Power is therefore negotiated and renegotiated and not fixed or inherent in particular linguistic structures. For this reason, knowledge of the context (which in this case includes participants’ past and present workplace experiences) is crucial for discursive analysis. Locher (2008), who provides a checklist for understanding the nature of power and how it is exercised, argues that “power is (often) expressed through language” (p. 39). Disagreements, advice-giving and the way that floor-sharing techniques are negotiated are all occasions which can lead to conflict and therefore negotiation.

A discourse analysis of the data shows that overall the interactions are collaborative and participants orient towards inclusive and collegial team talk. After describing and analyzing these interactions, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the wider

implications of the findings for professional migrants. I will argue that like the macro skills analysed in Chapter 5, speakers to be involved in the types of interactions observed requires familiarity with a range of linguistic skills. These include using language for work-related problem solving matters as well as for relational purposes. In addition, there are factors other than linguistic proficiency that determine belonging to a team. For example in many instances belonging to or exclusion from a workplace group or the degree of belonging, can be the result of sharing common interests and shared values which provide opportunities to engage in non-work talk.

6.2 Negotiating belonging through narratives

This section of the chapter analyses the role of narratives in team building in the settings where the study data was collected and in building "team" identity and collaborative teamwork. Early studies of narratives focussed on structure (Labov, 1967; Ochs, 2001) and then on types (Schwartzman, 1984; Holmes, 2002). More recently, narratives have been analysed in terms of their functions in institutional settings. Marra and Holmes (2004) suggest that more research is needed into the function of narratives in institutional settings. Some such studies suggest that narratives serve a multitude of functions (Holmes, 2005) including rapport building (Norrick in Richards, 2006), sense-making (Schwartzman, 1984) and problem solving difficult work matters (Orr, 1996)

The stories the study participants share are about both work and non-work topics. Unlike Holmes (2005) who considers stories about non-work matters as peripheral and a digression from on-task talk, it can be argued that regardless of topic, the function in the same way regardless of their overarching topic. Accordingly, in the analysis presented here, personal narratives are considered part of institutional talk (see Dyer, 2000 for an example of how personal and institutional narratives intersect). The fact that stories

about non-work topics are tolerated or even encouraged by the group indicates that the group legitimises topics that pertain to non-work matters.

This section demonstrates that these narratives, although they take place in an institutional setting and are embedded in work routines, evoke aspects of social and individual life outside of this setting. This lends support to the argument put forward in Chapter 5 that work talk and social talk are not only difficult to separate but that being able to navigate comfortably between work and non-work talk is actually a key characteristic of being a successful workplace communicator. This section also shows how participants' narratives serve to build rapport among team members and within teams in the same organisation. Narratives also serve to express participants' attitudes towards past and present events and their solidarity with each other. In some of the stories, narratives are also shown to represent a way of co-constructing professional identity.

Labov and Waletzky (1967), who are widely credited with having provided a structural model for the study of narratives, identified a narrative as having at least two events presented in temporal order (as cited in De Fina, 2000, p. 138). Furthermore, they identified narratives as incorporating the following structural features: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation and coda.

However, Labov's and Waletzky's definition of narrative has since been contested. De Fina for example makes a distinction between "stories" which refer to past events and "narratives" which encompass life events more generally (De Fina, 2000). Holmes (Holmes and Marra as cited in Holmes, 2005) distinguishes between workplace anecdotes which are not task based and working stories which are more work-oriented (Holmes, 2005). Fasulo and Zucchermaglio (2008) are more concerned with the

mechanics whereby narratives are inserted seamlessly into work conversations. They identify the following features which facilitate this process: rewindings, fictions and templates. Fasulo and Zucchermaglio (2008) identify three types of discursive forms which they classify as narratives. These may not initially appear to be narratives but develop as such "partially or entirely suggested by the narrators" (p. 371). For these authors, narrative is a type of discourse which occurs within other genres, is mixed with non-narrative discourse and refers to a description that is removed from the "here and now" (2008, p. 353). Vásquez (2007) identifies "relational narratives" which speakers use to present a particular type of professional identity. A further contribution to the rich study of narratives is provided by the notion of "small stories" developed by Georgakopoulou (2006) (which is based on Bamberg 2004) and their role in what they reveal about identity and group cohesion Georgakopoulou defines "small stories" as:

> "a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (2006, p. 123)

Following De Fina (2000), this study argues "storytelling is also particularly important as a type of discourse practice in the establishment, negotiation and modification of social roles" (p. 133). Stories are defined here as any episode of talk, which usually, but not necessarily, refers to past events. Unlike Holmes (2005) who believes stories or anecdotes are, like small talk, peripheral and not part of "on task" or core business talk., The examples examined here show that it is difficult to distinguish between on-task and off-task talk.

In this study, narratives concern a range of topics, both work-related and non-work-related since deciding whether the narratives can be considered non-core work talk depends on the work practices of the organisation and the relationships amongst the participants observed. In the workplaces observed for this study, the distinction between work-talk and non-work talk is not always clear-cut. However in the present study a distinction is maintained between *workplace anecdotes* and *working stories*, the first of which is regarded as "dispensable" talk and a digression from work-talk (Holmes, 2005, p. 675) and the second of which is considered purely work-focused talk which in this study involves large chunks of technical talk. The criteria for determining what is "dispensable" relate to the rules or expectations of each group of speakers. Questions of relevance or conversational maxims are worked out at the local (interactional) level and are not imposed by others (such as the researcher) from outside the group. The participants in this data set belong to close and collaborative work teams, and can therefore be said to belong to communities of practice (CoPs), as defined by Wenger (1999). The participants' close collaboration is a result of their strong team ethos. In the participating companies this collaboration was further fostered by the intensity of work across time zones and trans-national spaces, difficult cases that required overtime and reliance on team members to achieve the work goals during which distinctions between work and non-work life break down. In other words, it becomes difficult to distinguish between core and non core-talk. Following Thornborrow and Coates (2005), the terms "narrative" and "story" are therefore used interchangeably in this study (2005, p.16). Stories are a type of discourse which involves tellings which can take place in different temporal spaces.

Narratives were selected according to the discursive boundaries which signal them. For example, the episode entitled *"I have a smell of death in my apartment*" (see the section below for the full transcript of this story, Amir's Team 209) illustrates how speech

episodes were selected from the data. The boundaries can be indicated by a topic change or a pause at the beginning and end of the narrative. In this case a topic change introduces the narrative and also signals its conclusion. The story of Amir's hapless new apartment begins with him explaining why he will be leaving work early that day – '*I will be leaving at 3.00 I need to screw some uhm beds'* and ends with Michael's statement—'*I'm on first shift'*, which is an explanation of why he is leaving the conversation and an instance of "exit talk" (Jefferson, 1979) which ends the conversation for the team.

Although there are examples of elicited narratives in the data (particularly in the interviews where participants reported on the most memorable cases they had worked on and difficulties they had experienced in the job search), this section only considers narratives which occurred spontaneously in interactions and in meetings.

Example 1 "You need maccas man!"

The extract that follows is taken from Mac's Team where after a period of work talk and a brief silence the conversation turns to the topic of heavy drinking and eventually to other reckless and illicit behaviours. All the speakers in this fragment of speech are native speakers from Australia and New Zealand other than Judy who is an Asian background English speaker from the United States. The team is from *SolutionsPlus*. The narrative is long and complex and it is one of few such narratives in the data that includes a NESB background participant. This absence may indicate that this type of collaborative strategy is not always one that NESB speakers are able to access. These topics and behaviours are shown to be sanctioned by or agreed on by the team. Team members respond by narrating their own stories of outrageous youthful adventures and echo the moral positions expressed by each of the speakers. These narratives show solidarity and agreement on selected moral behaviours. Stories are often also a display

of ethical and moral stance; in this case the group telling shows the team members' collective approval of social behaviour they engaged in at a particular time in their lives. Close analysis of this interaction follows the transcript presented below.

1	Gordon	oh man, (as if in pain)
2	Mac	have you been to the gym?
3	Gordon	this guy said hey come over for a beer last night and I said since it's your birthday, ok I'll come over for one ha [Mac or two or several,] Judy [I know that, ha ha ha (staccato)]
4	Gordon	or two and then at 4 o'clock in the morning my housemate goes why are you waking me up? And so I'm really feeling it at the moment!
5	Mac	so it's one of the days when you go I'm gonna out for one beer and in four hours' time you're gonna go what 's one look like? And you're gonna go 'one beer' (hand gesture)
6	Judy	[I know that, ha ha]
7	Gordon	they made me do things)
(Maya offers him something to eat)		
8	Gordon	I'm fine thanks! (refusing food)
9	Maya	you sure?
10	Judy	ah he's not feeling well, you need maccas!
11	Gordon	I learned a very bad lesson last night!
…		
12	Mac	that's good, you have to do it every now and again why you shouldn't do it!
13	Gordon	yeah that's right, I work, like I hate doing this stuff, it ruins my whole week?
14	Mac	I did it about a month ago. I don't understand how I do it?

15	Judy	yeah, me either! (staccato)
16	Mac	XXX
17	Judy	??? (interrupted)
18	Judy	there was time when I used to come in every Friday
19	Mac	I don't know how I did it
20	Judy	yeah me either, I do not not understand how I did it even if it's just, like we had a softball team about three years ago, I used to go drinking with them after and used to go with this guy, used to and play poker and this sketchy club and I'd be like the only girl sitting there and they'd make me do things, and I'd be like whatever, they'd be all these drug dealers, whatever people [ha ha] Puerto Ricans
21	Mac	that'd be fun though!
22	Judy	and if wasn't that drunk I would probably be ok and I'd driving but then I'd be like people passing people passing, concentrate concentrate , I'd get up and go to work and I don't understand how I did that till four am and then get up and go to work, this is like three years ago!
23	Mac	[you have it man]
24	Ben	how can a skinny guy eat so much?
25	Mac	still growing man, he needs it!
26	Ben	I've had three already!
27	Judy	we used to uhm every Thursday and we'd all come back and be so hung over like lying on the floor though, but everyone was like that,
28	Mac	them were the days, when you do that and still drive home afterwards
29	Ben	half drunk
30	Judy	I would never drive now, I would never drive now but I used to drive like

31	Gordon	I got caught when I was 18 I was 0.25 and because I was on my P plates,
32	Mac	point 02
33	Judy	oh really?
34	Gordon	point 02!
35	Ben	I got caught because the car I was driving was wanted by the cops, they guy who owned it actually…and the cops said ok
36	Marcus	XX
37	Judy	I left a company function in XX (city) and then I went to the bathroom and I decided to leave, [M hey hey hey] I left, and the next day I woke up outside my place and I was on the front steps
38	Mac	we're incriminating ourselves
39	Ben	and we're recording?
40	Judy	I don't have a fricking idea how I got home, I woke up in the morning on my front steps and wonder how I got there
41	Ben	a beer I could handle all-right, but red wine
42	Judy	I would never drive home here, I would never drive here, cause you have those things everywhere
43	Mac	that's why
44	Judy	you like don't see cops for weeks and then you have a few beers and like fuck! But a home it was like
45	Mac	[I'm surprised my mother in law hasn't been pulled up in a police in (Name of STATE) have been trained in ESP! ha, 'we need to be here tonight at 8.30'
46	Judy	I'm so afraid, but at home I'm like I just drive home
47	Mac	I rode a motorbike for six years without a license, for crying out loud!
48	Ben	Nice!

49	Mac	Not a care in the world! Never got stopped!
50	Ben	I never put on my P plates, I was just driving pretending I had a full license
51	Judy	the best was that I used to leave the worst the worst messages to my friend at (pretends to be drunk) and say 'I've gone to maccas, I've just called the drug dealers" (slurred drunk speech) and she'd call me in the morning [hahaha]
52	Male1	haha ha
53	Judy	my friend XX (name) she used to call me in the morning and ask are you ok? and she's like 'I'm going to kill you' and I'm like, 'I don't feel so well, I've just been to Macdonalds' (slurred, drunk voice) ha ha
54	Male?	ha ha

(Mac's Team 09)

The narrative is prompted by Mac's comment on Gordon's obvious physical discomfort and his question (2). This leads Gordon to explain that he is feeling bad, not as a result of attending strenuous gym sessions but rather, it is alcohol-induced. This begins as a two-party interaction but quickly includes other members of the team, mainly Ben and Judy who work nearby. Gordon's reply to Mac's initial question functions as an orientation or abstract to what will become his narrative. The team then join in with similar tales of their own woes as a result of drinking too much. The team's stories have the function of supporting the behaviour and showing empathy for the impact of drinking excessively. The stories are therefore a form of solidarity marker as the team are non-judgemental in their show of support for Gordon's behaviour.

Judy's story of drinking and reckless behaviour provides a show of commonality. Judy states several times that she knows what a hangover feels like and is also

understanding of how a person can end up in such situations unintentionally as is the case with Gordon where *'just one beer since it's your birthday'* led to several other drinks. There is an implicit suggestion in both Judy's and Gordon's stories that the drinking bouts take place outside of their control as a result of their accompanying friends and colleagues. The participants' stories about drinking highlight commonality and shared morality in past behaviour amongst the team members as well as present solidarity — an aspect of the participants' social and non-professional identities.

Another function of these stories is the way that they address gender. For Judy, an Asian background speaker who is the only female participant in this interaction, the stories provide an opportunity to align herself with her male team members. Judy's desire to align herself with her male team members is highlighted when she states that initially she was only playing cards (20), but is also achieved in other ways. For example, in this speech episode, Judy is an active contributor to the stories and at times appears to be in competition with her team members eventually contributing a greater number of illicit stories than any other participant. For instance, she states that in the US she played cards with 'dodgy Puerto Rican drug dealers', visited drug dealers and drank so much she did not recall how she got home. Her stories also provide the greatest amount of detail and her turns are longer than those of the other contributors to this speech episode.

On a technical level, the above narrative is a type of narration akin to what Mulholland (1996) describes as parallel storytelling when a similar story is told by speakers with minimal linkage (p. 539). Mulholland says there is 'collegial strength' in using this technique as it allows the speaker to present a side of their own individuality. Mulholland argues however that the disadvantage of this strategy is that the story that follows is unconnected to the first. In the example in the excerpt presented above however, the

stories contributed by each participant are connected by the topics that unite Judy's, Ben's and Mac's experiences and the fact that they are accepted and shared. Mulholland (1996) also indicates that parallel stories can be varied. In the current example, there is some topic variation in that Mac's story of driving without a license does not include excessive drinking. However all the stories are connected by the theme of "unlawful" sanctioned behaviour.

Finally, the above stories highlight the participants' non-professional identities by reflecting aspects of their shared morality and their non-geek-like qualities. Amir (from another team) goes to some lengths (on another occasion) to explain that in IT there are 'geeks' and 'cool geeks'. Of course what is considered a mere geek and a cool geek may depend on factors determined by in-group markers and the choice of topics that they determine to be cool or uncool. . In this case as in others in this section, it is not proficiency that leads to in-group membership but social factors. For example Suresh, who is physically close to this team, is not an active participant in the interactions around him. Mac's team is very loud and lively and they share banter and play (both physical and in their verbal exchanges) as well as food. However Suresh remains peripheral to these goings-on. What makes him peripheral, however, is not his lack of English proficiency. Suresh is a bilingual who was brought up speaking Nepalese and English who appeared an articulate, confident but quiet member of this team during my interactions with him. Therefore his lack of participation in the interactions was more than likely to be due to factors that relate to group belonging. He is new to the company and is still on probation, which may contribute to his lack of participation. In this episode the participants are exposing and celebrating a high-risk taking behaviour which is more 'cool geek'. It would be difficult for Suresh to take part in this type of exchange if these values are not shared. Therefore, in this case, the topic could be considered to have prevented Suresh from participating. Whilst the group sanctions and echoes the moral

stance taken by each of the participants, there is also an acknowledgment that things have changed and they no longer routinely take part in these activities. The story functions as a sharing experience for those who have taken part in a particular type of conduct, so those who have not participated fall outside the group membership. Observation of this team shows that these team members were the loudest and most visible in the space. Mac, as the team leader of the group that handled the most difficult problems in this area, had certain status others did not enjoy and his dominance in the conversations shows this.

The following example also highlights the way that narratives achieve collaboration. This narrative takes place in the middle of a chaotic day in Mia's team where systems have crashed and the team are inundated with calls. Mia is from India and Tony is an Australian English background speaker (ESB) from *InfoContact.* The team is under-staffed due to illness but nevertheless Mia devotes a reasonable amount of time listening to Tony who is from a team that handles the more serious or "escalated" problems from Mia's team. Whilst not his subordinate, Mia would have a sense of duty in having to listen to Tony's story, which is both an update and an account of his own achievement in solving an unusual case. In this exchange Tony is reporting to Mia the results of a problem she had reported about a month earlier regarding electronic calendars where new appointments entered were overriding old ones and leading to chaos. By informing Mia of the outcome of his investigations into the problem, Tony is completing the job, i.e. closing the loop on the events in an informal way. Apart from this informative function, this narrative performs a number of relational functions and also establishes professional identity.

1	Tony	Mia! (getting her attention)
2	Mia	uhm

3	Tony	do you remember hum it was probably about a month or so ago,XXNAME, I think it's XX the PA for XXName ↑
4	Mia	uhm
5	Tony	she had the issue where hum, when she launched hum Outlook it wouldn't bring up the reminders ↑remember that?
6	Mia	uhm, yep
7	Tony	and I had to set a short cut for her cause I couldn't figure it out hum, she always had to run it out with the ??? thing and then it would bring up the reminder, I've discovered ?? a few people when they're scheduling meetings when they hover someone and the menu doesn't bring up any information and we've been investigating and there's been a call on the Microsoft
8	Mia	doesn't ?? wipe the effects?
9	Tony	no, no it's not
10	Mia	because somebody told me that because they wipe the ?? they ??
11	Tony	oh no! No it wasn't, what it was, because she was one of these people who just, hold on ? when scheduling other meetings you can't see what meetings they've got
12	Mia	oh I remember now, you can't see the other calendar grids?
13	Tony	that's right ,
14	Mia	is that what you're saying?
15	Tony	you can't see the details yes, when you hover over it ↑
16	Mia	yeah yeah all right!
17	Tony	she had that too, it's a corrupted calendar entry which I've deleted
18	Mia	huh huh
19	Tony	now she can, now

20 Mia oh!

21 Tony when she launches the reminders so somehow it was linked to it

22 Mia oh how did you figure that out?

23 Tony oh no we've been on to it with Microsoft, they, we, we identified it, it was something to do with ??(Tech) there was a ?? supply , these people did not realise when they update appointments from their phone and then synch back, it can corrupt their entry and recreate their appointments?

24 Mia oh ↓huh huh

25 Tony so that's what happened, hum, so I had to manually figure it out, cause if you try to figure it out, cause if you move them it brings up a message from a corrupted one, telling I can't find the entry or some or some message so I had to [try to]

26 Mia [how did you], how did you find the corrupted one?

27 Tony had to manually go through all the corrupted ones, go through all the recurring

28 Mia uhm

29 Tony and create like a XXTech and copy into XXTech

30 Mia uhm

31 Tony and during that process if there's an issue with one of them, it brings up an error

32 Mia oh right, ok,

33 Tony and once, if you delete that out of the calendar, so we still want a tool so we don't have to manually do it, so Microsoft is working on it,

34 Mia oh I think somebody was saying about

35 Tony oh there's been a few↑ ??? and kathy F. and Cecelia, and Jacky

		C., probably been a few others ???
36	Mia	and have you looked at the other calls as well or
37	Tony	well I haven't ???
38	Mia	so you'll have to do that manually
39	Tony	well Microsoft will ?? I'm hoping in the next few days they'll have a way to do for us ?? mailbox so
40	Mia	oh well done
41		(Elsa and Catherine need something done, there is a backlog of calls to be attended to)
42	Catherine	M don't forget that email! (loud)
43	Mia	i'll do it, sorry I'll do it!
44	Catherine	ok
45		(to Elsa and C who are clearing the backlog emails
46		???
47	Tony	oh no cause? the thing is it won't appear in the calendar if you have day/month view↑you have to go category
48	Mia	oh:
49	Tony	that's how they first identified it, something was synching and they noticed how they when the calendar would disappear when they changed it so that's how we identified it↓
50	Mia	so if we get anymore we just log them over, right?
51	Tony	that's right
52	Mia	Rather than just copy them over to a usb
53	Tony	no, not but that
54	Mia	I'm glad you told me about it
55	Tony	at least we got a solution for it! that's a big achievement I think, otherwise you're just, finding your way in the dark I think

56	Tony	especially if, for the PAs, cause XXName needs to see what XXName asked and needs to hover on the calendar, so
57	Mia	the calendar yeah, hum, oh good, well done
	(topic change)	

There are three important features which indicate that this is a shared story, even if in the latter part it may appear to be about Tony's success at solving a difficult problem.

First, collaboration is shown in Tony's use of a framing device to ask Mia if she recalls a problem they experienced in the past, a shared event that was significant for both (line 3). This and the following turns by both speakers provide the orientation to the story. Tony and Mia then collaboratively reconstruct the background (3-11) guided by Tony's detail until Mia recalls the full details of the problem that she had reported (line 12). This recalling of events acts as an orientation to the story that Tony is about to tell, the bug he noticed in the software. The orientation in this instance is not merely setting the scene but also acts as a way of including the hearer, Mia, in the story. Mia in fact subsequently becomes a co-teller in this story rather than a passive listener since she is the first person whom people in the company call when they experience a problem. As Mia does not immediately remember the event, Tony evokes details to help her recall it. In other words the orientation itself is co-constructed.

Another collaborative strategy is evidenced by the pronouns Tony uses in reporting how he went about solving the issue; these display both a team orientation and an individual focus at different times. At first (line 23) he uses the plural pronoun 'we' allocating the team (including Mia) responsibility for the solution strategy. Next he highlights his role in the problem solving exercise by switching to the singular pronoun 'I' (line 25, 27).

Mia's role in the narrative also highlights the collaborative nature of this story since she adopts a role not just of passive recipient or listener but rather that of a co-teller who offers an evaluation of the outcome. Mia does this through the adoption of several different strategies. First, her questions help Tony construct the details of the eventual resolution. The questions she asks (Lines 22, 26 are direct, allowing Tony to maintain the floor and giving him the opportunity to elaborate on this issue. In this way, Mia co-constructs the story by creating opportunities for Tony to elaborate when she thanks him for the information and congratulates him on the result (Line 54). By doing this Mia is taking care of the elaboration part of the story as well. She does this by rounding off, saying how useful it is for her to know the outcome of the problem. Therefore, both the orientation and the evaluation are co-constructed.

While the above narrative is based on a work event the following example is only partially related to work matters and the speakers' orientation is much more relationally focused. This example illustrates how a speech episode which begins as part of an explanation can be considered a storytelling episode about an event that is central to the participant in question. In other words, the structure is not typically that of a story, but it features the same kind of "tellibility" as that referred to by Georgakopoulou in relation to "breaking news" stories (2010). Holmes and Marra (2005) term this type of narrative a "minimal narrative". The speech event in this excerpt takes place at the end of a team meeting before the beginning of the work shift. The topic, Amir's ongoing problems with his new apartment, is not new to the team.

In terms of the structure, this story begins as an explanation or information giving speech event. Amir, a participant from *SolutionsPlus, is* a Hebrew speaker who recently arrived in the team in Australia from Israel and is telling his team members he will need to leave work early because he has to be at home for a delivery. The topic is a work-

related issue, an explanation for a planned absence from work. However the amount of detail that Amir provides indicates that the story also has relational functions.

1	Amir	I will be leaving at 3.00 I need to screw some hum beds,
2	Scott	???
3	Ramon	it's the long weekend?
4	Jordan	you've got a mattress man you can sleep on the floor
5	Amir	na na na I'm getting the bed today, the whole bed, I still have a smell of death in my apartment I need to do something about it so I smoked all over the rooms
(laughter)		
		a different type of death but
6	Ramon	how do you know how death smells have you killed someone?
7	Amir	you know the death smells of those apartments you know like old people live there and they never open the windows, somebody died there for sure I need to do a séance or something like that
8	Ramon	I am sure what do you call that thing? Incense incense
9	Jordan	get that thing that you plug into the wall man
10	Amir	??? every room I have like the fire alarms, when I start to smoke I start to smoke I
11	Ramon	That's standard here
12	Max	just take out the battery
13	Amir	well I believe
14	Vittoria	can you open the window? Are you on, what floor are you on?
15	Amir	I am on the ground floor
16	Vittoria	You can also get those hum essential oils
17	Amir	I can't bring girls there, somebody died there

18	Scott	that's you man! You should have noticed that when you first inspected it
19	Max	I'm on first shift.

(Amir's team 09)

The "breaking news" story is that Amir has finally bought a bed. Amir's story about setting up his apartment and obtaining furniture has been told to the team in the form of updated or "breaking story" events over time. The speech episode reproduced above therefore represents a further instalment in a series of stories about setting up a home in Australia. Like the example above (Example 2 'Do you remember about a month ago') this story resembles a conversation more than a monologic story and is constructed by the team's shared knowledge of these events.

The team's reaction to the story may initially appear to be unsympathetic. The team members' remarks are characterised by jocularity (line 4) and the accusation that Amir was careless in choosing to rent this particular apartment (line 19) can be interpreted as disafiliative. However, this is not the case. The jocular manner with which his news is met is typical of the team's communication behaviour and their interactions are more often than not laced with humour. Also, the news that Amir's apartment smells is not a new story and therefore the team members' reactions are not surprising, even though Amir's description of it is quite shocking. The fact that the story and the team members' reactions to it are collegial in nature is demonstrated by the fact that they are part of ongoing relational work.

The following brief narrative similarly illustrates the lack of strict separation between work and non-work related topics. It takes place in Mac's team at *SolutionsPlus*. Mac and his colleagues are discussing the impact that the global financial crisis (GFC) will

have on their work. Yusuf, a Turkish speaker, is the other main interlocutor. This was a much-discussed topic in this company around the time of data collection (early 2009 — see for example "*We'll see the technicality drop*' which follows this exchange). However, this topic is also connected to a discussion about having children soon after marriage which is topical as Mac is due to be married.

1	Yusuf	have a kid straight away, bang!
2	Mac	at least try for it,
3	Yusuf	yeah, that's what I'm gonna do as soon as I get married, bang, soon straight away
4	Mac	really? Jane is worried about being made redundant, her company is announcing new redundancies next Tuesday they're announcing the next round of redundancies, so everyone is shitting themselves, cause they're been laying off people at XX(name) but they've been doing it quietly so the media don't get hold of it, ?? they've been doing it like every day they, 2 or 3 people are asked to leave,
5	Yusuf	it's really sad, what are they going where are they going to go if they're made redundant, where they go,
6	Male	these guys I went out with last night are bankers, they're all from XX(name) I was teasing the shit out of them, pulling their leg, how we get the jobs ???
7	Mac	it's not fun though?? Working?? in an office though where they just walk around just chopping people, left, right and centre
8	Yusuf	I was on a conference with XX(name) this morning and they're laying off people)
9	Male	they're gotta do it, they can't hold on to them
10	Ben	freaky!

11 Male it'll come back, in 12 months time, it'll come back

12 Mac what're you gonna do from now till then? People with mortgages, people with

13 Male just stay in the XX(name) team hahaha (*this is the team they are in now)*

(Mac's Team 09)

Stories can highlight various aspects of self, including the professional and personal dimensions of individuals' identities. The above story is deeply personal in that Mac's recounting news of redundancies highlights his concern for his future life plans, including having children. In the second part of this conversation (see below) the focus turns to how the GFC will impact on the nature of work at *InfoContact.* The smooth transition from deep personal topics to more work-related ones indicates that the team's shared repertoires are both personal and work-related so that their team conversations provide an opportunity to display both their personal and their professional identities.

This section has demonstrated that one way to achieve team is by sharing stories. Whether they indicate shared moral values or professional achievements oranxieties about new situations, the stories require that the speakers have a voice and are accepted by their teams as legitimate speakers. These are issues that go beyond linguistic proficiency and highlight that successful team building strategies are built on shared understanding and values. As shown, the respective teams to have an interest in these stories because they present an opportunity to share values and beliefs. So, the drinking stories enjoyed by Mac's team are tolerated because they are shared and common for these speakers. For Amir's ongoing stories and anxieties about his new apartment to be accepted and understood the team have to understand and want to be involved in his settlement difficulties. Mia takes time out from a busy schedule to listen to

Tony out of a sense of duty and politeness. In other words the success of the stories pertains to group dynamics and belonging not just to the ability to construct the stories.

6.3 Negotiating team identity through identifying the other

This section analyses a group of speech episodes which further highlight how the teams construct their professional identities and the discourse strategies they adopt in doing this. There are times where team identity is “done” explicitly by colleagues using speech acts such as compliments. At other times, the strategies used are less explicit, for example by the construction of the “other”.

Explicit ways to do team

This section outlines some explicit ways that participants promote team identity. These include the use of particular linguistic forms which are deemed by the teams to indicate praise.

The first strategy involves directly praising another individual. The first example is an exchange between Rick and his team members and takes place during a meeting. All the speakers in this segment are ESB speakers except for Mia who is from India. The meeting was held at the end of a very busy day when systems had crashed and several staff were away due to illness.

1. Rick you just have to wipe off the headset! Haha Oh; dear! haha
   I have to say, really appreciate your efforts today guys, we’ve,
   we’ve done pretty well today!

2. Chris I think we're hum, sort of like hum, counting the chickens before they've hatched! There's still an hour and 15 minutes to go ha!
3. Rick yeah, I'll I'll stay with you till 5.30, it's cool

(Mia's Team 09)

Rick's praise is downplayed by Chris, whose humorous reply acts to deflect the compliment. The use of compliments here is used to build team identity by explicitly identifying positive features of teamwork.

Another example of direct praise occurs when Rick passes on a compliment to Bill, one of his subordinates spontaneously as they pass in the corridor. This direct compliment is also downplayed by Bill.

1. Rick I got some good feedback about you from some clients. They were very happy with you. Well done!
2. Bill Oh were they? (smiles)
3. Rick I send out a customer satisfaction survey once a month (to Vittoria, walking alongside him).

(Fieldnotes, *SolutionsPlus* 09)

Another example of direct praise being given occurs when Sofia compliments Claire at the beginning of their weekly catch-up meeting (see excerpt below). This is not the first time that Sofia has spoken highly of Claire in the presence of the researcher. On other occasions she has said how glad she is to have Claire on her team and what an efficient worker she is. It is possible therefore that this extended praise is a form of "safe-talk" which establishes common ground (Brown, 1987, p. 112) in this meeting between Sofia

and Claire, her subordinate. Observations suggest that the use of a compliment on this occasion is not just related to Claire's work performance but also addresses other aspects of the speech event. That is, it is used to bolster Claire's confidence before a problematic issue is discussed in their meeting. The use of the compliment is therefore a relational device to deflect a problem and build team identity.

1 Sofia: We have a lot of meetings. Claire's are the most enjoyable.
2 Vittoria: Are they? Why is that?
3 Sofia: They're the most productive because Claire is very good at keeping things moving.
4 Vittoria: Great. You know that is being recorded? That's fantastic.
5 Claire: Yes she always gives me positive feedback which is really good!
6 Vittoria: Is that part of being a good team leader?
7 Sofia: I think my job is easy with staff like Claire really.
8 Vittoria: I keep hearing this!
9 Sofia: Now Claire is very good at escalating problems but problems she will have researched first so she comes with the problem and a possible solution, rather than just the problem so it makes my job easier because we can then just assess the solution and think laterally about that and rather than have multiple catch ups "here's the problem and why don't you go and investigate X, Y and Z" and then meet again. So Claire is a forward thinker.
10 Vittoria: And you like the initiative obviously?
11 Sofia: I do.

(Claire's Team 09)

The compliments exchanged in this interaction perform two relational functions. First, Claire's indirect compliment establishes a friendly atmosphere for the meeting and

reinforces the collegial relationships between the two speakers. Although both speakers are familiar with the researcher and have been interviewed individually, the recording of their meeting is a potentially awkward situation and both speakers are keen to display their best professional selves. Thus, the use of compliments in the early part of the excerpt allows the speakers to assert mutual collegiality. Thus Sofia's compliment (line 1, 3) regarding Claire's high professional standing is returned by Claire (5) when she acknowledges Sofia's good management skills.

The second relational function of praise relates to Sofia's use of compliments to reassure Claire about her work performance. Later in the meeting Sofia and Claire discuss an incident with the branch manager during which Claire felt her work was criticised. Sofia may be anticipating discussion of this incident in this meeting, so the use of compliments helps pave the way for positively reinforcing Claire's overall performance before the incident is discussed directly.

The examples above show how team building can also take place when a common other is identified. In fact team cohesion relies on shared values and the display of professional identity. The discursive ways of displaying these are complex and require knowledge of the subtleties of speech acts such as compliments, as shown above. The next section demonstrates how potentially face-threatening directives are downplayed in the interactions for the sake of maintaining team cohesion.

6.4 Negotiating advice giving: steering subordinates

A directive is a speech act which can potentially lead to the assertion of power. As with disagreements, the way that directives are negotiated in teams that strive to be collaborative is a matter of considerable interest. Directives can take many syntactic forms (Jones, 1992) and encompass many others such as giving advice, making hints

and making requests. The term ‘control acts’ proposed by Ervin-Tripp (as cited in Vine, 2004, p. 26) includes all of these different forms of directive and is adopted here. In this study, giving advice is defined as an attempt to cause an action to take place and is therefore a type of ‘control act’. The way that ‘“control acts’ take place is determined by the context and the relationships amongst the interlocutors.

In the following extract Claire, a Chinese speaker and her manager Sofia who is an Australian from an Italian background, are discussing the problematic issue of Matt, Claire’s subordinate, during a weekly catch-up meeting. Matt does not participate in the meeting. Claire initially brings up the issue of his report writing, indicating that it is not up to the required standard. Claire presents Matt as a problematic member of her team; by bringing up this matter with Sofia, it is constructed as a complaint about Matt’s performance. As the manager, Sofia has to show support for both members of staff.

The analysis of this exchange shows how Sofia manages the potentially sensitive issue of giving advice about how to handle a member of staff who is not performing well. Giving advice is a speech act fraught with the potential to turn into a directive thereby creating an face threatening act (FTA). Sofia therefore has to give advice or direct Claire, without threatening Claire’s positive face. In doing this, Sofia must acknowledge Claire’s desire to portray herself as a competent manager who, at the same time, has high expectations of the staff she supervises. Sofia must also defend or speak up for Matt. This means Sofia has to steer Claire into managing her underperforming staff member at the same time as she downplays her own powerful position.

The exchange captured in the transcript below took place at the end of a meeting between Sofia and Claire at *InfoContact* that lasted approximately forty-five minutes during which the researcher was present. In what follows, the strategies employed by

Sofia, Claire's manager, are analysed with all instances of 'control acts' highlighted in bold typeface. Aspects of this extract were previously analysed in Chapter 5 to highlight informality in meeting talk (see Section 5.3).

1 Claire: (project description) ….He showed me that document which you marked it yeah! I said 'but you haven't even finished the document there are still a lot of empty parts!' I said 'why you give to Sofia for review?' And he said' okay'. I'm not sure why he give [20:55]

2 Sofia: That's okay, it's because it is part of his coaching sessions I need to provide some assistance and guidelines. But he wasn't presenting that it was done. So he wasn't saying that it was a final document. This is his work in progress and I gave him some tips and also told him to talk to you if he you know, for some advice and things.

3 Claire: Okay.

4 Sofia: And I suppose next time he does something like this I'll be looking at not reviewing the document in draft and be waiting to see what he does by himself.

5 Claire: Yeah because I guess afterwards he was a bit of depressed or sad.

6 Sofia: Low?

7 Claire: Yeah, low – he said 'I give Sofia my communication strategy and then totally been scraped out'. And I said, "What does that mean?" And then he showed me the document and then I look at it, I said, "just this part you haven't completed and of course Sofia can't comment on this part". And then he put some issues and then he said "what is the impact of this issue, what is your solution.' Yeah and I said 'that was pretty fair comments and then the other part and then I said' yes it was not that bad and you just put a little more work and then so you will finish it off."

8 Sofia: Okay that's good feedback and I agree with that and I think you should

continue to give Matt feedback so he obviously asked for your feedback and you should give that and I think it has to be structured in very similar to that. It's like well, this is what you've done and this is the expectation.

9 Claire: Possibly, yes because Matt is someone, he does like to do something good.

10 Sofia: I think Matt likes positive feedback and he really likes positive feedback.

11 Claire: Yeah he likes positive feedback and then he does like to deliver something good but sometimes he might not be having the ability or the skill or sometimes, he just needs a little bit more help possibly.

12 Sofia: Yeah but I wasn't looking at that as a final document, I knew it was a work in progress but I would rather look at it as a work in progress and say – this is the areas that need more attention than look at it as the final product and think this is completely wrong. So I asked him to go and look at some other communication plans.

13 Claire: Yeah, possibly.

14 Sofia: I think sometimes that will help yourself but also help you in instructing like people like Matt or instructing your BAs or is to say what's the purpose of the document? What is this document trying to help with? And so that's why I said well why have you got issues in there, you know, is it a communication issue and what's your solution. So you always have to bring it back to what's the purpose? I think Matt sometimes thinks – I'll complete the template without thinking about what the content is and sometimes the template is wrong. Well it doesn't give you the guidance, you need to think!

15 Claire: Correct!

16 Sofia: I think Matt needs to concentrate on the thinking of what, [24:20].

17 Claire: I agree.

18 Sofia: Always just say what's the purpose, why do we need this document for this project, what are we trying to achieve through this document?

19 Claire: Yeah so what I get at this, I basically I will focus on the previous part exactly to the mini-charter.

20 Sofia: See this is where I worry that he is just going to cut and paste and things. So this is why I said well what's the issue in terms of communication? It was that one there.

21 Claire: Well that's my benefits.

22 Sofia: Well something around the benefits might not be achieved and I said well what does this have to do with communication?

23 Claire: I understand, yes so he – because I give him this document as well. I said 'if you need any information you can get it from my documents. But this is scope, yeah I didn't change anything, this stakeholder, this is issue and research just to refer to I want this issue register in the [25:21] WA and that was risk. And then I couldn't team structure, that's for the team and then the roles and responsibility. And then I added this is the important part is the resource requirements so I need all those resources for the start date and the finish date. That's why I want to send out because otherwise I find that my mini scope and people are still then and what about the resource. So I want to …

24 Sofia: So you want me to have a look at this? Right I'll take that, remind me to give it to you on Tuesday.

25 Claire: Yeah you take it back and then you have a read before I want to circulate. Yes I add this part and then project meetings and then possibly to get to the next stage – that was my schedule and the timeline, I did it. Yeah that's it.

26 Sofia: Another thing is Matt hasn't struck me in the communication plan, much

had been referencing that, if you're running this through the XXSystemName that there is that shared, that project site so he hasn't referenced that.

27 Claire: The communication media and channel?

28 Sofia: That's right. So you just need to follow that up, all right?

29 Claire: Yeah, okay I will follow it up. Yeah I haven't reviewed this document, I want him to finish first before I review it.

30 Sofia: I agree.

At the beginning of this interaction Claire's heightened nervousness is apparent from her voice quality and the fact that she adopts a quicker pace than she normally uses. Although Claire does not complain directly about Matt, by directly reporting their exchange, she indicates that she is somewhat surprised at his lack of knowledge and unsure why he would seek help from Sofia (line 1). Claire's annoyance and surprise is evidenced by the use of prosodic features such as intonation and pitch.

This direct way of reporting the event is a useful strategy for Claire to report her "complaint" about Matt as it allows Sofia to interpret the facts for herself without assigning Claire any responsibility for interpreting events. Sofia manages Claire's discomfort and "rescues" her from a potentially face-threatening situation by treating this episode as an advice-giving opportunity or training session on how to deal with this type of situation in general, rather than a complaint about an individual. The way this is done softens the potential threat to Claire's face wants.

Sofia adopts five different strategies in managing this negotiation. First she deflects responsibility for Matt's poor performance from Claire to herself. She does this by stating first that Matt has the right to seek help and has in fact been told he can seek help from

Sofia (line 2), and by indicating that it is Sofia's job to provide feedback as part of his coaching sessions. She explains — 'I need to provide some assistance and guidelines', which lets Claire know that Matt is still being trained.

The fact that Matt can legitimately ask for Sofia's help can itself be seen as affronting to Claire. In other words, Claire can now be perceived to be presenting an unfair complaint about Matt. Sofia therefore emphasises that this is acceptable in this instance, but will not be in future (line 4). This indicates that they are discussing a special case which means that Claire has not flouted any procedures. Again Sofia nominates herself as the person responsible for monitoring the problem with Matt (line 4).

The second face-managing move Sofia makes is to reinforce Claire in relation to the way she has dealt with Matt. This acts as a repair for any face loss Claire might feel. This is evident in the overtly positive remarks Sofia makes about Claire (line 8). Not only does she say that Claire has acted as she should have, but Sofia also indicates that she agrees with her actions.

In addition, there are two instances of the discourse particle 'I think' in Sofia's contributions to this exchange. Both are of the type that Holmes identifies as "deliberative" in the sense that the speaker is not showing uncertainty but giving weight to her assessment (Holmes, 1987, p. 61). The use of the discursive marker 'well' also serves to hedge Sofia's comments here.

The third way Sofia offers advice about how to handle Matt is by framing her suggestions as *general* advice and not simply advice focused on managing Matt (line 14). This functions as a means of diverting the focus from a particular problematic staff member and introducing a more general hypothetical situation. Sofia's strategy therefore creates the distance necessary to remove any suggestion that Claire is complaining

about someone, or does not know how to manage a team member. The use of ‘I think’ at the beginning of Sofia’s statement functions as a way of mitigating her directive.

The fourth strategy Sofia adopts to affirm Claire’s position as a project manager is her use of the possessive pronoun *your* in the phrase ‘*your* BAs’ (my emphasis). This is a powerful way of reasserting Claire’s role in this interaction since it acknowledges that Matt and others in his position are Claire’s responsibility and are under her authority. Although Sofia is the manager and has the ultimate responsibility for providing staff training, in this interaction she is affirming that Claire also has authority to deal with the staff she supervises.

The final way that face is managed in this exchange is by minimising disagreement about Matt. In spite of their initial disagreement about Matt’s evaluation, the two speakers eventually reach a point of agreement (line 9-11). In this part of the exchange Sofia and Claire evaluate Matt’s work and agree that in spite of his shortcomings, he is working very hard and responds positively to encouragement. Thus the speakers move from divergence to agreement. Sofia has managed to avoid overt disagreement with Claire and provide enough advice to support Matt. By doing this she is attending to all parties that report to her. The way this problem was resolved follows the stages identified by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) in which problems are solved by first avoiding upsets, then attending more closely to the face needs of the interactants.

The strategy adopted by Sofia is a carefully managed one that supports both the staff who report to her, Matt and Claire. Matt is provided with the support he needs to improve his performance and through her advice giving Sofia has given Claire the strategies to take control of the situation without losing face.

The next section analyses how elements of topic and turn allocation contribute to collaborative talk.

6.5 Negotiating disagreements

Although disagreements in the workplace occur with frequency and can be considered to foster creativity (Angouri and Locher, 2012) they are also risky speech acts that have negative connotations. Disagreements are not frequent in the data and when they do occur, they are commonly mitigated to avoid conflict and highlight collaborative practice suggesting that participants have a preference for what Angouri (2012) has termed unmarked linguistic behavior. As with other collaborative strategies described in this chapter, successful use of these strategies is determined not just by linguistic proficiency or choice of particular linguistic forms but by group dynamics and the orientation towards collaborative practices.

Following Locher (2004, p. 94) a disagreement is defined as a situation which involves “conflict” and “clash of interests”. According to Locher, disagreements are made evident in the analysis of adjacency pairs where the first part provides a framework for the interpretation of the second part of the dispreferred sequence.

Tony, an ESB, and Alan, who is originally from the United Kingdom, are colleagues from different teams at *InfoContact*. At the time from which the excerpt comes they were waiting for a download to complete and so they had time to chat about issues that are not strictly task-related. One topic they discuss is how a particular aspect of work is completed in implementing new technologies across the company — the way job orders are generated. Tony criticises the way Alan’s team goes about generating orders and suggests how the process could be improved. In doing so he poses a threat to Alan’s

negative face wants, i.e. that as a competent professional his actions should not be impeded by others. Tony's criticism is initially strong or "bald on record" (Brown and Levinson, 1987) but in the course of the interaction, in response to Alan's defensive comments, he makes a series of moves to redress his criticism and changes footing to finally agree, or appear to agree with Alan's procedure for generating work orders. The excerpt takes place on a Monday morning, a likely time for workplace conversation topics to include weekend activities, and forms part of a longer interaction between the two speakers which lasts approximately 30 minutes during which both work and non-work topics are covered. Other participants are present but no one else enters the conversation.

1	Tony	It's over the top the amount of work orders you guys create!
2	Alan	yeah, but you've gotta create one for/
3	Tony	/but, there's so much duplication haha
4	Alan	no, I mean this tells you exactly what you need to do, this one here is, oh no that's something else…that (softly speaking to himself)
5	Tony	I wouldn't do that, I would just say do 'decommissioning service one need to move XX and need to move licence server migration' I think I would have done
6	Alan	ok, yeah
7	Tony	and add all the details into one, it's too confusing having the details into 3 or 4!
8	Alan	oh cause, this is XX ↑ so you create one, you create
9	Tony	nah,
10	Alan	nah, you wouldn't do it that way?
11	Tony	nah
12	Alan	but the, then the thing with that one

13 Tony as long as you've got all your steps into one

14 Alan yeah, I did that, originally I was doing that, originally I was doing that for Quickkids↑

15 Tony and what, you had half of it working and half of it not? So you thought, let's split it up?

16 Alan yeah that's right cause then how do you keep track? Cause you might look at it you might accidentally close it and think that's done already and then there's another [part to it?]

17 Tony [what didn't work for Quickkids?]

18 Alan sorry?

19 Tony what didn't work?

20 Alan uhm, there were two parts, uhm, I was trying to organize XXPlace and the other centres,

21 Tony ah ok

22 Alan and the other centres were fine but the XXPlace were waiting↑

23 Tony oh, that's fair enough! is that finished extracting yet?

24 Alan yeah

Tony's offending statement — 'it's over the top the amount of work orders you guys create" (line 1) is delivered in a jocular style suggesting that the intent was probably not to cause offence. Alan appears nonetheless to take it as a face-threatening act (FTA). Tony's criticism is directed at Alan's whole team, whom Tony addresses as 'you guys', therefore reducing the personal impact on Alan as an individual, and consequently his own face wants. That is, Tony's use of the phrase 'you guys' functions here as a way of lessening responsibility for an action (working inefficiently) by referring to more than one person. Alan's quick response to Tony's remark is a latch comment which indicates the sense of urgency he feels in defending his team.

Another strategy Tony uses to redress his FTA is to justify his criticism. In other words he holds himself accountable for his statement so that he and Alan come to have similar roles in this interaction (Line 3 and 7). What follows (line 5-6) is further mitigation, evidenced by Tony's use of modal verbs which function as hedges. In addition Tony's use of 'I think', which Brown and Levinson define as a "quality hedge", may suggest that Tony is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance (1987, p. 164). Holmes (1987) identifies three possible meanings of the hedge 'I think', arguing that it is "very clearly speaker-oriented in its affective or interpersonal meaning…" (1987, p. 61). The function of 'I think' in the exchange between Tony and Alan can be described as a softener or negative politeness marker (1987, p. 61).

In the turns that follow (lines 9, 11) Tony maintains a stance of opposition to Alan's way of doing things, but his position softens somewhat. His repetition of the particle 'nah', a softer and more hedged version of the negative 'no' (which appears twice), also indicates a weakening of his criticism and the beginning of a shift in his position.

Finally when Alan has the chance to fully explain his method (line 14), Tony pre-empts his explanation by offering the solution himself (line 15). This pre-empting demonstrates Tony's agreement with Alan, indicating that they are thinking along the same lines. By using a question (line 15), Tony defers to Alan's authority on the matter. Alan has therefore moved from being on the defensive to once again being in control. The next question from Tony (line 17) further enables this shift in authority to occur. The two speakers have moved from disagreeing to agreeing on this topic.

The final strategy occurs when Tony concedes on record that Alan's method has merit and in effect changes his footing with regard to his previous position. This is acknowledged twice, the first time when Tony says 'ah ok' and then again when he

states ‘oh, that’s fair enough’ (l 21, 23). The pair’s quick change of topic to the download they are attending to signals the end of the interaction.

The following interaction illustrates how a potentially face threatening act is handled by a supervisor (Scott), who simultaneously establishes his own authority and avoids appearing to impose a decision he has made but not yet communicated to the team members. The interaction takes place at the end of a meeting at *SolutionsPlus* once the official business is over and some time remains before the team members begin their work day. Amir, a key participant, is new both to Australia and the team, having just moved to *Solutions Plus* from an offshore branch of the company. Amir raises the issue of training for a particular technology known as PQ which falls within his area of expertise. He is keen to establish the training timetable since he will be responsible for conducting the training. This exchange poses a potential problem for Scott who disagrees with Amir about when to offer the training because he has other training priorities.

The exchange has the potential to create a feeling of resentment in team members who may consider they have too much training to do already. As described in Chapter 3, the teams at *SolutionsPlus* divide their work shift into two parts. One part of their day they are required to take calls, the other to continue to work on unresolved cases, document and share notes and participate in ongoing meetings and research. Since training would take place outside of this team’s scheduled call taking times, it represents additional work. As Amir is expecting to run the training, to be told otherwise in public involves a potential loss of face, or a threat to his positive face wants i.e. to be accepted, in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms. Scott has to therefore minimise any offence caused to Amir’s positive face. At the same time Scott has to establish his own agenda for the training which will take place. He has the delicate task of setting the agenda without

offending Amir (who has a lot invested in running the training) and without appearing to be overly authoritative.

1	Guy	ah let's go for coffee ha!
2	Amir	ha: do you want to decide when hum when hum, PQ training will take place?
3	Male1	\what PQ training?\
4	Male2	\1 why do we need it?\
5	Amir	no really, because we said it would take about 2 hours a day, and we have to decide, for four [days],
6	Scott	[well] actually, before we do that, one thing, I wanna do is the skills matrix thing↑ so we did that hum a little while back↑ maybe a little over a year ago ↑so we should do that first because that sort of, highlight which area we need to do some more skills skill work of, I'm sure PQ will be one of them but I also wanna see what, what other areas, yeah need to be covered it would be good man cause a number of guys wasn't in this team when we last time we did it, so it would be good to????
7	Ray	???
8	Scott	yeah that's right!
9	Guy	a lot of guys have improved right? Champions! hahaha SLL champions haha
10	Guy	SLLL champions !
11	Scott	I'll get the survey out next week, you guys can fill it out, and then we can talk about the PQ training
12	Jordan	???
13	Vittoria	PQ?

14	(Jordan	and explain what this is)
15	Amir	that's one of the technologies we support (to Vittoria)
16	Amir	yeah, P and then Q
17	Vittoria	PQ, I got it!
18	Ray	PQ, what is it?
19	Guy	Amir! why is it called PQ actually?
20	Amir	everybody says it's like Protocol Qube, something like that!
21	Monty	It's ?? isn't it nah, it's gotta be something more interesting than that!
22	Guy	what]s it to do with cube?
23	Scott	no, it's gotta be something more than that?
24	Amir	cube, like a box, like a protocol box↑ the protocol box
25	Scott	but the box is not even square!
26	Amir	it was square,
27	Guy	yeah man …
28	Ray	can you do me a favour shoot that guy ha!
29	Amir	you know when I was at the start of the?? it was a basically it was a PC, and it was like … cards and we didn't even have the hardware for it
30	Scott	yeah man they sure know how to dress up a PC don't they? They call it PQ and charge em
31	Guy	MPQ , a new name for ?? MPQ haha!
32	Jordan	hey shift start, hey it'd be nice if we get an AG case?
33	Amir	hey?
34	Jordan	it'd be nice if get an AG case?
35	Guy	Amir is looking forward to the AG case!
36	Amir	yeah, yeah yeah! (confirming)

37	Jordan	next AG case that comes I think Amir can take it!
38	Amir	if that's the technology that I support then,
39	Scott	did you guys support XX when that came out?
40	Amir	yeah
41	Guy	the AG haha
42	Amir	yeah if there's a new product, do it!
43	Scott	10 thousand users out!
44	Guy	wouldn't be funny

This situation poses a threat to Amir's positive face because, since he is the expert in this technology, he was under the impression that he would be training the team in how to use it. This assumption is now being challenged or refused by the team leader which threatens Amir's positive face. Scott and the team employ a number of different strategies to attenuate this face-threatening situation.

The three responses that immediately follow Amir's suggestion that a date be determined for the PQ training to begin are from other team members. These responses are jocular and exaggerated as can be inferred from the fact that training in new technologies is something that takes place regularly and going out for coffee at this time is not a real option (2-3). Although jocular in nature, these comments are a negative response to Amir's proposal that a training date be found, which he then attempts to justify (5). Amir does this by reminding everyone, in a somewhat defensive and serious tone, that as the training will take two hours per day, it has to be formally included in the teamwork schedule.

Scott's response to Amir's suggestion is essentially a refusal to set up the training but it is delivered in a way that minimises offence. Scott uses his next turn (45) to refuse the

training in a way that attempts to lower the damage of refusal and maintain Amir's face wants. Scott is therefore managing a potentially damaging situation by attenuating the refusal. In order to do this, Scott takes the floor for what is the longest (uninterrupted) turn observed in this interaction.

1 Scott [well] actually, before we do that, one thing, I wonna do is the skills matrix thing↑ so we did that hum a little while back↑ maybe a little over a year ago ↑so we should do that first because that sort of, highlight which area we need to do some more skills skill work of, I'm sure PQ will be one of them but I also wonna see what, what other areas, yeah need to be covered it would be good man cause a number of guys wasn't in this team when we last time we did it, so it would be good to ????

Scott successfully attenuates the refusal by adopting six different strategies. First, he uses the discourse marker *well* in order to mitigate the potential disagreement that could arise in this situation. *Well* is a well-documented discursive resource which functions to mitigate disagreement. Tannen states that hedges "may soften the impact of negative statements" (1993, as cited in Locher 2008, p. 113). 'Well' is therefore a hedging device which can act as a mitigator in face-threatening situations. As Hölker points out (1991, as cited in Jucker, 1993, p. 436), discourse markers carry emotive rather than referential meaning in utterances.

The second strategy Scott adopts is to justify his decision to delay the training that Amir will deliver. He does this by reminding everyone that it has been a year since the skills matrix took place and the team has changed, making it necessary to run this training again. This shifts or externalises responsibility for the decision-making, representing it

as being beyond Scott's control. The training needs are framed as being driven by group dynamics and change, rather than due to Scott's personal decision-making.

Thirdly, Scott overtly *reassures* Amir that this training will be needed in the future, thereby enhancing Amir's positive face, indicating what he has to offer is highly regarded and that his skills will be called upon. This acknowledgement can be considered as a redressive action — an "action that ... attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 69). A further device that works to mitigate the potential FTA is Scott's use of the in-group marker 'man'. Team members regularly use this term as a form of address; it indexes both group membership and friendliness.

Scott's question regarding Amir's previous workplace (line 39) can be regarded as yet another redressive device. It moves Amir to the centre of the floor as the expert, if he chooses to take it. Finally, Scott's humorous reply (line 40) echoes the humorous tone adopted by Guy and Jordan earlier and provides further support for Amir. By echoing the style of the team, Scott has re-joined them at the same level. The final cynical comment by Guy (line 44) again uses humour to lighten the situation in a collaborative manner.

The other team members are also observed to adopt strategies aimed at attenuating the potentially conflictive situation. The first strategy is the use of humour. Holmes and Marra (2002) identify two types of humour — supportive and contestive. In this exchange, Amir's colleagues use supportive humour in an attempt to defuse the potential tension that arises with Scott's suggestion to postpone the PQ training. The second strategy is Jordan's attempt to end the conversation on a positive note for Amir (line 32). He achieves this by paying him an indirect compliment which is in fact repeated (line 37). This statement works as an indirect compliment because it highlights the area of expertise which Amir possesses and the other team members lack. By emphasising Amir's expertise, albeit in a joke, Scott is highlighting the fact that his

professional skills and knowledge are needed and appreciated in the team. There is no overt linguistic data or follow-up interview that reveals Amir's perception of the interaction. However paralinguistic clues show that his tone of voice shifted from one that was confident, louder and in control when he suggested the training to a quieter and more submissive one following Scott's intervention. This is an example of how participants have to move quickly from one situation to another, recognise subtle ways of being directed without upsetting team concerns while managing personal goals and expectations. Part of managing these workplace challenges is language-related and requires using soft skills, even within close-knit teams.

This challenge is also obvious in the next example, which comes from an interaction I recorded at *InfoContact*. It provides a third example of how disagreement is mitigated between colleagues. In the following excerpt Rick, a team leader, has had a disagreement with an internal client about a procedure regarding the use of new equipment. That interaction is not recorded. Both speakers are ESB from *InfoContact* and no other speakers are present.

Here Rick is seeking to establish that his assessment of the technical problem was correct. Rick consults Max, a more technically qualified member of another team. The exchange takes place in the corridor and is an incidental meeting. In the course of this interaction it becomes clear that Rick is seeking more than a technical clarification. In fact Rick is seeking support as a form of reassurance that he is correct in his understanding of the technical issue. Consequently, the function of Rick's question is not simply to seek clarification but also to gain support from Max. Since Max aligns himself with Rick and presents the client as less of an expert, this exchange becomes a relational sequence.

1	Rick	Oh you're just the person I wanted, I was gonna ask ↑ …
2	Max	only if it's quick!
3	Rick	hum, scanning, to network uhm fax machines↑, hum scanning to MFDs
4	Max	scanning from MFDs?
5	Rick	scanning onto the MFDs, but if I scan multiple pdfs files, it will create multiple files later on…
6	Max	if you, load the XX,? (seeking clarification)
7	Rick	no this is the person going '*no I do one scan and then I come back later and do another scan, it overwrites the*'/
8	Max	/it shouldn't overwrite, it should create unique, it should create, it should create a unique one each time
9	Rick	yeah that's what I thought but he said '*no it's always been the way it operates'* (mimics the client being haughty)
10	Max	it's it's a uhm,
11	Rick	there was a XX? Folder there, in that directory and
12	Max	that wouldn't help that would <u>stop it</u> from scanning
13	Rick	I've deleted that
14	Max	it shouldn't, hum, it should create a neatly named unique file each time you scan a new document for <u>that</u> day
15	Rick	yeah!
16	Max	if it's not, it's a, it's a manual process to set 'em up and you've gotta go tick tick tick tick tick set this one, set this one, see this
17	Rick	/so should I log that call across to you?
18	Max	across to XXUnit Name
19	Rick	yeah to XXUnit name (confirms)

20 Max yeah that'll be ??? the file, they're either manually changing on the machine, or ↑ we didn't set the template up properly,

21 Rick [yeah]

22 Max but I suspect it's probably the latter!

23 Rick yeah, cause this guy's saying '*it's always been like that!'*

24 Max ?? hey guys here it is test it!

25 Rick they're not, or they've not understood the functionality

26 Max yeah!

27 Rick ok th, thanks

28 Max and if anything goes wrong then we clear them out

29 Rick well he knew about that!

Rick's irritation with the internal client is evident in the way he portrays him to Max. Rick presents the client as being rather petulant and uncritical by reporting what he says using the verb 'going' (line 7), which implies 'rattling on' rather than speaking with authority. He also portrays the client in unflattering terms by using direct quotes on two occasions (lines 7, 23).

Max aligns himself with Rick, effectively providing support for him in the disagreement in the following ways. First, although he does not have much time to speak, and indicates this openly (line 2), he is sympathetic and does not show any sign of rushing off until Rick's dilemma has been resolved. In terms of linguistic shows of solidarity, first of all Max uses modals as distancing mechanisms (line 8). He uses the modals 'should' and 'shouldn't' to suggest that if the system has been properly set up, Rick is correct in his assessment. Furthermore, Max suggests two possible reasons why the scanning equipment is not working as it should (line 20), and states that it is most likely that Max's unit has not set it up properly (line 22). Acknowledging that this is a possible reason for

the mishap adds further support for Rick. Finally, Max shifts some of the responsibility to the users who do not understand how the machines should operate and who should consider testing as an option when things are not running as they should (line 24), an attribution which Rick echoes (line 25).

Max also aligns himself with Rick by highlighting the fact that users need to know what procedures to adopt when things go wrong (for example, they can request testing to be carried out). In doing this, Max is indicating that Rick's exasperation with the client is justified, so in this sense, this exchange is a relational sequence.

Whilst the narratives above show orientation towards collaboration, the next example provides further insights into how team coherence is maintained when a disagreement occurs. The interaction takes place between colleagues and provides another example of how disagreement is avoided in a workplace interaction at *SolutionPlus*. This interaction was recorded but not observed. It is therefore impossible to know whether Xavier, who is a NESB speaker, was physically present throughout the whole interaction. If so, his absence could account for the reasons he misinterpreted the tenor of the interaction.

Mac and Ben, both ESB English speakers, are discussing the weight loss strategy of eating small amounts of food throughout the day. To the listener this exchange sounds exaggerated and humorous in tone. Xavier's interjection, in contrast, is rather serious in tone in both content and paralinguistic cues. There is potential here for disagreement, but this is avoided when Xavier changes footing. Xavier is a NESB participant.

30	Mac	well I'm about to be gone for the day
31	Ben	fun!

32	Mac	Calorie controlled diet, only one sandwich for the day
33	Xavier	why are you doing calorie controlled?
34	Ben	he's trying not to aim for the biggest loser!
35	Xavier	he he you cannot starve yourself you know that? At your age and my age if we starve yourself you get more susceptible to other sorts of things like insulin issue and diabetes and everything, you shouldn't do that the body just backfires according to/
36	Mac	/I go home and drink maple syrup, [golden syrup]
37		[Xavier you drink it?]
38		so I don't think I'm going to have any insulin problems (laughing to himself) you think this is going to affect my insulin levels?
39	Xavier	no I don't think so no no (agreeing)
40	Ben	see that's what I do once a year, and we, we gamble with having cordial shots in the fridge, …
41	Mac	that's why I have condensed milk in the fridge, just in case I want a quick meal
42	Ben	hey I love that!
43	Xavier	does that pick you up?
44	Mac	oh it's very good!
45	Ben	it's very good! Have you ever had condensed milk?
46	Mac	that's what got me through South America!
47	Ben	condensed milk and white bread! Oh, I can't get over it!

This exchange provides a clear example of how Xavier changes footing to align himself with Ben and Mac, thereby avoiding an open disagreement. I label this a *pseudo agreement* because it is unlikely Xavier would change his mind so quickly and radically about this topic. Rather, he shifts his position in order to avoid an argument, as both

Mac and Ben have dominated this discussion and have rejected the change of topic offered by Xavier.

As can be seen from Xavier's attempt to contribute to the discussion (line 6), his turn differs in length and tone from the snappy, funny one-liners that characterise Ben's and Mac's turns. Xavier's contribution therefore represents a change of pace and tone to this interaction. This is evidenced by the use of the following linguistic strategies. In his long turn Xavier states rather directly and emphatically the dangers of dieting. He states somewhat baldly — 'you cannot starve yourself you know that?' (6) and is similarly direct when he says — 'you shouldn't do that the body just backfires according to" (8). However this change of tone is not tolerated by the dominant members of this group, Mac and Ben. Their dominance is reflected in Mac's interruption (line 9) in which he reasserts that he consumes sweets without adverse effects. Mac's question —'you think this is going to affect my insulin levels?' (11) — functions as a challenge to Xavier. As this example shows, questions can function as a means of expressing objection (Locher, 2004, p. 133).

At this point Xavier "backs down" or changes footing and delivers his pseudo agreement. He does this first by replying to Mac's question in the affirmative, then by asking what seems to be a genuine question — 'does that pick you up' (16). By asking Ben to clarify, Xavier locates himself on the same discursive path as the other two. In other words, he has now moved from opposing the diet to expressing curiosity about it.

By replying that he keeps a supply of condensed milk in case he needs a quick energy boost (14), which seems highly unlikely and exaggerated, Mac appears to have violated the Gricean maxim of quality which indicates that speakers should try to say what they believe is true and not say what they are unable to substantiate (Grice as cited in Schieffrin, 1990, p. 243). In doing so, Mac maintains his position of principal in this

event. Since Mac's position is unchanged, Xavier is left to do the relational work of avoiding a disagreement. He does this by changing footing. As his position changes, his role also changes from an oppositional one to that of someone who is curious but has no authority on this topic.

This example is useful as it provides insights into the dynamics of group interactions that are influenced by factors other than language proficiency. In the example above Xavier has no issue with language proficiency and his failure to gain the floor in this interaction is due to dominance of the other two speakers. As the dominant group members Ben and Mac have set the jocular and exaggerated tone of the talk on this occasion, Xavier appears to be a marginal member of the group who is not yet socialised into the group style of jocularity and seems unaccustomed to it. Research in the use of humour in workplace communication can indicate group membership or exclusion. For example, Plester and Sayers (2007) identify one of the uses of banter as a means to socialise or exclude new members in the IT companies they studied. It is Ben and Mac who do not accommodate his attempt to shift the tone of the topic to a more serious one. The reason Ben and Mac are dominant is not clear in this interaction alone and could only be gleaned by conducting a follow-up interview and viewing observational data of this team. Xavier's interactional competence therefore reflects a much more complex construct than the way in which it is imagined by teaching and training institutions.

The next excerpt provides a further example of avoiding disagreements and the use of unmitigated requests which were discussed in Chapter 5 function to achieve team collaboration. The discussion in Chapter 5 showed that the criteria for identifying an un/mitigated request include the frequency and urgency of requests as well as the relationship between the participants. This section demonstrates that requests can also involve implied criticism and can therefore be considered FTAs.

In the following extract Guy is seeking clarification about why a problem which appears easy to solve still appears as ongoing on the team's work schedule. However his request includes implied criticism. The team members respond to the potential face-threatening nature of his request by using humour and exaggeration to show solidarity with Brendan and preserve the team peace. In this way the "blame" for the unfinished task is shifted onto the customer and away from the team member.

1	Guy	Brendan how come this case is still/
2	Brendan	/hang on I am doing it now
3	Amir	(stops playing the guitar to join in)
4		Don't put any pressure on him man!
5	Guy	yeah man you're gonna close it right?
6	Brendan	no he said leave it for one day
7	Scott	what?...in case he can't find another command
8		(general laughter about the customer involved)
9	Scott	can we at least lower the severity? Or shall we keep it at, just keep it at P1
10	Guy	follow the sun
11	Scott	(laughs) Come on! (incredulously)
12	Male	?Mate?? if someone opens such a stupid case you should make them follow the sun and go 'do you need a command? Have you found a command?' Are you sure you are in the right command?'
13	Guy	Have you saved your?? (technical)
14	Male	Mate?? have you saved your ??(technical)

(Amir's team 09)

Guy's request (line 1) is delivered in a very authoritative and demanding manner and

sounds accusatory. Brendan replies rather apologetically indicating that he is still working on the case, reassuring Guy that he has not neglected the task (line 2). Brendan's immediate reply, which interrupts Guy's turn, adds force to his defensiveness. Three strategies are used here to attenuate the potential face threat for Brendan.

The first strategy is provided by Amir, whose turn is a friendly appeal for Guy to be more sensitive (4). This is suggested by the tone of Amir's voice. The address marker 'man' can also be interpreted as an appeal to team solidarity and an indirect way of telling Guy he is being rather forceful in his request. Guy responds to Amir's turn by reiterating his request in a different manner. His goal is to make certain that the problem will be dealt with (5) which explains why he initially appeared to pay less attention to the manner of his request and more to getting the work finished.

The second strategy involves Brendan supplying the reason he has not finalised the problem, explaining that the customer has requested the case remain open for a while in case other unforeseen problems occur. As explained in the Methods chapter, this way of delaying closure allows the customer to avoid making another call and joining a queue again. Once the reason for the job remaining open has been established as the customer's own incompetence, the team members join in a chorus of teasing these customers. Scott, the team leader, suggests that the severity rating of the problem be reduced. This provides a solution to the problem of still having an unresolved case on their work list.

The final strategy adopted to attenuate the face threat to Brendan consists of Guy's use of humour. Guy, Scott and another team member engage in mocking the customer by suggesting that he lacks basic knowledge which explains his need for more time than is necessary with a team member. By using mockery and humour, the team members have shifted the responsibility for not completing a job from the team member, Brendan,

to the customer. This blame shifting is done collaboratively and reinforces team identity in a situation where there was initially potential for it to be fragmented by Guy's demand for immediate action.

6.6 Negotiating the floor

Another way to consider how collaboration functions in interactions is by examining turn-taking behaviour or how the floor is shared. CA indicates that one of the most obvious features of conversation is that the person who is speaking changes frequently and that any overlaps that occur between speakers are significant (Liddicoat, 2007). Like other features of conversational organisation, turn-taking and topic sharing (which are closely associated conversational features) are arrived at by the interactants. Thus whether interruptions (moves which break the turn) are deemed impolite or not is not inherent in the act of interruption but depends on how the interactants interpret this (Watts, 1991). Analysis of the following excerpt shows that responsibility for the turns and topic development is symmetrical; there is no overall dominant speaker role in the interactions and these strategies serve to contribute to 'doing team'.

The example that highlights the sharing of turn-taking is from an excerpt taken from a longer stretch of dialogue that at times includes a third speaker. The exchange analysed here, however, involves only two speakers: Tony and Alan. Alan is working on resolving a problem which requires Tony to be close by. However, as the work task is not intense, while the speakers are waiting for programmes to load there is ample opportunity for them to talk about matters unrelated to this task. The topics they discuss therefore move from work to non-work topics. This section focuses on how topics are shared during the interaction. I argue that the way the speakers share topics and negotiate turns is one of the linguistic resources the participants use to collaborate or "do team".

1	Tony	someone will test it and then (*very low, inaudible, then yawns*) Oh geez!
2	Alan	how was your weekend? Get up to much?
3	Tony	[??]
4	Alan	perfect weather though [??]!
5	Tony	[I've] been up at work since ??I this morning!
6	Alan	you're kidding me!
7	Tony	I don't get insomnia that much, probably get it once, every 3 months
8	Alan	just can't sleep?
9	Tony	no, no I never, I never get it where I can't go to sleep, but I get it where I wake up and I can't go back to sleep, so
10	Alan	oh yeah, that's happened to me a [few times,]
11	Tony	[3 o'clock]
12	Alan	I thought you mean, from night you can't sleep till morning haha!
13	Tony	oh shivers no haha
14	Alan	I was gonna say, geez that's pretty extreme! I've never had that, that experience so I was gonna say oh that's that's new! Yeh
15	Tony	yeh
16	Alan	nah, it's happened to me a couple of times, you wake up and then you can't go back to sleep and just keep rolling around till morning!
17	Tony	??? since 5.30!
18	Alan	yeah…5.30! wow!
19	Tony	?? yeah
20	Alan	it's pretty early yeah, so you came to work?
21	Tony	yeah I woke up about 5.30, got here about 7.15, so I should go soon,
22	Alan	yeah, that's true, get some rest, before tomorrow night when we're

all be here for a while?

…

23 Tony I'll be able to sleep all ??

24 Alan haha yeah,

25 Tony cause I cause I was almost like, like I never, I never, like it's not like my job is pretty full on and I never get tired like thatbut I was pretty tired today,

26 Alan yeah

27 Tony like I was almost falling asleep on the floor

28 Alan geez!

29 Tony ??

30 Alan do you drink coffee or you don't drink coffee?

31 Tony what's that

32 Alan do you drink coffee?

33 Tony nah nah

34 Alan no neither do I,

35 Tony I just got up and walked around

36 Alan yeah, just got out and have some fresh air

37 Tony I'll probably get it cause ??? sleep ???

38 Alan a bit yeah, but I'm getting used to it now, I'm getting used to it now, getting by with little sleep, I think your body just adjusts, is, I think all you need really is 2 hours of good sleep and then you can go with that

39 Tony yeah, I don't know about that! Such a small ???

40 Alan seriously your body really only just needs 2 hours, and it just keeps going ↑ , I don't feel sleepy now, originally starting off I did feel sleepy

but now, I'm feeling pretty good! and then on the weekend you can sleep as much as you want!

41 Tony how many hours ???

42 Male 1 ???

43 Alan like a set, like at the moment he's waking up right, but as long as you have like 2 set hours [of sleep]

44 Tony/MX1 [of sleep]

45 Alan then your body is refreshed,

46 Male1 do you think so?

47 Tony if I had two hours sleep I would ???

48 Alan [oh] no you sleep 2 hours then you wake up again then you sleep again

49 Tony oh right!

…

A turn-by-turn analysis of the above excerpt reveals that the speakers engage in sharing the floor and that there is no struggle to hold the floor. Watts (1991) argues that the floor is determined by the take up of the topic, which is evident here. In the exchange reproduced above, the topic is introduced, taken up by the interlocutor and elaborated by both speakers. The speakers also jointly construct the topic so that each of the participants becomes a resource person (Watts, 1991) as is illustrated below. In addition, this topic about insomnia develops and re-emerges throughout the interaction at the same time as topics associated with work talk. In other words, the speakers are sharing the role of relational and transactional work; these two things are not separate or isolated but fluid in the interactions observed. These interactional tasks are shared; therefore any power differences between the speakers are greatly reduced.

The topic of sleeplessness is introduced when Tony yawns loudly and makes the comment '*Oh geez!'* (1). In effect this works as an invitation for his conversation partner to comment and Alan obliges by asking about Tony's weekend, implicitly attributing his tiredness to a busy weekend. By responding to Alan's comment, Tony has succeeded in establishing a new topic between the two. Alan develops the topic by asking about Tony's weekend (2). Tony is then given the opportunity to elaborate and explains that the real reason he is tired is due to the fact he has insomnia and has been at work since 7.00 that day. The topic of insomnia and how to deal with it then becomes the subject of subsequent turns.

The topics and turns are shared between the two interactants as follows. Following Tony's explanation about his early work start, Alan provides Tony with the opportunity to expand on his experiences of insomnia. For example his comment (8) invites elaboration. Alan subsequently attempts to present his own experiences with work orders (10,16) but Tony holds on to the floor until he completes his story. Finally however (38), Alan is able to relate his own experiences and move from being the resource person to having something to contribute on the topic. Although not explicitly stated in this extract, ethnographic data adds to the understanding of the subject in the latter part of this extract (38-51). Here the speakers are discussing how Alan, who has just become a father, manages to get by on little sleep. In the latter part of the exchange therefore it is Tony who is seeking elaboration (41) and reacting to Alan's story (47). This is helped in part by a third party who has entered the conversation (42, 46). The final exchanges in the excerpt are aimed at clarifying how Alan has dealt with his experiences of broken sleep.

Another example of collaborative turn taking comes from the following excerpt, which is part of a longer interaction that was discussed in chapter 5 to highlight the fusion of work

and non-work talk. It takes place among members of Amir's team on a Friday night after work has finished. The team is lingering around the work area and drinking. The excerpt contains several topics but as will be seen, the floor is shared equally so that eventually all the topics are taken up by all the participants.

1	Guy	ok guys, cheers guys,
2		*(glasses clinking)*
3	Joe	I wish I was still on holidays
4	Guy	??? weekend
5	X	Cheers
6	X	who is working tomorrow?
7	Scott	Me and M
		(lots of simultaneous cheers and comments)
8	Roy	so this is a ?? for you ?
9	Guy	M took the case
10	Roy	so did you fix the case?
11	Guy	well we decided to do Webex, and while we are on the Webex with the guy, he receives a call and says 'hang on' they're another case on the company (laughter)
12	Scott	you should have held on to that guy and brought the ??DM over [on,]
13	Joe	you're working, did you say you're working tomorrow?
14	Guy	then I get busy this weekend Marty I know you man, you you look forward to your work on the weekend!
15	Joe	[I know man]
16	Marty	[you take all the cases off me!]
		*(*laughter*)*
17	Guy	did you see all the NAME cases? There are 3 dispatches for our shift tomorrow already.

		(laughter)
18	Scott	oh that's all right, we got Marty on tomorrow, he's working for us for free!
19	Guy	who else Marty and Joe? Wow!
20	Roy	he's sick!
21	Joe	I should have taken 2 or 3 weeks to get back into it before working weekends man
22	Scott	man you need the schedule ha
23	Joe	I felt bad because I was away for quite a while I thought I better make up for all the weekends I missed
24	Scott	good you should feel bad!
25	Joe	this comes from a guy who takes a WAAS [report case and goes huh!]
26	Guy	[what's a] what's a WAAS (technical) reporting case?
27	Joe	Reports that XXCOName generates.
28	Joe	bludger! Big time!
29	Scott	hey R you still have to do an initial response
30	Guy	iust close it, put a note in there, case closed and that's it, I mean put what you did,
31	Roy	open and erode haha
32	Guy	no no
33	Roy	no I know *(more serious tone)* I am doing it now!
34	Guy	is there, when you close is there an option in the menu in there that says hum
35	Male	Mad Customer's stupid?
36	Guy	well I didn't want to say anything because the recording but yes
37		(all laugh)

(Amir's team 09)

In this example Joe makes an attempt to gain the floor by introducing the topic of his leave and returning to work too early. Initially, his attempt to introduce this topic is not taken up (3) and his statement ends up as part of a stream of simultaneous statements at the beginning of the group's after-work drinks (1-9). The team members then discuss work and weekend work. Joe's next attempt (25) is successful as Scott's reply indicates (26). There is a lot at stake for Joe in ensuring that his comments receive the floor because he wishes to excuse himself for his poorer than usual performance, which is the result of his returning from leave too early. Joe's explanation is significant as it signals his commitment to the team by indicating that he returned early for the sake of the team and because he felt he had let them down by taking the amount of leave that he did. Clearly, his introduction of this topic is relationally focused.

6.7 Other ways to do team

Studies in professional settings show that there are several ways that individuals or teams form identities. For example some may define themselves according to what they are not (Richards, 2006, p. 190). Others define themselves by distinguishing themselves from their clients which is explained in terms of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Alvesson, 1994). Research also shows that shared criticism of others, especially those not present in the interaction, boosts solidarity as it fosters common values and attitudes (Holmes, 2000). In the present study the participants define themselves in terms of how they stand out as a unique group from the people they help and serve.

A recurring way of establishing and strengthening professional team identity consists of emphasising team members' high level of professionalism and expertise in contrast to that of less expert clients (the others). The participants from the call centres get to know the customers over time and come to anticipate the sort of interactions they will have with each of them. This familiarity includes getting to know whether particular customers

are cooperative and whether they have a high level of technical expertise. In Chapter Five the communicative strategies, known as “soft” skills, which are needed to handle difficult customers were discussed. This section outlines the way in which discussion of difficult customers constructs team and professional identities.

I have already highlighted the importance that participants place on their technical identity. In this section I discuss how the display of this aspect of their professional identity serves to establish team rapport. The following extract takes place while members of Mac’s team are having a break from their work. As the data were gathered in early 2009 the GFC was imminent so global economic conditions were frequently discussed in all the companies during fieldwork. In one company, *Its.I*T participants’ fear of losing their jobs was a major concern. In *SolutionsPlus*, the company in which the following excerpt was recorded, the main problem anticipated in association with the GFC was a higher volume of work accompanied by a lower level of technicality (line 3). This possibility is met with a groan from Ben (line 4) who echoes the sentiments of the team in arguing that this would not be a good outcome. Mac confirms that this is the pattern in their profession during economic downturns (line 8). This speech episode illustrates the central role of technical expertise in this team.

1	Mac	[just stay] in the XX(name) team hahaha (this is the team they are in now) Cause they’re (the customers) gonna call the financial assistance,
2	Hernan	they’re always gonna need call centres,
3	Male	well I expect our call rates will go up because they’re gonna have less IT staff they’ll just be handing us stuff, they won’t be doing any trouble shooting hooting
4	Ben	oh man! (groans at the prospect)
5	Male	all the money

6	Mac	we'll see the technicality drop probably, a bit , seen it happen,
7	Male	have you been through a recession before?
8	Mac	2000
9	Male	2000
10	Mac	I was at XX (name) in 2000
11	Male	not as bad as they say,
12	Mac	???

(Mac's Team 09)

Similarly in the following example Guy, is talking to one of his team members, Zoe, and arranging to take over a case from a remote team. This interaction takes place over the phone, which is on loudspeaker. The fragment reproduced below highlights the way in which the disparity between the participants' level of technical expertise and that of their clients is used to distinguish the service suppliers from the clients. In this case, even though the client is in a position where (s)he is expected to be more "technical", (s)he is not. In this extract Zoe is explaining to Guy the nature of the difficulty the client is experiencing. In this excerpt there is a reference to 'a guy' (a client) who constantly opens up cases as though they are serious (when they are not) who will be the topic of conversation in the following example. In this instance 'nice' means 'capable' and therefore 'easy to deal with'.

1	Guy	is he a nice guy?
2	Zoe	Well I don't know, well he's not a bad guy but he doesn't know what like you know, what's that guy's name who opens up S1 and S2 cases all the time and they're not, and he's a Com leader?
3	Guy	they often don't know too much!
4	Zoe	yes, that's right, Guy is going to resolve it in 5 minutes! haha

(Amir's Team 09)

Subsequent to this exchange (which is a face-to-face interaction) other team members join in by contributing comments and questions to discover just how technical 'the guy' actually is. Zoe's exaggeration of Guy's skills, at the end of the conversation, reaffirms the team's feeling of confidence in their ability.

Another way to highlight team cohesion is to share the difficulty and pressure that working with non-technical clients can entail for the participants. The following extract was recorded in the middle of a working day in Amir's team. The team are at work when Jordan notices a call has come up on the queue from a known difficult customer. Jordan announces, even though it his turn to take the call, that he will not do so because of the client's difficult nature and lack of technical knowledge. The client's lack of technical knowledge makes him difficult to deal with since he reports his problems as high severity when in fact they are low. This tendency is reported by both Jordan (13) and Amir (23) and is acknowledged by Scott (14) and Amir (23). Whilst it seems that refusing to deal with a client would result in a problematic exchange, this excerpt shows that in this team it is acceptable to do so and the way the problem is solved shows that difficult work is shared unproblematically. This extract highlights how the team's identity is formed along the lines of us and them.

Jordan repeats his refusal several times in quick succession (1, 3, 5). In addition, he adds some force to this refusal by adding that he took the call from this customer last time (line 5) and dealt with a difficult case the previous day (7). These statements serve to indicate that he feels he has done his share of the difficult work in this team. The fact that this is a difficult customer is understood by the other team members.

The shared laughter by the other team members and Scott, the team leader, confirms

their agreement with Jordan's assessment of this customer. In fact the team starts to consider ways of dealing with this customer including giving the call to the newcomer, Amir. However this is not possible as Amir is not working on the relevant shift. Another strategy is to negotiate for this call to be counted as double the workload of a normal case. The first option is a humorous way to avoid reaching a solution; the second is more likely to be implemented and acknowledges the difficulty they are facing. The impression created is that this conversation will continue until someone volunteers to take the call, which is exactly what happens.

1	Jordan	oh no forget it man, forget it man
2	Scott	who? oh man!
3	Jordan	I'm not taking it man, I'm not taking it man,
4	Scott	you set me free!
5	Jordan	oh I'm not taking it man, I really don't wonna help him
6		I took it last time?
7		Hahaha (shared laughter at once)
8	Jordon	I'm not gonna take it I had XXName yesterday!
9	Andy	I had XXName yesterday, the day before yesterday,
10	Jordan	did you?
11		Amir's in the afternoon shift though, what're you gonna do?
12	Andy	oh I'll take the case, it's allright
13	Scott	let's negotiate with him, you take two cases instead of this one, what does he want?
14	Jordan	everything, every single thing this guy does he opens a case for
15	Scott	he's not very good is he?
16		should we wait a bit see if he ups it to P2 (i.e. a more serious case)

17	Jordan	gonna grab it A? (serious tone)
18	Andy	yeah! (serious tone, letting Jordan off the hook)
19	Ray	who who is it, S?
20	Amir	he's the one that abusing the tool, who is opening the P2
21	Ray	he's an independent consultant
22	Amir	what? A partner no?
23	Ray	independent consultant
24	Amir	(to Vittoria) this guy, he's opening cases always on P2s this guy…if you give him good service he still ?? back…(background noise and he's always on phone all the time,
25	Andy	yeah I'm gonna put him in my contact man! (Hahahaha general laughter)
26	Ray	blacklisted!
27	Amir	blacklisted
28		Hey where's he from?
29	Ray	US!
30	Amir	US
31	Ray	?? (inaudible)
32		(background talking at once, humming)
33		(Fragments, false starts)
34	Amir	and everytime he wants documentation just give him and that's it,
35	Jordan	ok just…..
36	Amir	you guys, maybe you are too good to him, maybe you are accepting to configure his boxes maybe you should not!
37	Guy	oh oh (seeing the recorder) let's talk nicely about him, haha he's such a nice guy

38	Vittoria	oh no keep going , I was alerted that it was an interesting case
39		(general laughter, talking)
40	Amir and Guy	?????
41	Guy	no no
42	Andy	I closed the case on Tuesday, this Tuesday, and no problem
43	Amir	and? good bingo ?
44	Andy	ah,
45	Amir	[????]
46	Guy	[????]
47	Andy	ah, he didn't ???haha
48	Scott	that's allright, that's my Andy!
49	Amir	ok, I will remember his name, XXName
50	Guy	XXName
51	Amir	XXName
52		(laughter)
…		
53	Guy	well the good thing about XXName is that no matter what severity is you barely spend fifteen minutes, he opened a P1 last time ??
54	Amir	what? A P1? (incredulous as this is rare)
55	Guy	so we argued for two hours and after that R got him….
56		and Andy got a case from him on Tuesday right?
57	Andy	hahaha
58		

(Amir's team 09)

The negotiation concerning who will take the call is resolved quickly and seamlessly. Andy volunteers to take it in spite of having had some unfavourable feedback the previous week (11). Whilst Scott, the team leader has not assumed a role in assigning the job, he does take over some relational work once the team members have reassigned the task. Scott does this by jokingly saying to Andy that this case is worth the same as two more manageable ones (12). This serves to boost Andy's morale in deciding to volunteer for the unpopular task. Another way in which Scott boosts Andy's morale is by directly showing his appreciation for his decision (48). Other team members also show appreciation for Andy's decision and it becomes a joke among the team members. For example Amir gives mock advice and suggests they should be harder on this customer while Ray jokingly suggests he should be blacklisted (25) and Amir suggests he should be taught procedures (36).

Consequently, Andy is constructed as a good team member which is demonstrated by the chorus of direct and jocular statements of support he receives. The obstructive person in this interaction is not the team member who refused to take the call, but the client. This episode illustrates how problem solving and team cohesion practices occur in an established supportive team. Apart from Amir, the newcomer, this team has been working together for several months and have built up shared knowledge about the 'who's who' of their range of clients. This smooth negotiation is possible due to team members' implicit expectations that they are able to refuse or swap certain customers. Another expectation is that difficult work has to be shared around and that some kudos can be gained by accepting unpleasant work.

Example 4 ‘Tell him to do it and fuck off’

The following extract provides another example of the way that dealing with customers who are perceived to be incompetent enables team members to build identity. The interaction which follows involves two speakers — Ben and his team leader Kavi, who are from Mac’s team. In this extract Ben, who comes across as uncharacteristically bad-humoured and uncooperative when his team leader approaches him about following up on a client query, speaks rudely about the customer to Kavi but not directly to the customer. The team leader is asking Ben for help in closing the case but the customer wants to keep the case open in case there are further problems. A few minutes later Kavi, the team leader, checks on the hold up. The customer has emailed Kavi to ask why Ben is no longer responding to his calls about the problem. Ben’s reply is angry and emphatic. In his view, the customer needs to read the notes he has been given and act on that advice. Clearly the customer is not following Ben’s technical advice. Ben considers this a delay in closing the problem and therefore a problem both for himself and the team. The way this situation is resolved also shows team cohesion between a subordinate, Ben, and the team leader, Kavi. Discursively this is an instance where agreement is resolved tacitly and where the subordinate has control of the interaction.

1 Ben I’m ignoring this, i’m gonna ignore it, I’m gonna read my case notes, Can we talk about the case resolution, pissed off man, spends more time arguing cause he can’t be bothered (to a colleague about the client)

….

(moments later about the same client)

2 Kavi did ???

3 Ben I just gave him the document ID … if he understands it great, if he

		doesn't then he can ask he'll ask ! (defiant)
4	Kavi	he says you are not responding him, ??? after yesterday then?
5	Ben	yeah, cause he's asking stupid questions that I don't want in escalation….(rising angry voice, eating at the same time) there's no point, I wanna know the customer problem, I wonna know the business impact man , it's all there man, read it! (gives it to Kavi…
6		it doesn't really matter cause all I really want is a resolution and we fix it! Fuck off and do what I told you! (referring to the customer)

(Mac's Team 09)

Kavi does not reply to Ben's final remark, nor does he display any sign of having been offended. The case is not mentioned again in the rest of the recordings. I interpret this to mean that Kavi and the others tacitly agreed that Ben had fulfilled the requirements of his task and was no longer required to do anything. This is a fairly emotional and charged exchange in which Ben shows his anger and frustration verbally by using explicit language and by raising his voice. The interpretation that this behaviour and attitude is tolerated comes from observations of the team over time.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has considered the way talk in the IT companies at the centre of this study is organised at the micro-interactional level. A close analysis of the data supports the overall thesis finding that members of the speech communities observed manage linguistic repertoires that achieve collaborative talk. The participants show a high level of sophistication in their speaking skills in that their linguistic repertoires include nuances and a range of communicative strategies which fulfil various relational and transactional goals.

The chapter has also considered broad units of speech and speech acts such as disagreements and advice giving. Disagreements were shown to be regarded as a form of dispreferred talk and efforts were made by speakers to minimise and redress any FTAs when they did occur. Several strategies were identified to redress these. For example, disagreements were mitigated by using hedges and pseudo agreements in order to minimise confrontation.

When giving advice, speakers (particularly those in a supervisory role) mitigated this speech act in order to avoid being overly direct. Thus advice was presented in general terms rather than as case-specific to avoid the perception that the supervisor was being too “strong” in giving directives. The analysis also showed that when speakers gave advice to others, their talk was surrounded by positive politeness strategies such as offering praise in order to mitigate FTAs. Directives were also attenuated by efforts to highlight the power associated with the hearer’s position in order to redress any potential loss of face.

The analysis also revealed that the way talk is organised and right to the “floor” is negotiated reflects a preference for sharing turns and topics, which also supports collaborative ways of talking. A strategy that emerged as salient in the participants’ workplace talk was sharing the role of resource person in the interactions, indicating a collective preference for avoiding dominance of the floor.

Narratives, both personal and work-focussed were identified as other ways of team members collaborating, indicating that narratives can function as relational exercises. Ochs and Capps (1996) claim that narratives are an important resource for socialising individuals into group membership and community. In the examples presented in this chapter, narratives have been shown to help construct a sense of team. Furthermore the

topics of the stories, whether personal or work-related, are used in ways that reveal shared knowledge and shared moral values within these work communities. In addition, the narratives reflect a high level of co-telling as demonstrated in the blurring of speaker-listener roles which shows that listeners are also highly involved in the storytelling (Ochs & Capps, 2001). The data also show that there is a high level of cooperation and this is displayed in narratives as speakers become co-tellers and show agreement with the speaker's evaluation of the narrative. Therefore, the narratives can be said to function relationally and to contribute to a cooperative and inclusive team culture. According to the observations and the interviews, these discursive strategies are considered to be collaborative by members of the speech communities which employ them and therefore contribute to the shared repertoire of their community of practice.

These findings have many implications. At the level of micro analysis, the data shows that the participants successfully enact the ways of speaking required in the IT environments where sharing of knowledge is required in teams whose members are flexible and collegial. As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3) one of the limitations of the study is that the data is collected in sites that are supportive of research and have a successful story to tell. At a more local level, the data gathered represents only active participants and only a few examples of unsuccessful participation. Therefore it is not possible to generalise from these findings. However, these few examples cannot fully account for the absence of participation the reason for the absence of some of the migrant participants in the interactions and this would have to be taken up in a future study.

Chapter 7 **Conclusion**

This thesis explored the employment perspectives, experiences and intercultural communication of IT migrants in Australia and in the workplace. The research was designed with two aims in mind: first, to uncover barriers to migrant employment and second, to discover how language is used in actual IT workplace interactions in order to better address training. On the basis of these aims, the following three research questions were developed:

1. *What types of barriers (linguistic or social) do migrants in the IT industry experience in the Australian labour market?*
2. *What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?*
3. *What key communicative collaboration patterns can be observed in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges do these patterns of communication pose for skilled migrants?*

In this final chapter I summarise the findings of my research as they relate to each of these questions. Following the summary, I explore the implications of my study for research and teaching practice and, finally I discuss the limitations of the study and suggest how these could be addressed in future research.

7.1 Summary

7.1.1 Barriers to employment

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated that there exists a mismatch between the expectations of Skilled Migrants Visa recipients and Australian employers since a number of invisible barriers operate at the job entry level. This is evident since visas granted for Skilled Migration did not easily translate into jobs in the market place. In other words, the same skills and experiences were evaluated differently for visa purposes and for job search purposes. The dynamics of this mismatch are best understood by considering that social capital gains or loses value as individuals travel across borders. In Chapter 4 I considered the first research question

> *What types of barriers (linguistic or social) do migrants in the IT industry experience in the Australian labour market?*

In that chapter I explained this phenomenon using Blommaert's model of orders of indexicality (2005) which view the participants' language skills in terms of how they are received in different contexts. That is, language is viewed in the social context in which they are received rather than isolated from them.

The thesis demonstrates that attitudes towards non-native speaker varieties of English and other signs of 'otherness' are significant disadvantages in the quest for work. The problems the IT professionals in this study experienced have been described using labour market segmentation theory (Alcorso, 2006). This study thus adds to our understanding of the problems overseas professionals can face when seeking work in Australia by focusing on the experiences of overseas-trained IT professionals with the added insights provided by Blommaert's sociolinguistic framework of orders of

indexicality and L2 learner identity theory. These workplace barriers, lack of local experience and knowledge of how to present CVs for example, are not viewed as individual problems and language proficiency is not conceived of as a set of deficits. Rather, the problems the IT professionals experience have their roots in social phenomena such as linguistic attitudes towards non-standard varieties of English and NS paradigms. The rich data reported in this thesis, captured using in-depth interviews and observations, also provides insights into the expectations that migrants have of their labour opportunities in Australia.

I identified a number of non-linguistic factors linked to lack of labour market success such as a lack of local experience and differences in CV presentation and interview styles. Australian employers were shown to prefer Australian-trained professionals over those with overseas qualifications; this disadvantaged migrants seeking employment in the IT sector. As outlined in the literature review, this is not a new problem in Australia but chapter 4 demonstrated that the problem is also evident in the IT sector where professionals are highly mobile and possess highly valued skills.

Another marker of disadvantage identified through the data analysis was the assessment of participants' language skills. Employers, and in some cases, customers, were shown to valorize particular varieties of English, as evidenced by their negative attitudes to those with accented English. At the same time participants' negative self-perceptions extended to other areas of language use. These attitudes to second language learning and use are consistent with the view that native speakers have 'complete' linguistic competence and access to genres, a view challenged within critical applied linguistics. The attitudes held by the participants indicate that they identified strongly as L2 speakers. This leads to the conclusion that as long as certain varieties of

English continue to be favoured, so too will second language speakers' identities continue to be associated with 'otherness'.

'Otherness' was also identified in the labour market by the participants' foreign names which acted as another barrier. Some participants believed that changing their name had led to successful outcomes, as previous research confirms. Awareness of the extent of this problem has led to the formulation of policies aimed at reducing discrimination at the job entry level by companies such as Accor Hotels (Bertone, 2009). This company has a policy of accepting only anonymous CVs in order to avoid discrimination and ensure that recruiters focus only on the applicants' interview performance, skills and experience. This policy is apt as it addresses discrimination at the job entry level, an area which was shown to be problematic for the study participants. Further policies are also needed to ensure ongoing equality at work. In this respect the initiative by the Canadian company TRIEC Foundation which aims to address the problem of underemployed migrants by specifically recruiting and mentoring skilled migrants (Bertone, 2009) offers one possible practical solution for fairer recruitment practice.

7.1.2 Key characteristics of workplace communication

As stated in the Introduction (Chapter 1) the motivation for the second research question resulted from a desire to resolve tensions in my own teaching practice where I was asked to teach 'workplace communication skills' which could not easily be identified or were often prescriptive or reified. The second question,

> *What are the key characteristics of communication in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges does this type of communication pose for skilled migrants?*

therefore aimed to identify the types of interactions that characterised IT professionals' workplace communication. Thus, Chapter 5 analysed the language the participants used at work from the macro perspective, exploring their linguistic routines and how these were organised.

The data revealed first that participants interact in a variety of informal and impromptu meetings and second, that, in accordance with modern work practices among knowledge workers, work is organised in flexible and informal ways which rely on teamwork. In terms of the ways of talking, these professionals adopted a number of linguistic repertoires and styles to communicate with clients and team members.

A detailed analysis of the interview data and observations showed that communication among colleagues is characterised by the use of informality evidenced in register, verbal contractions and terms of address that index friendliness. In addition, the analysis of the interactions revealed that work/non-work talk is not easily separated providing support for what has been termed the 'conversationalization' of workplace talk (Fairclough, 1995).

These ways of talking showcase participants' soft skills which are often contrasted with technical skills. These soft skills included the ability to negotiate interlocutors' preferred communicative styles (whether written or oral when communicating with remote teams or clients as well as the choice of language. In these contexts soft skills complement technical skills. Two examples of the participants' performance of soft skills involved managing non-technical clients in a crisis and responding to company surveys about how to improve conditions for staff. These examples were regarded as manager-oriented tasks and were reported by the participants as being challenging. In addition, soft skills were paramount in dealing with difficult customers who attempted to seek

solutions for more than one problem in a single call. As performance is also based on time, handling more than one problem in a single call would not favour the participant's performance since they would be seen to take longer than required to solve a problem. It was considered that the participants' success in dealing with such demanding customers rested on their soft skills. Similarly, the ability to deal with clients who had little technical knowledge depended on the participants' ability to employ communicative strategies that attended to problem solving but also managed rapport with the customer.

The use of soft skills was also evident in the face-to-face contexts where ESB participants perceived the potential for breakdown in communication with their NESB interlocutors. In these cases strategies such as asking for repetition or rephrasing were employed to foster ongoing communication. The data show that the participants' soft skills include the ability to make choices about the medium of communication, the language in which to communicate and the appropriate variety of English to adopt. In conclusion, these data show that participants manage a number of linguistic repertoires that can be described as soft skills.

It is useful to return to the context that led to the formulation of the second research question. In effect, the research question was formulated as a result of wanting to investigate what constitutes workplace communication since it had not been clearly defined. The data show that effective communication in these contexts includes familiarity with a variety of genres. An analysis of the data shows that multilingual IT professionals need to manage linguistic repertoires which include knowledge of varieties of English as well as of the English spoken by NESB colleagues in order to be fully prepared to participate in this sector.

These linguistic skills cannot easily be ‘packaged’ and transferred to the workplace via the classroom. Further, the distinction often made between general and vocational English can be artificial at times which I indicated in the introduction was problematic. Rather, the study has shown that not only is workplace talk dynamic, fluid and context-dependent, but most importantly, it includes all facets of communicative styles. Beyond formulaic ways of addressing selection criteria, how to write and format CVs, it is difficult to ascertain what is meant by teaching language that is workplace focused. In the light of the study’s findings, it is clear that learning these formulaic ways of setting out documents is unlikely to lead to fairness in the selection process since foreign names carry more weight in determining who gains an interview than the skills and experience demonstrated by the applicants. Whilst curricula can include the teaching and learning of some aspects of general English language, skilled professional migrants already have the knowledge they need to perform the work and the technical language that is specific to their professional area. Furthermore, they may already be familiar with profession-specific terminology in English. In fact, skilled migrant professionals require exposure to the use of English in context rather than more classroom-based teaching. Workplace placements or mentoring systems are the mechanisms best able to provide this exposure to English in use. The study by Burton (1989) reported that the project which focused on improving the English language skills of professional doctors and engineers owed its success to learner autonomy, the usefulness of the placements and the diverse, collaborative role adopted by the teachers. Most importantly however Burton’s programme found that:

> “If language learning optimally takes place where language naturally occurs, then the classroom as it has traditionally been thought of is no longer needed. (Burton, 1989, p. 189)”

Participants in this study (Nicolas, Felipe, Antonio, Héctor, Luz) reported that although courses with an employment focus were 'useful', these courses do not translate automatically into job entry. It is therefore necessary to go beyond models that provide additional training in the hope this will help participants gain employment via the transfer of skills. This is especially true when bearing in mind that these professionals have already been deemed acceptable by the visa granting officers on the basis they have both the skills and the experience required for successful inclusion in the Australian labour force. These additive training models privilege learning via didactic means but are challenged by those who hold that learning takes place within communities (Gumperz and Hymes 1972 for example). Further, the community of practice model of situated learning (Lave, 1991) offers a particularly useful model of professional learning. This model, which proposes that learning is inseparable from social practice (1991, p. 31) states that it is ultimately through participating in the workplace in the form of legitimate peripheral participation that professionals gain the knowledge and expertise they require. A community of practice approach to the training of professional migrants would combine employers' and providers' responsibility to offer training and coincide with Burton's view that classroom practice should not be separated from workplace experience.

The next section summarises the findings from analysing the micro aspects of communication which was the subject of Chapter 6 by identifying the discursive strategies used to achieve collaboration and teamwork.

7.1.3 Patterns of communication and interactions

The third question, which is stated below, was addressed by analysing the recordings of the interactions.

What key communicative collaboration patterns can be observed in multicultural Australian IT workplaces and what challenges do these patterns of communication pose for skilled migrants?

This question was aimed at discovering how linguistic resources were used by the participants in their micro level spontaneous interactions at work. In addition to a wide repertoire of genres analysed in Chapter 5, the analysis of this data in Chapter 6 paints a very positive picture of migrant workers' discursive capital by this set of participants who were active in the interactions recorded. This chapter reveals that the IT workers at the centre of this study formed a community of practice and that their relationships with colleagues together with the workplace culture led to successful communication. The discursive features that demonstrated this collaboration were speech events such as mitigated disagreements and advice giving by ESB and NESB speakers. Also, the participants were shown to use narratives as a way of supporting collaboration and teamwork since the stories they told evoked shared values. In addition, team identity was fortified by identifying 'the other' in less technically expert colleagues and clients they met in the course of their work.

One of the ways collaborative talk was achieved in the interactions recorded for the study was by minimising or avoiding disagreements. In Chapter 6, I outlined the view that every interaction involves a struggle for power or control (Watts 1991) and defined disagreements as instances where 'conflict' or 'clashes of interest are evident (Locher, 2004, p. 94). The participants used a number of strategies for mitigating disagreements, which I interpret as rapport management strategies. One strategy involved redressing FTAs. Another was changing footing and alignment (Chapter 6 section 6.4). Other strategies adopted by the participants to avoid or minimise loss of face included using discursive markers and hedges to mitigate disagreements. In addition, there was

frequent use of justifications to externalise the sources of conflict. The use of in-group markers to intensify solidarity and the use of humour were also identified as ways of mitigating FTAs (Chapter 5, 5.3 and 5.5).

Negotiating advice seeking and giving among colleagues of different status represents another potential FTA. In Chapter 6 I analysed the use of directives and took the view that the way these are used is determined by the context rather than by culture or status, as studies have suggested in the past (Vine, 2009). The analysis of directives used by participants in the study revealed that power is attenuated by the use of indirect linguistic strategies such as suggestions and being perceived to give options which the use of more direct means such as imperatives do not. These strategies are therefore rapport management strategies.

At the level of turn taking it was shown that several strategies were used to share the floor and minimise power in the interactions. Turn taking, topic sharing and floor sharing were other conversational features employed by team members to achieve collaboration.

Narratives or stories are another salient communicative pattern in the data that establishes rapport, whether the topics were personal or work related. The topics in the narratives and style in which they are told support the view of workplace 'conversationalization' (Fairclough, 1995) where work/non-work talk differences are fluid and difficult to separate. Stories were analysed in terms of topics and structure. The content of the stories, i.e. the topics, demonstrate shared and common values in the groups.

In terms of structure the stories analysed in Chapter 6, are characterised by the fact they are not begun as narratives, but as ‘compressed’ or ‘minimal’ narratives. That is, the first turn does not have the features of a narrative and the hearer could easily opt to give a short answer. In addition, the narratives show a high incidence of co-telling as shown in the blurring of speaker- listener roles. This feature indicates a high level of involvement by the interlocutor (see Ochs and Capps, 2001) and is a feature of collaborative talk.

Strong team identity is demonstrated through the construction of a common other. Usually others were customers who were seen as less competent in terms of technical skills or in terms of following protocols. In some instances, the organisation itself is evoked as the other as if this were a separate entity to the workers within it, for example at *InfoContact*, where the participants’ team was part of a large local government department. In this case the other, the slow moving bureaucracy, is an ever present but almost anonymous entity. The analysis of talk about customers in spontaneous conversations or in meetings is found to have relational functions as it bolsters the participants’ professional identity and is an important feature of team talk.

The results are consistent with other studies of how professional identity is constructed. For example the participants in Alvesson (1994) and Richards (2006) found that groups of professionals define who they are by highlighting who they are not. Alvesson found that advertising professionals constructed themselves as being ‘anti-bureaucratic’, unlike their clients. Similarly Holmes (2000) points out that a shared sense of criticism of others, especially those not present in the interaction, boosts solidarity as it fosters common values and attitudes (2000, p. 168). The results of this study therefore add to our understanding of identity construction phenomena in *multilingua*l contexts. In particular my study highlights the fact that in these multilingual contexts participants’

team identity is a result of shared technical expertise and rapport management skills which includes, where necessary, sharing the communicative burden that may occur in linguistically diverse teams and which leads to the creation of inclusive multilingual spaces. These workplaces are thus exemplary multilingual spaces where LOTEs are regarded as highly valued linguistic capital rather than deficits and where the differences between ESB and NESB individuals are minimised rather than emphasised. This study therefore highlights the value of studying the ways in which multilingual groups achieve successful communication and concentrates on the way that communicative aims are successfully achieved in such contexts rather than choosing to focus on miscommunication. As indicated in the literature review, studies of how successful intercultural communication is achieved are relatively rare. This research therefore contributes to breaking down existing stereotypes that view intercultural encounters as inherently fraught with difficulties.

7.2 Implications for teaching and further research

7.2.1 English proficiency in the Australian labour market

I set out to conduct an ethnographic study of migrant professionals in and out of work in Australia and uncover the role of language use in their job seeking process and in the workplace. The findings, summarised above, add to our understanding of the labour market experience and language used by IT professionals in Australian workplaces. These findings have several implications that can inform migrant language training programmes as well as government policies and recruitment practices in Australia.

First, my data show that whilst migrant IT professionals have met skilled visa entry requirements and their skills are highly sought after, their success at the job entry level

is mediated by language ideologies that favour NS models. At the same time, the NESB participants continue to regard their English in terms of NS standards and display an ongoing L2 identity. The participants' evaluate their experience of multiple rejections as individual failings while they continue trying to improve the way they speak and seek more professional help with preparing CVs. When they identify disadvantage due to their racial and linguistic NESB factors, they attempt to reduce their visibility or otherness. The gatekeepers on the other hand, are oriented towards monolingual speakers and focus on differences as deficits. Thus, in rejecting applications from those with accented English, foreign names and lack of local experience, employers and recruiters are making assumptions about who fits in on the basis of race and language background. This manifests a belief by employers and some job seekers in imagined Australian workplaces that are predominantly Anglophone rather than diverse where migrants will not fit in. My data show that the Australian labour market is not a level playing field but a site for discourses of new racism (see van Dijk (1992) and some examples of these in Australia with particular focus on how employers might avoid explicitly stating recruiting on racial preferences have been outlined by Tilbury and Colic-Peisker (2006) where differences indexed by race are perceived to be a disadvantage. The key issue that needs to be addressed then is how linguistic diversity can be best foregrounded in discourses of social inclusion which foster attitude changes. This can be done more effectively by forging greater links between the academy and gate-keeping institutions such as training institutions, professional bodies and recruitment agencies by disseminating the findings of relevant research.

The implications of non-inclusive practices are manifold in a society so heavily reliant on migrant labor that has defined itself as 'multicultural' over the past three decades. Multiculturalism, now a highly contested term (Jupp, 2010), was a policy that attempted to capture linguistic diversity through the promotion of community language teaching but has not addressed issues of linguistic diversity as far as English varieties are concerned.

In spite of its well-intentioned trajectory, multicultural policies have been described as symbolic in nature (Cope, 1997). Although policies have attempted to promote linguistic diversity by encouraging the teaching and learning of LOTEs - also a problematic term – it has not yet promoted diversity in the English language itself, for example by promoting the acceptance of different varieties of English. Clyne referred to this as the acceptance of biculturalism rather than assimilation (1985) in recognition of the value (rather than the deficit) of NESB speakers' non-English linguistic knowledge as well as the value of "New Englishes" (Clyne, 1994, p. 209) which acknowledge new linguistic knowledge. The promotion of the concept of "New Englishes" would require those who consider themselves NS of English to be more tolerant of other varieties and this would require a reconceptualization of defining English proficiency (Canagarajah, 2006). At the same time ESL teachers must take into consideration that they are training NESB students for linguistically diverse situations and not just to communicate with NS (Clyne, 1994) of English. One way to harness these what is by adopting models such as English as an International Language (EIL) (Sharifian 2009), in language training programmes as well as by recruitment agencies who act as gatekeepers and perpetuate these ideologies.

The problem of migrant disadvantage in the labour market should be addressed at a government policy level and some initiatives have been taken. Since the Keating government era during which the policy of productive diversity came about, little has been done to address diversity management through policy. Thus, today the government services industry needs and provide the necessary visas and quotas that allow the necessary skilled migrants to enter the country and join the labour force. However, once these skilled professionals arrive in Australia, the problem of underemployment has not been addressed adequately. This is not a new problem in the Australian context, as documented in Chapter 2. Whilst the effectiveness of government policy is not the focus of the study, the study's findings suggest that policy and

legislation have a larger role to play in overcoming skilled migrants' current labour market disadvantage. Progressive models that could be adopted are those that have been used to successfully promote gender equality in the workforce. In Australia this includes legislation specifically designed to promote gender diversity. The *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* which is due to be amended (Australian Government, 2011) is one example. In addition ongoing debate about legislating for quotas on company managing boards continues (Diversity, 2011). If the same debate and progressive policy were applied to the under-employment of migrant workers in Australia, perhaps a longer term solution could be found.

7.2.2 Linguistic routines and patterns of communication in the workplace

With regards to talk at work, the study's findings challenge two notions. The first is that workplace communication is a unified set of skills, which can necessarily be taught; the second is that workplace communication in multilingual teams is problematic. The data analysis revealed that the participants contribute to talk that is varied in style and genre. The participants demonstrated the ability to manage a range of discursive strategies both backstage and frontstage and were oriented towards establishing team rapport. Participants' talk was characterised by a variety of styles and genres. In other words, the jokes, interjections, topic choices, levels of formality, ability to manage the floor and frequency of participation of the participants' interactions were all contextually driven.

In a climate where English language training is focused on work readiness what actually constitutes workplace communication needs to be given careful consideration. In order to adequately prepare migrants for the workplace, the curriculum needs to provide opportunities for professional migrants to learn and appropriate English that reflects actual workplace use. More importantly, the role of the workplace as a site of language socialisation needs to be taken into account rather than limiting learning to the

classroom. In other words, teaching English must take into account that workplace communication is contextually bound rather than an essentialised or predetermined set of skills or *practices* (Thornborrow, 2002, p. 7) or that talk can be dichotomised into institutional as opposed to ordinary conversation (McElhinny, cited in Thornborrow 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, the language use is determined in the local context where teams work out a set of communicative practices over time (Poncini and Turra, 2008). These authors states that

> "However, within every single company different micro-discourse communities may coexist and generate different linguistic sets of linguistic resources" (2008, p. 179)

This was evident in the teams I observed where talk was structured in vastly different ways according to the nature of the work. For instance, Amir's team, which had a lower volume of calls, displayed longer conversations and greater numbers of turns than Manny's team which had such a higher volume of incoming calls leading to shorter bursts of team interactions. So, in addition to on the job training, migrants need to be sensitised to the impact of context on the linguistic routines they will be required to adopt and that these are not always just job specific.

Finally, my study has described how three groups of professionals in the knowledge economy are organised at work and how their talk is organised. However the study is limited by a number of factors. First, further research is required to determine whether these findings are typical of IT workplaces in Australia. Future research should also consider the characteristics of linguistic interactions outside the knowledge economy where migrants are also employed, to gain a fuller picture of what exactly constitutes workplace communication, if it can be described at all in generic terms.

My interpretation of the findings is informed by a constructionist stance that views communication as dynamic with members of particular groups negotiating the way it is managed over time. These ways of speaking are mediated by group dynamics as well as the dynamics of the work itself. The professionals in this study promoted and welcomed interactive work practices which led to greater problem-solving which was recognised, encouraged and rewarded by management.

This study enhances our understanding the experiences of transnational professionals both before and after they enter the workforce. It achieves this by using multiple methods of data collection, combining in-depth interviews with discourse analysis of actual workplace interactions. This approach results in a careful description of the different communicative repertoires the migrant professionals are required to manipulate in the workplace in order to deal with the myriad, complex communicative situations they face. The study also suggests the value of non-didactic modes of learning as most likely to benefit professional migrants who, though they may lack some familiarity with linguistic aspects of the workplace, are highly experienced and motivated members of the workforce. The negative and problematic recruitment experiences reported by some participants prior to obtaining employment, contrast with the positive workplace experiences of those employed at the three companies at the centre of the study once they had successfully negotiated entry to the workplace. This disparity in experiences highlights the need for policies to address discriminatory practices by gatekeepers to workplace entry. It also highlights the crucial fact that participants develop task-appropriate linguistic skills within the workplace and not the classroom.

This study has shown that where the workplace is truly linguistically diverse and linguistic performance is judged alongside technical and professional expertise, the result is successful communication and inclusive workplaces. The findings in the study

indicate that in spite of misgivings about differences in work experience from one country to another, diversity can become the norm. This study's findings also highlight the important role of employers in creating an inclusive workplace, demonstrating that the onus to fit in is not always on the migrants.

As the Australian labor market continues to employ skilled migrants to redress skill shortages, the workforce will become more linguistically diverse. In fact, linguistically diverse workplaces are the norm rather than the exception in Australia and this fact needs to be accepted and promoted. It is therefore imperative that research continues to explore and document sources of disadvantage in the current market place in the interests of forcing positive long-term change in practices and attitudes.

Appendix I Transcription Conventions

Symbol	**Meaning**
[ ]	Beginning/end overlap
( )	Description/annotation of tone of delivery/extra information
,	Short pause between turns
…	Longer pause (more than 3-5 seconds)
??	Voice/meaning inaudible or unclear
?	Intonation suggests a question
!	Intonation suggests surprise
XXName	A proper name/company cannot be identified
haha	Laughter, continuous
Ha ha ha	Laughing marked/staccato (as in mocking)
Aha, ah, uhm	Acknowledgements and backchannel markers
Tz	Clicking sounds
<u>underline</u>	Stated with emphasis
:	Longer sound
↑↓	Rising/falling intonation
/ /	Interrupted turn (beginning/end)

Appendix II Ethics Approval

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

26th June 2008

Ms. Victoria Grossi
6 Bolwarra Street
Chadstone 3148
Victoria

Reference: 30MAY2008- D05867

Dear Ms. Grossi

Final Approval

Title of project: "Second Language speakers in the workplace"

The above application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). Approval of the above application is granted, effective 26th June' 2008 and you may now proceed with your research.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. Approval will be for a period of twelve (12) months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are required to submit a Final Report on the project. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. The Final Report is available at: http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms
2. However, at the end of the 12 month period if the project is still current you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval if the project has run for less than five (5) years. This form is available at http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report (see Point 1 above) and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
3. Please remember the Committee must be notified of any alteration to the project.
4. You must notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/policy

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN REBEARCH)
LEVEL 3, RESEARCH HUB, BUILDING C5C
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
NSW, 2109 AUSTRALIA
Ethics Secretariat: Ph: (02) 9850 6848 Fax: (02) 9850 4465 E-mail: ethics.secretariat@vc.mq.edu.au

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it **is your responsibility** to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

Yours sincerely

p.p. **Dr Margaret Stuart**
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)

Cc: Professor Ingrid Piller, Linguistics, AMEP

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
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Appendix III – Information for Companies

Vittoria Grossi

Email: vittoria.grossi@students.mq.edu.au

Mobile: 0425 716 855

Position: PhD Candidate
Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre
(AMEP RC), Macquarie University NSW

*To read more about the **AMEP RC** go to:*
http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/

*For more information about **Professor Ingrid Piller**, the thesis supervisor, go to:*
http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/about_us/staff_list/ingrid_piller

Work Biography

I have worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in the government funded Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) since 2001. In that role, I have prepared teaching materials to specifically address the linguistic and cultural challenges that confront new migrants as they settle and integrate into the community and workplace. My students are at various language levels, ranging from beginners to advanced and are also from various vocational backgrounds such as finance, banking, IT, medicine and administration. In addition, I have worked as an ESL Teacher at Melbourne University teaching ESL and academic English skills to international students. Currently, I teach at Swinburne University of Technology/TAFE. In 2008 I was awarded a Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship and I am now working on a PhD thesis on spontaneous communication by second language speakers in the workplace.

Aim of the Thesis

This study will investigate aspects of cross-cultural communication in both work and non-work related talk in the workplace across a number of contexts, both formal and informal. The study will analyse some of the communication strategies that second language speakers use when requesting, greeting, thanking, complementing, criticizing, giving and receiving feedback or negotiating. The results will seek to inform teaching and curriculum writers to improve language training to newly arrived migrants.

Data Collection

In order to carry out the study I am seeking the participation of a company which has employees from English and non-English speaking backgrounds. The data will be collected using interview, questionnaire, observation and analysis of spoken interaction. For this purpose it will be necessary to record people speaking.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The study has been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Committee. The researcher is required to abide by a number of rules in order to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality of information.

For further information and a copy of the Human Ethics Application form see below:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/documents/Revised_Guidelines_v2_0207.pdf

Security Issues

If requested the researcher will:

- provide written personal and professional references
- obtain a police check prior to entering the company and meet the cost of this
- report on arrival and departure from the site
- wear a name badge while on site
- follow other rules if requested by the company

Appendix IV Written Consent Form

Written Consent Form for Individual Participants

Title of Project: Second Language Learners in the Workplace

You are invited to participate in a study of Spoken Interaction in the multilingual Workplace. The purpose of the study is to explore second language speakers in the workplace using work and non-work related talk.

This is a Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

The study is being conducted by Vittoria Grossi in fulfilment of a PhD in the AMEP Research Centre (RC), within the Linguistics Department of the above mentioned university. Prof Ingrid Piller, Director of AMEP RC is the supervisor. Contact details for further information are as follows:

Vittoria Grossi (researcher)	Ingrid Piller (supervisor)
Ph (03)98072710/0425716855	Ph (02)9850 9646
Email vittoria.grossi@students.mq.edu.au	Email ingrid.piller@mq.edu.au

If you decide to participate, the researcher will interview you and ask to follow you around your workplace to meetings, training sessions, coffee breaks, lunch and other events which take place around your office and listen to you talk on the telephone. The researcher may ask to audio record your interactions with other people with people in public places if you agree, for example a work function. No recordings will take place without prior permission being sought. Also, should you at a later date decide that an interaction should not form part of the data this will be excluded from analysis.

Interviews will initially be on a one-on-one basis by the researcher in a public place or your workplace. Later there may be group interviews. During interviews, the researcher will ask questions relating to English language training before and after arriving in Australia. The researcher will also ask about your experiences in finding work in Australia and your perceptions of your workplace. The interview will be audio recorded and the researcher may take

some notes. The interview will last for one hour or less at a time. You may be interviewed more than once.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. This is ensured by code names being used on all data records, analysis and publications. No individual will be identified or identifiable in any publication of the findings.

Digital audio recorded data will be downloaded as electronic files and stored on a password protected computer by the researcher. The researcher' home computer is also password-protected. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

You can request a review of any quotes that will be attributed to you by contacting the researcher on 98072710 or the supervisor on 9850 9646 and by their emails above.

If you wish to obtain a copy of the results or would like to ask any questions regarding the study please contact the researcher.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I ……(block letters) have read and understand the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I am aware that de-identified data may be made available for use by other researchers in the future. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Signature: _____Date:

Investigator's Name (block letters): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____Date:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799, email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix V Interview Questions

Spoken Interaction in the Workplace:

Interview Questionnaire

These are guidelines only. Other questions may be added or some omitted according to the participant's preparedness to add details and elaborate on questions asked.

Personal and Interview Information

name_____ date_____

place of interview_____ duration_____

consent form signed_____ agrees to further interviews_____

1. What work did you do in your home country?

2. What work have you done since arriving in Australia?

3. Did you learn English in your country? In what context? (English Centre, University)?

4. Have you do any English tests? (ISLPR, IELTS)

5. Have you studied English in Australia? In what context? (Language Centre, TAFE, AMEP or ELICOS)

6. Can you describe your experiences when looking for work in Australia? What was most difficult? How did you overcome these difficulties? Give any examples of difficulties you had and the cause of these.

7. What problems, if any, have you experienced when using English in the workplace?

8. Are you happy with the job you do now?

9. Are there any interactions in your job you find easier than others, for example meetings/giving presentations/talking to clients/talking to colleagues/talking to managers/talking as a manager? How do you overcome or cope with the more difficult areas?

10. What would you like to do in the future? What problems, if any, do you think you may have achieving these goals.

Appendix VI Participants

Table 1 Individual participants - Interview data only

Name	Country of origin and of arrival	Visa	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Number of Interviews/year
Felipe	2007/Mexico	Skilled Visa, PR	Business Analyst	2, 2009
Ricardo	2008/Peru	Skilled Visa, PR		2, 2009
Luz	2007/Mexico	Skilled Visa/PR	Business Analyst	1, 2009
Hectór	2007/Mexico	Skilled Visa, PR	Business Analyst	1, 2009
Antonio	2008/Argentina	Skilled Visa,PR	Sales	1, 2009
Jim	China	International Student, PR	Computer Science graduate	2, 2009/10
Patrick	India/	International Student, PR		1, 2009
Leon	China	International student, PR	Software designer	1, 2009
Nicolas	2007	Skilled visa, PR	Software engineer	3, 2009-10
Leon	China	International Student Visa/ PR	Software Designer	1, 2009

TABLE 2 Key Participants in the Companies

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings 4. Observation
Company 1: Its.IT				
Jeff	Australian		Computer Science	1,, 2, 4
Oscar	Lebanon background but grew up and live in Bahrain until he came to live in Australia	International Student/ PR	Work placement as part of his degree/then in current position/Internal Sales manager	1,, 2, 4
Company 2: SolutionsPlus				
Amir	2009	Skilled Visa, company sponsored /waiting for to PR		1,2,3,4
Jordan	South Africa			1,2,3,4
Guy	France	International Student/PR		1,2,3,4

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings 4. Observation
Gabriel	Venezuela	Skilled migrant visa /PR		1,2,3,4
Mac	NZ			2,4
Company 3: *Infocontact*				
Claire	China	International Student/skilled visa	Computer Science/Project Manager	1,2,3,4
Sophia	Italian/ Australian born		Manager	1,2,3,4
Mia	India		Certificate IV in Training	1,2,3,4
Rick	Australian		Manager	1, 2,4
Alan	Fijian, Chinese		Computer Science	1,2,3,4

TABLE 3 SECONDARY PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMPANIES

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings
Company 2: *SolutionsPlus*				
Secondary Participants: Gordon, Judy, John				
Anna	Lebanese parents	Australian born/ overseas experienc e		1,3
Manny	2007/ Venezuela	Skilled Visa, PR	Tertiary/network engineer	1
Andrew	At age 11/refugee from Vietnam	Refugee/ citizen	Tertiary/Network engineer/Team leader	1, 3
James	China			1
Bella	US	IT	Manager,	1,2,3
Vadim	Russia	Skilled visa now	Network engineer	1

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings
		PR		
James	Australian		Network engineer	
Oliver	Australian, visually impaired	NA		1
Kevin	China	International Student then PR		1
Jennifer	Chinese	International Student/PR	Network Engineer	1
Eddie		Skilled Visa/PR	Network Engineer	1
Tom	Malaysian	Skilled migrant	Network Engineer	1
Antonio	Australian born		Network Engineer	1
Myat	Burmese	Skilled	Network Engineer	1

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings
		migrant		
	Lebanese parents	Australian born/	Network Engineer	1
Paul	Indonesia	International Student Visa/ PR	Network Engineer/Manager	1
Luciano	Argentina	Skilled Visa, company sponsored/PR	Network Engineer /Manager	1
Henry	China	Skilled Visa, company sponsored/PR	Manager	1
Francine	Australian		Manager	1
Kaveh	Iran	International		1

Participant Name	Country of Origin	VISA	Professional Qualifications Position/background	Type of data 1 =Interview 2 = Peer Interaction 3. meetings
		student/PR		
Caleb	India	NA	Network engineer/Manager	1,2
Louis	China	Skilled Visa	Network Engineer	
Dominick	Australian			
Eric	UK	Skilled Visa	Network engineer	
Company 3: *Infocontact*				
Alex	Vietnam	Refugee	Computer Science	1
Bill	China	Migrant (family)	Computer Science	1,2
Tony	Australian		NA	2,
Cecilia	Australian	NS	Manager	1,3

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