



TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

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NAVIGATING WORKPLACE INTERACTION WITH MULTICULTURAL COLLEAGUES

How often have you called the toll free number of a large organization or service company whose help you need, only to be connected to a customer service employee whose English you cannot understand?

We can all relate to similar difficult experiences that in time will be a thing of the past, thanks to (1) the research and teachings of ESL (English as a Second Language) professionals in occupation-specific language training, and (2) enhancements of language proficiencies and assessments for adult immigrants in Canada.

A recent research study by [Tracey Derwing](#), Professor Emerita University of Alberta, reveals that the comprehensible speech of selected immigrant employees who had been in Canada for about 20 years was limited and difficult to understand by native English-speaking colleagues. Although the immigrants had received English language training, none had had pronunciation instruction before. Following a remedial pronunciation course, they became easier to understand and more intelligible.

Dr. Derwing recommends LINC (Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada) programs should include pronunciation at the outset and believes it is never too late to improve someone's communicative skills. She also advocates for intercultural communication workshops for Canadian-born workers who could take some responsibility in assisting their immigrant colleagues with pronunciation. Dr. Derwing makes the point to employers: "Communication breakdowns cost time and money. So why not pay a little more up front to save time and money later? "

Recommendations of other ESL research studies in the workplace have been made for higher standards of readiness in both language training as well as in the workplace-specific culture. And another study demonstrates how the relationships among program developers, testers and workplace executives are key to the support and success of language training in an organization.

These studies were presented at the 16th Annual [Research Symposium on ESL in the Workplace](#), a segment of TESL Ontario's [annual conference](#) November 12-13, 2015 at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto. Other sessions related to ESL in the workplace were among the 100-plus presentations taking place here. One presenter, for example, discussed the importance of "**Cultural Intelligence**" as being an essential skill for employees to be able to adapt their cultural points of view in our increasingly multicultural society. Another discussed "**Top 10 Secrets on How to Succeed in Canada**" - several unwritten rules for success in Canadian workplaces as well as socially and in schools.

More than 700 language training professionals from public and private sectors as well as academics, researchers and government representatives participated in not only the research symposia, but also [interactive workshops](#), technology labs, keynotes and other presentations at the largest conference of its kind during [ESL Week](#), November 8 -14, 2015 in celebration of [ESL education and learning](#) opportunities across Ontario.

[TESL Ontario](#), established in 1972, is a non-profit organization serving the needs of teachers of English as a Second Language. It represents more than 4,600 language training professionals and is instrumental in influencing the success of many thousands of English language learners throughout the province. TESL Ontario's expertise is in teaching, advocacy, accreditation, and professional development.

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