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**IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE  
OF ONE NEW ZEALAND COMMUNITY  
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

A thesis completed in  
fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in Second Language Teaching  
at Massey University  
Palmerston North

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1999

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates one New Zealand community as an English language learning environment for NESB immigrants. Formal and informal sources of English are identified, and the degree to which the immigrants are able to access them. Immigrant perceptions of ideal language learning situations are investigated, as are perceived links between English language acquisition and success in gaining employment.

The relative importance of different sources of English, and critical events impacting on the development of English language skills, is investigated by means of individual interviews followed by discussion sessions. Immigrants are also asked to indicate barriers which they have encountered in their efforts to become part of an English-speaking community, and their responses to such barriers.

Results indicate that there is a considerable gap between immigrant perception of the community before arrival, and actual experience after arrival. There is a strong belief among immigrants that interaction with native speakers is the most effective means of acquiring both English and a knowledge of local ways. There is also a belief that lack of relevant information, coupled with unhelpful government policies, are major factors contributing to language and employment difficulties. Other barriers indicated by the immigrants include the high cost of formal English and other courses, the lack of bridges to help professionals re-enter their fields of expertise, and the difficulty of interacting with native speakers on a more than superficial level. The difficulties of maintaining a

balance between second language acquisition and first language maintenance are also investigated.

The thesis concludes with a tentative model of what are seen to be *vital* and *important* factors in successful language acquisition. A number of avenues for further research are suggested, including investigation into the barriers which prevent “outsiders” from becoming accepted as “insiders” within a community. The study highlights the importance of defining and implementing fair government and organizational policies, and stresses the need to research and set in place measures to prevent the unnecessary sacrifice of first-generation immigrants.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Cynthia White and Dr Margaret Franken for their encouragement and advice, both when the topic for this thesis was under discussion, and during the course of the research. I would especially like to thank Dr White for her guidance, hospitality, and unfailing support.

I am also very grateful to Gillian Skyrme for giving me the benefit of her expertise, and for helping me to meet many of the immigrants who became part of this study. I owe a great debt of thanks to these immigrants. They were willing to share their experiences and beliefs with me in the hope that, by increasing understanding of their situation, they might help others facing similar challenges.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, and especially my husband, for their interest and support. Through my husband I have gained some understanding of the world of a refugee, and knowledge of many of the facets of an immigrant's life.

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