

**The Role of Language Assessment for Immigration Purposes: The Case of Chinese
Immigrants in Canada**

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Abstract

Through this study, I aimed to understand how Chinese immigrants make sense of their experiences with English language testing in the Canadian immigration system. To this end, I first examined the rationales and discourses that shape Canadian immigration policy, particularly those related to language requirements. I then explored how Chinese immigrants perceive and interact with language tests, and how these experiences shape their choices, emotions, and sense of belonging in Canada. By placing these two strands of analysis in dialogue, the study revealed how official framings of language both constrain and are contested by immigrant voices. Drawing on a poststructuralist orientation, the study was guided by policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) for the analysis of policy and media documents, and the findings were also viewed through the lens of the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to interpret participant data. I adopted a qualitative methodology that foregrounded participants' voices. Participants took part in focus group discussions and collaborative co-analysis sessions. Rather than treating participants solely as data sources, I invited them to contribute as co-researchers, prioritizing their interpretations and amplifying their perspectives on language, identity, and belonging.

Document and media data analysis revealed policy trends that emphasize language as a measure of economic potential and cultural fit, often under the guise of fairness and meritocracy. These discourses reflect neoliberal narratives that privilege “ideal immigrants” who can demonstrate both productivity and adaptability through language scores. Themes from focus

group data were organized primarily according to three dimensions of the model of investment—identity, ideology, and capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Themes related to identity revealed tensions between external perceptions and participants' internal sense of self, shaped by their migration histories and cultural background. Themes related to ideology reflected how participants engaged with dominant discourses of legitimacy, often navigating contradictions between policy expectations and lived realities. Themes related to capital illuminated how participants' linguistic, cultural, and symbolic resources were recognized, devalued, or transformed through the immigration process. Cross-cutting themes included reflections on fairness, emotional labor, and systemic exclusion.

The findings contribute to the growing literature on language testing and migration by centering immigrants' perspectives and offering a critical account of how assessment practices shape social inclusion and exclusion in Canada.

Keywords: language assessment; immigration policy; language testing; Chinese immigrants; co-analysis; policy archeology, model of investment

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Dedication

献给妈妈、爸爸和奶奶，

谢谢你们让我无论何时都有枝可依，有家可回。愿你们身体康健、快快乐乐。

献给爷爷，愿你在彼岸安好。你走后，我学会了如何在想念里继续生活。

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虽然你们离开得早，但你们给了我一个独立而坚强的妈妈。

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感谢你在我摇摇欲坠的每一刻里抓住我，护住我。

献给我人生中所有的猫儿们——

小小欢、小阿欢、闹闹、捣捣、小太、赖咋、獸哥、喵子、Momo，以及 Pinga。

谢谢你们教会我如何去爱、如何被爱，如何在混乱与崩溃之间，保持柔软。

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgement	iv
Dedication	vi
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Current trends in Chinese emigration and Canadian immigration	4
1.3 Early immigration policies: from exclusive to somewhat inclusive	6
1.3.1 The point-based systems	8
1.4 Language requirements in Canadian immigration	15
1.4.1 The tests	16
1.5 Preliminary identification of key issues in language assessment for Canadian immigration	18
1.6 My approach and positionality to research	20
1.7 Thesis overview	22
Chapter 2 Literature Review	24
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2. Global trends in immigration policy and standardized assessment	25
2.2.1 Overview of international immigration policies	25
2.2.2 Standardized assessments in immigration policy	27
2.3 From liberalism to neoliberalism in Canadian immigration policy	28
2.3.1 From liberal foundations to neoliberal restructuring	28
2.3.2 Neoliberalism in contemporary immigration policy	30
2.3.3 Canadian national narratives and “ideal immigrants”	33
2.3.4 Canadian multiculturalism: from liberal ideal to neoliberal instrument	35
2.4 Language testing in immigration: hidden agendas and invisible borders	37
2.4.1 Framing the debate: hidden agendas and invisible borders	37
2.4.2 The gatekeeping role of language tests	38
2.4.3 Language testing and policy rationales: what is explicit and what is not	39

2.4.4 Creating invisible borders through assessment	40
2.4.5 Language testing within a regime of truth.....	42
2.4.6 Limitations of existing validation frameworks for language tests in immigration	43
2.5 Chapter summary.....	45
Chapter 3 Conceptual Frameworks.....	47
3.1 Introduction	47
3.2 A poststructuralist approach to language assessment	48
3.2.1 Understanding language as constitutive of reality.....	50
3.2.2 Discourse, Power, and Knowledge	51
3.2.3 Subjectivity and identity construction	52
3.2.4 Poststructuralism in practice: connecting to language assessment for immigration	54
3.2.5 From problematization to control: language assessment as governance.....	55
3.2.6 Centering immigrant perspectives	57
3.3 Framing the study: policy archaeology and the model of investment	59
3.3.1 Policy archaeology as a theoretical framework	60
3.3.2 Policy archaeology as a methodological framework.....	61
3.3.3 The model of investment as a complementary interpretive lens	62
3.4 Research questions	65
3.5 Chapter summary.....	65
Chapter 4 Research methods.....	67
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Overview of the study design	68
4.3 Phase 1: Document analysis.....	73
4.3.1 Methodological rationale.....	73
4.3.2 Data collection	73
4.3.3 Data analysis	75
4.4 Phase 2: Focus groups.....	77
4.4.1 Methodological rationale.....	77
4.4.2 Data generation.....	78
4.4.3 Preliminary thematic analysis	83
4.5 Phase 3: Co-analysis sessions.....	85
4.5.1 Methodological rationale.....	85
4.5.2 Procedure and session design.....	86

4.5.3 Collaborative data analysis.....	89
4.6 Ethical considerations and trustworthiness	91
4.6 Chapter summary	93
Chapter 5 Research findings: policy discourses and immigrant perspectives	95
5.1 Introduction	95
5.2 Part 1: Document analysis results	96
5.2.1 Economic justification: language as a tool for workforce integration.....	97
5.2.2 National identity discourse: language as a measure of belonging.....	99
5.2.3 Deficit framing: constructing immigrants as lacking adequate language skills.....	101
5.2.4 Cultural othering: framing non-English speakers as outsiders.....	103
5.2.5 Summary of Part 1: Document analysis results	105
5.3 Part 2: Immigrants' lived experiences (Focus groups & comments made during the co-analysis sessions).....	108
5.3.1 From document analysis to dialogue: focus group questions.....	109
5.3.2 Refined themes from co-analysis	110
5.3.2.1 English or French necessity for survival or advancement in Canada (Theme 1)	113
5.3.2.2 Strategic decision-making in the immigration process (Theme 2)	116
5.3.2.3 English on test vs. English in daily life in Canada (Theme 3).....	118
5.3.2.4 Perceptions towards English language tests (Theme 5)	122
5.3.2.5 Participants' testing history and feelings taking the test (Theme 6)	124
5.3.2.6 Micro strategies for test preparation (Theme 10)	127
5.3.2.7 Policy understanding and commentary (Theme 4).....	129
5.3.2.8 Chinese immigrants' perceptions of how Canadians view them (Theme 8)	130
5.3.2.9 The discussion of the experiences and attitudes with other immigrants/refugees groups (Theme 9)	131
5.3.2.10 Critique of Canadian values and culture and the underlying construction of policy (Theme 11)	134
5.3.2.11 Comments on integration and integration efforts (Theme 7)	137
5.3.2.12 Self-identity within a multicultural context (Theme 12).....	141
5.3.2.13 Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits (Theme 13)	144
5.3.3 Group dynamics of focus group discussion.....	148
5.3.4 Summary of Part 2	150

5.4 Chapter summary.....	150
Chapter 6: Discussion.....	152
6.1 Introduction	152
6.2 Part I: Policy-level interpretation and discussion	153
6.3 Part II: Discussion of focus group results	158
6.3.1 Identity: the struggle between positioning and desire.....	160
6.3.2 Ideology: the negotiation between dominant values and lived realities.....	164
6.3.3 Capital: from inherited assets to recognized value.....	169
6.3.4 Beyond the framework: language, testing, and everyday tensions.....	174
6.3.5 Summary	177
6.4 Chapter summary.....	180
Chapter 7 Conclusion	182
7.1 Summary of key findings.....	182
7.2 Implications for research, policy, and practice.....	185
7.3 Reflections on challenges, limitations, and insider positioning	188
7.4 Future directions	192
7.5 Final reflections.....	194
References.....	196
Appendix A Certificate of Ethics Approval	212
Appendix B Full Scale of CLB Levels	214
Appendix C The Full List of Documents Analyzed	215
Appendix D List of contact points for Chinese immigrants in Toronto and Ottawa	219
Appendix E Initial Contact Email to the Contact People (English version).....	220
Appendix F Recruitment letter (English version)	222
Appendix G Consent Form for Focus Group (English version)	225
Appendix H Short questionnaire for demographic information (English version).....	230
Appendix I Focus group protocol	235
Appendix J Consent Form for Co-Analysis (English version)	238
Appendix K Co-analysis protocol.....	243

List of Tables

Table 1 Document data	74
Table 2 Summary of focus group participant characteristics	79
Table 3 Focus groups schedule and duration	81
Table 4 Example of coding focus group data into a theme	84
Table 5 Co-analysis sessions schedule and duration	89
Table 6 Framing of immigrants' language ability as a policy issue in government and media discourses and related focus group questions.....	106
Table 7 Comparison of original and refined themes using co-analysis	111
Table 8 The four main discourses from document analysis	154

List of Figures

Figure 1 Projected immigration categories in Canada’s 2023–2025 Immigration Levels Plan (adapted from IRCC, 2022).	5
Figure 2 Canadian Express Entry System and the eligibilities for its three programs	9
Figure 3 Example of Points Accumulation in the Canadian PR Application Process (Canadian Experience Class)	14
Figure 4 Timeline of research activities	71
Figure 5 Flowchart of study design	72
Figure 6 Theme distribution for co-analysis sessions	88
Figure 7 The Circular Logic of Canadian Immigration Language Policy.....	157
Figure 8 Themes positioned within the Model of Investment (adapted from Darwin & Norton, 2015)... ..	178

Chapter 1 Introduction

走出去的人，應當發出自己的聲音。池骋 (2024)。

Pas seulement un travailleur, un immigré est avant tout un être humain (Not just a worker – an immigrant is above all a human being). DeGama (n.d.).

1.1 Introduction

In Canada's immigration system, language assessment functions as a critical gatekeeper. English and French proficiency tests are often used to determine whether potential immigrants meet eligibility requirements. While these tests aim to measure a person's language ability for settlement, the growing reliance on language assessment to select immigrants has raised significant concerns, especially when test scores are used to exclude applicants whose language skills may in fact be adequate.

In this study, I seek to critically examine the role of language assessments within Canada's immigration system, through document data analysis, focus group discussions, and co-analysis sessions. Document analysis will focus on examining policy documents, government reports, and relevant articles from newspapers to understand the explicit and implicit narratives embedded within these assessments. Subsequently, test-takers' lived experiences and perspectives will be brought forward with focus group discussions. Finally, their voices will be amplified with inclusion in co-analysis sessions, where my participants and I examine the focus group data as co-researchers, providing a nuanced understanding of how language assessments impact their immigration journeys.

The language tests used for immigration are designed to measure how well test-takers can use a language in everyday or professional settings. The results of these tests provide a snapshot of their language proficiency. However, within Canada's immigration system, these tests have come to serve purposes that extend far beyond language measurement. Test scores are tied to a point-based selection system, where they are combined with factors like age, education, and work experience to assess a person's ability to integrate into Canadian society. In this dissertation, I will first explore how the results of these tests are no longer just about language proficiency as they become a predictor of how well a person might adapt to life in Canada. I will then examine in depth how this approach of using language tests scores as a proxy for integration potential is logically flawed for two reasons. First, these language tests were never designed to predict how well someone will adapt to life in a new country. Their primary purpose is to assess language skills, not to measure broader qualities like adaptability or success. Second, the assumption that language proficiency level directly correlates with adaptability is as well questionable.

These issues raise critical questions about test fairness and test validity. Are language assessments being used for purposes they were never intended to serve, such as excluding otherwise qualified immigration candidates? Do they truly reflect the language abilities and potential of immigrants? Are the levels of language proficiency required fair and necessary for immigrants? These questions also highlight deeper issues about how language proficiency is interpreted and valued in immigration policies in Canada. For immigrants, the stakes of these tests are incredibly high as the scores can determine their future lives. Although there have been test validation frameworks in language assessment that include considerations of social consequences, these frameworks often fail to align with how language tests are applied in

immigration contexts since language tests seem to serve multiple functions beyond their intended scope.

I seek to understand the precise role of language tests in Canadian immigration system, including their explicit purposes and the possible unintended consequences. By analyzing immigration policy documents and amplifying the voices of immigrants themselves to the largest extent possible. By exploring and revealing the inconsistency between the intended purpose and actual use of language tests in immigration, I use this study to highlight the need for policy reform. Specifically, I seek to bring immigrant perspectives to the forefront, questioning the fairness and inclusivity of current practices and advocating for a more comprehensive approach to study language tests for immigration that recognizes the complexity of language proficiency and the symbolic power of language in the context of immigration.

This introduction begins with a review of the current trends of Chinese immigration in Canada, followed by a historical review of Canadian immigration policies, highlighting the shift from racially exclusionary measures to the introduction of the points-based system and the subsequent creation of the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS). Subsequently, The English language tests that are designated for use in these systems—IELTS, CELPIP, and PTE Core—are introduced. The problems associated with language test use in this system and their impact on immigrants are also discussed, particularly with regard to how they affect the accessibility to citizenship and opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the contents of the following chapters.

1.2 Current trends in Chinese emigration and Canadian immigration

In the past decade, China has experienced a substantial outflow of citizens driven by a mix of economic, political, and social factors. Although China does not publish official emigration data, figures compiled by alternative sources show a net migration of –318,992 people in 2024 (Macrotrends, 2024). With an estimated population of 1.419 billion, this corresponds to a net migration rate of approximately –0.225 per 1,000 population. In particular, high-net-worth-individuals (HNWIs) have left China in increasing numbers, with an anticipated net exit of 15,200 HNWIs (compared to 13,800 in 2023). The major destinations for Chinese HNWIs are the United States, Canada, and Australia (Henley & Partners, 2023).

As one of the targeted immigrant countries, Canada has one of the highest per-capita immigration rates globally and topped the G7 with 23% of its population being immigrants in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Canada has a Chinese immigrant population exceeding 1.7 million, representing 4.7% of the total population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023). In addition, though immigration policy has been changing constantly, in its 2023–2025 Immigration Levels Plan, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) outlined targets of 1.45 million new permanent residents over the three-year period (IRCC, 2023). As the second largest immigrant group in Canada, Chinese immigrants play an important role in the fabric of Canadian society. While some of these new permanent residents will gain their status through family reunification (338,500), refugee resettlement (225,170), or humanitarian and compassionate reasons (37,735), the majority will come through Canada’s economic immigration streams (848,595), which represents 58% of the total population of new immigrants between 2023 and 2025 (IRCC, 2022; see Figure 1). Those coming through economic streams will need to meet Canada’s English- (or French-) language proficiency requirements for their specific program.

These requirements are embedded in a point-system developed through immigration policies that have been evolving over several decades.

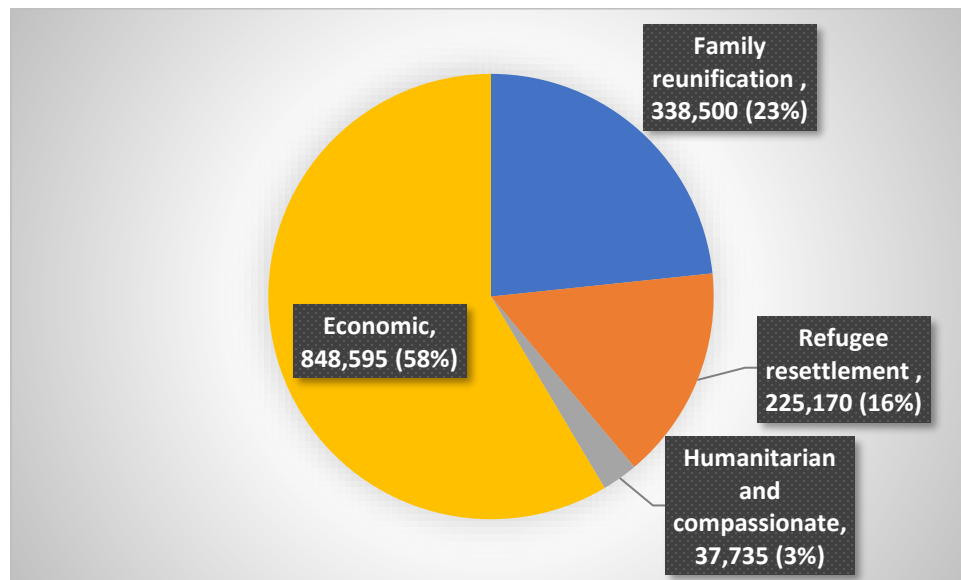


Figure 1 *Projected immigration categories in Canada's 2023–2025 Immigration Levels Plan (adapted from IRCC, 2022).*

In the current era of globalization, Canada stands as one of the top 10 countries with the highest number of immigrants (World Population Review, 2024) and is well known for its multiculturalism and inclusive immigration policy. Canada's immigration system has undergone significant transformations over the past century, from exclusionary policies aimed at preserving a European settler society to somewhat inclusive frameworks that prioritise economic potential and multiculturalism. In this transformation, language proficiency has become a key factor, and one of the primary tools to determine whether immigrants are fit for permanent residency and citizenship.

1.3 Early immigration policies: from exclusive to somewhat inclusive

The history of Canadian immigration policy has had a clear transition from having an exclusionary approach to having more inclusive and merit-based approaches. In the 19th century, Canada's immigration policy was heavily influenced by its colonial ties, welcoming mostly European white immigrants. The first *Immigration Act* was passed in 1869, which specifically discriminated against people based on their class and disability (Dirks, 2024). Later on, Canadian immigration policy had more explicit racial and ethnic preferences. That is, the government enacted policies that gave preferential treatment to immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, as people from these regions were considered more culturally and racially compatible with local residents. Immigrants from other parts of the world, especially China, India, and Japan, were severely discriminated against. For instance, the *Chinese Immigration Act of 1885* included explicit racist measures like a head tax to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants. The *Act* was amended in 1923 to prohibit Chinese immigrants' entry altogether. Another example of overt discrimination was the regulation in 1908 to limit the number of immigrants from India by requiring them to travel via a direct, non-stop journey, which was almost impossible to achieve given the transportation situation back then. These policies were considered part of a broader attempt to maintain Canada's "British character" (Resnick, 2005).

After World War I, amendments in 1919 represented a shift of Canadian immigration policy based on national security and political concerns. For instance, immigrants from "Enemy Aliens," such as Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians, were restricted from entering. More restrictive policies were also implemented based on immigrants' ideology such as whether they are judged to be anarchists or Bolsheviks, or on their religious and/or ideological affiliations such as Communist, Mennonite, and Doukhobor (Backhouse, 1999).

After World War II, with the influence of human rights movements, Canadian immigration policy started to shift from explicitly discriminatory towards prioritizing economic growth (Basok, 2009). In 1962, Ellen Fairclough, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, introduced new immigration regulations that eliminated overt racial discrimination. In 1967, a point-based system was introduced to create a more objective and transparent means to select immigrants. That is, instead of discriminating on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other personal factors, applicants were awarded points based on their age, education level, work experience, language proficiency, and whether they have relatives in Canada. This seemingly neutral system was, therefore, a pivotal moment in the evolution of Canadian immigration policy (Green & Green, 1999). I will introduce the point system in detail in the following sections.

A series of relevant policy documents were then introduced from 1970s to 1980s to inform immigration. In 1976, the liberal government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced the *Canadian Multiculturalism Policy* (Trudeau, 1971), which was the first of its kind in the world. Canada became the first country that officially promoted cultural diversity and valued a variety of cultural identities. In line with these principles, the *Immigration Act 1976* brought a more structured and fair immigration framework. It clarified that Canada's immigration policy emphasized human rights and was no longer discriminatory. At the same time, it provided a detailed categorization of immigrants, including family reunion applicants, refugees and independent applicants. Later, the *Multiculturalism Act 1988* enshrined these commitments in law with the explicit intention to guarantee the political participation and cultural expression of all Canadians (Kymlicka, 2007).

Together, these documents have helped Canada move from an exclusive immigration framework to one that is somewhat inclusive. Two systems to process immigrant applications were developed at that time and continue to be used: the point-based system for the Federal Skilled Worker Program, and the Comprehensive Ranking System for the Express Entry program. In the following section, I will describe these systems in greater detail.

1.3.1 The point-based systems

In 1967, Canada became the first country in the world to implement a point-based approach in immigration policy. Applicants were evaluated based on age, language proficiency, education, work experience, and adaptability. This model has since been recognized for its fairness and transparency, influencing countries like Australia and New Zealand to adopt similar frameworks. Over the decades, while the point system has undergone considerable changes, its foundational role in Canadian immigration policy remains intact today.

In 2015, the federal government launched the Express Entry (EE) system to streamline the selection of economic immigrants and better respond to labour market and regional needs (IRCC, 2020a). The EE system (see figure 2) is the central platform used to manage three major economic immigration programs: the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), and the Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP). A point system—the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS)—evaluates and ranks eligible candidates across these programs¹.

¹ In addition to the federal system, some provinces and territories in Canada also operate their own point-based selection programs tailored to local needs. For example, Ontario runs the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP), which targets immigrants who are more likely to settle and contribute to the province. While the specific criteria and program structures may vary, the underlying rationale behind these systems is largely consistent across jurisdictions.

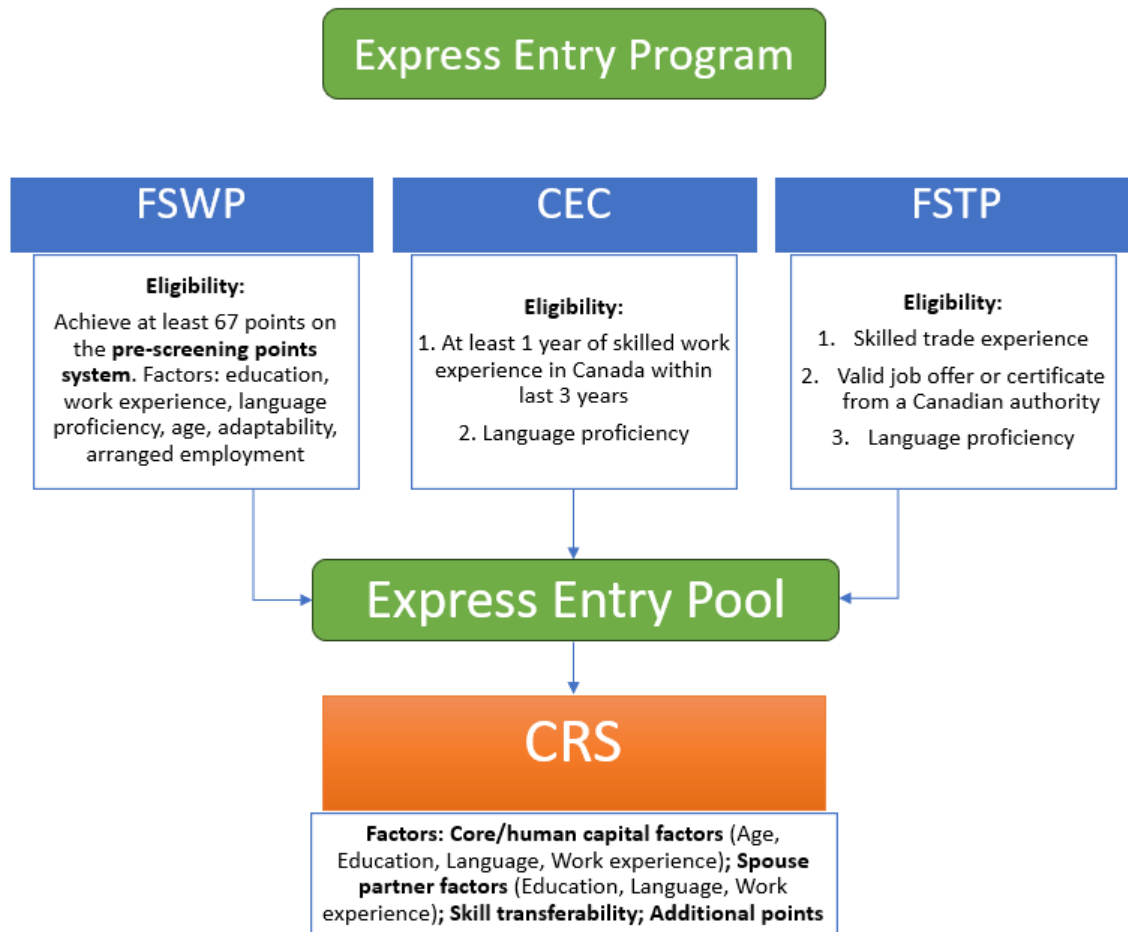


Figure 2 Canadian Express Entry System and the eligibilities for its three programs

Among the three programs, FSWP is the only one with its own preliminary point system. Applicants must first score at least 67 points out of 100 based on fixed criteria to be eligible to enter the EE pool. Once in the pool, all candidates, regardless of stream, are assessed using the CRS. Figure 2 illustrates the structure and the two-stage process of Canadian Express Entry System and the eligibilities for its three programs.

In the following sections, I first introduce the FSWP point system in detail, followed by an overview of the CRS.

As previously mentioned, the FSWP uses point-based preliminary screening tool for immigrants seeking to enter the pool for permanent residency. The key selection criteria in the FSWP are listed below:

- **Age:** Younger applicants are awarded higher points, with those between 18 and 35 receiving the maximum. Applicants under 18 or over 47 do not receive any points for this factor.
- **Language proficiency:** Proficiency in one or both of Canada's official languages is a crucial factor in the points system, as it carries the highest possible weight among all factors. Applicants must demonstrate their language proficiency by taking a standardized test. Currently, three English tests and two French tests are accepted (IRCC, 2024)
 - For English
 - the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
 - the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program (CELPIP) test
 - the Pearson Test of English (PTE Core)²
 - For French
 - Test d'évaluation de français (TEF)
 - Test de connaissance du français (TCF)

There are minimum accepted scores required for different immigration streams, but typically, the higher the language test score is, the higher points one can achieve.

² The Pearson Test of English Core (PTE Core) was officially accepted by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in January 2024 as the third designated English language test for economic immigration. However, as data collection and generation for this study was completed prior to its implementation, the PTE Core is not included in the scope of this dissertation.

- **Education:** Points are awarded based on the highest level of education applicants have received. Degrees obtained in Canada are favored and typically receive more points than those earned overseas. Higher levels of education result in higher points.
- **Work experience:** Points are awarded based on the number of years of work experience an applicant has. Canadian work experience is prioritized and typically receives more points than overseas experience. Applicants with six or more years of work experience earn the maximum points for this factor.
- **Adaptability:** While language proficiency, work, or study experience are evaluated individually in other categories, the adaptability factor focuses on how these elements, along with personal ties, combine to contribute to an applicant's overall potential to settle successfully in Canada. For instance, the assumption is having both Canadian work experience and strong language skills demonstrates a higher likelihood of successful integration, and thus earns extra points in this category. Similarly, applicants who have been studying in Canada and have close family ties in Canada may receive additional points, as these connections can provide social support deemed crucial for adaptation.
- **Job offer:** A valid job offer from a Canadian employer will also boost applicants' point totals, especially when the job is categorized as a high demand occupation³.

Those who meet the minimum cutoff score of 67 are eligible to submit a profile to the Express Entry pool. Once the applicants from either of the three programs have entered the EE pool, CRS is used to rank applicants by assigning them scores based on four different dimensions:

³ In practice, however, obtaining a “valid” job offer depends on employers’ willingness to provide formal documentation, introducing an additional structural barrier that is not evenly experienced by all applicants.

- ***Core human capital (and spouse) factors (up to 500 points)***: this includes age, level of education, official language proficiency, and Canadian work experience. It functions similar to the point system used for the FSWP; that is, younger applicants with a higher education level and language proficiency are awarded higher scores. However, applicants with a spouse or common-law partner are allocated slightly fewer points for their own core human capital factors compared to single applicants. This means that for married couples, some points are transferred to the spouse's credentials. If the spouse has strong qualifications in areas such as education or language proficiency, the couple's overall score increases. Conversely, if the spouse's qualifications are weak, the principal applicant's total score will be lower than if she or he had applied alone⁴.
- ***Skills transferability factors (up to 100 points)***: This category rewards applicants for the combination of factors that are perceived to enhance their ability to succeed in Canada. It is similar to the *Adaptability* factor in the FSWP calculation, but focuses specifically on how different elements complement each other. For instance, applicants with a higher education level, strong language skills, and Canadian work experience at the same time are awarded additional points. In this sense, this factor acts as a kind of 'bonus points' category, recognizing the added value of overlapping qualifications.

⁴ I was unable to locate any official document from IRCC that provides or discusses the specific rationale for this design, as most publicly available sources only include point allocations without detailed explanations. I assume that the system is structured to evaluate the potential economic contribution of the couple as a unit rather than the principal applicant alone. This design likely reflects the assumption that if a spouse has weaker qualifications (e.g., lower education or language proficiency), the couple's overall ability to contribute economically may be reduced, while they would still both be eligible for shared social benefits. As a result, the system lowers the points awarded to the principal applicant to reflect this perceived balance between social contribution and social cost.

- ***Additional factors (up to 600 points)***: points will be given to applicants who have provincial nomination, a valid job offer, proficiency in both first and second official languages, or previous work or study experience in Canada.

It is not difficult to see that IRCC has adopted a set of truly complex systems to evaluate and select immigrants. Applicants are screened to get into the EE pool, then ranked based on CRS scores. IRCC then conducts regular draws (typically every two weeks) to invite candidates with the highest scores to apply for permanent residency. Instead of drawing a fixed minimum score that represents the quality of immigrants needed in the labour market in Canada, the minimum score required to receive the invitation varies based on the number of candidates in the pool, their scores, and the immigration target sets by the Canadian government (IRCC, 2025). That means the same applicant might have a high enough score to be selected in one month, but the same score might not be enough to be selected in another month. In other words, the applicants are not evaluated based on their own abilities but are forced to compete with other candidates in the pool.

Although the CRS is praised for selecting candidates efficiently, researchers argue that the heavy emphasis on language proficiency and youth may overlook the value of experience and other non-measurable qualities that immigrants can bring to Canada (Bauder, 2013; Boyd et al., 2009). We can review an example case here in the Canadian Experience Class (see Figure 3). Consider the scenario of applying for permanent residency (PR) in Canada as a single individual aged between 20-29, which awards you 110 points. Suppose you hold a master's degree and have achieved a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) 9 for English proficiency, equivalent to IELTS scores of 8,7,7,7—a much higher than necessary level for university study, for example. This language proficiency, coupled with an A-level job such as a financial manager, earns you an

additional 50 points in Adaptability. If you have worked as a financial manager for a year, that adds another 40 points in work experience. We will also assume you have foreign work experience (although realistically, accumulating a master's degree, a year of management experience, and foreign work experience in your 20s might stretch credulity). Your cumulative score now stands at an impressive 497, yet the current cutoff score to receive an invitation for PR at the time of writing is 539.

Point factors	Points earned
Single	
Age: 20-29	110 ★
Education: Master's degree	135
Language: CLB 9 (8.0 Listening, 7.0 Reading, Writing, & Speaking)	124
Transferability	50 ★
Canadian work experience : 1 year (A level job)	40
Foreign work experience: Yes	50 ★
Total score	497
Latest cut off score	539

Figure 3 Example of Points Accumulation in the Canadian PR Application Process (Canadian Experience Class)

The stars in the figure represent the maximum points has been attained in those categories. What could be your options if you found yourself in this position? Pursuing a PhD or gaining more work experience? They both come with the risk of losing points due to age. The only feasible option is to improve your language test results and achieve a score that is higher than IELTS 8,7,7,7. This means you are forced to attempt to get a score that may represent way

more than what is needed to live or to be successful in Canada. In the next section, I will discuss language assessment requirements in the Canadian immigration context in more detail.

1.4 Language requirements in Canadian immigration

According to *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (2002), a skilled worker must demonstrate their abilities in either English or French to fulfill the language requirement, through one of the designated tests listed above. These test scores are aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)⁵ framework of reference for English or its French equivalent, the Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC) (see Appendix B for the full scale of ability). Both CLB and NCLC frameworks are used to measure four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The CLB/NCLC levels range from 1 to 12, with higher levels indicating higher proficiency. Applicants are awarded points based on their language test results according to CRS. As previously discussed, this language test score is combined with other elements. For example, high language test scores can increase points for “skill transferability” when combined with a higher level of education or Canadian work experience. To be more specific, using the Canadian Experience Class as an example again, if applicants already have a post-secondary degree/Canadian work experience/foreign work experience, the ones who achieve CLB 8 in language tests could receive 92 points on the language components and 25 points in skill transferability factor, while applicants who achieve CLB 9 could earn 124 points on the language component plus 50 points on the skill transferability factor (the top score). Applicants who achieve CLB 10 receive 136 points for the language component, while the skill transferability factor is still capped at a maximum of 50 points. Put simply, applicants can

⁵ There are three stages in the CLB. Stage I covers basic language ability (benchmarks 1 to 4). Stage II covers intermediate language ability (benchmarks 5 to 8). Stage III covers advanced language ability (benchmarks 9 to 12).

certainly aim for CLB 10 or above, but CLB 9 or IELTS 8,7,7,7 is the most cost-effective score. It is widely understood that IELTS 8,7,7,7 is not easy to achieve even for English native speakers (IDP IELTS, 2024).

1.4.1 The tests

While both English and French proficiency tests are part of Canada's immigration system, I will focus exclusively on English language tests in this study. English is the dominant language in most Canadian provinces and is most commonly used for the majority of immigration streams. The exclusion of French tests is not meant to diminish their significance but reflects the scope and specific objectives of this study.

As previously mentioned, IRCC designates three English tests for Canadian immigration purposes: IELTS General, CELPIP General, and PTE core. This study does not intend to conduct detailed test reviews of each test⁶. Instead, I will provide a brief introduction to these tests to facilitate a general understanding of this project.

The IELTS is one of the most widely used English language proficiency tests around the world and has two versions: IELTS General and IELTS Academic (Read, 2022). For immigration purposes in Canada, the IELTS General is required. It was developed in 1989 through a collaboration between several major organizations: The British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge English Language Assessment (formerly known as UCLES, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate). It is used by multiple countries in their immigration process in addition to Canada, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Test scores are reported on a 9-band scale and the scores are valid for two years. One special feature

⁶ For detailed test reviews, please refer to Read (2022) for IELTS, and Qin and Baker (2024) for CELPIP.

about IELTS is that instead of test takers talking to a computer, the speaking test is conducted in person. It is worth mentioning that the price for taking the test varies depend on the country where it is taken. It is CAD340 (approximately USD250) in Canada and RMB 2170 (approximately USD300) in China.

The CELPIP test is a computer-delivered test for English language proficiency, primarily used for Canadian immigration purposes. It also offers two versions: CELPIP General and CELPIP General LS (Listening and Speaking). For Canadian immigration, CELPIP General is required. It also assesses proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The result is reported as CLB levels. The cost of CELPIP General in Canada is CAD280 (USD207), which is slightly cheaper than IELTS General. Again, test results are valid for two years. One thing special about CELPIP is that it used to be considered the only locally developed test in the Canadian immigration process because it was developed by Paragon Testing Enterprises, originally established as a for-profit affiliate of the University of British Columbia. In 2021, Paragon was acquired by the Canadian subsidiary of Prometric, a U.S. company (Qin & Baker, 2024).

The PTE Core was introduced in 2024 as a third IRCC-approved English proficiency test alongside IELTS and CELPIP. It also assesses listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, with similar costs and a two-year validity period. Its most distinctive feature is that the results are typically available within 48 hours, making it the fastest among the three. However, as my data collection concluded prior to its implementation, the discussion on PTE Core is not included in this study.

All tests for immigration purposes are developed and maintained by globally well-known testing companies and subjected to systematic validation, to ensure the tests are in accordance

with international standards. While they can all be defended as high-quality tests from a psychometric point of view, this does not mean that serious validity problems do not exist with how the tests are used. As previously mentioned, in order to accumulate more points in CRS, applicants are forced to working to achieve higher language test scores because the higher language score one achieves, the higher possibility one can be admitted. Many immigrants invest significant time and money in language training and test preparation in order to improve their chances, which places a financial burden on individuals and families who may already be experiencing economic challenges. In other words, those who can afford to invest in language assessment are more likely to succeed in the immigration process (Kunnan, 2021). This requirement to get higher and higher scores extends beyond ensuring that applicants have the language proficiency needed to survive or be successful in Canada. Instead, it favours applicants who are linguistically and culturally closer to Canada, and those who are more financially able to afford language learning resources and the costs associated with multiple test attempts (Blackledge, 2009; Dickie, 2016; Frost, 2021, Carlsen & Rocca, 2021; Van Avermaet, 2009). In other words, while ostensibly testing language ability, the test scores are in fact used as a proxy for measuring factors that extend beyond language proficiency. This also raises concerns about whether assessments designed to measure general proficiency are valid when used as high-stakes screening tools for immigrant settlement, an issue I return to in the following section.

1.5 Preliminary identification of key issues in language assessment for Canadian immigration

In examining the use of language assessments in Canadian immigration, several significant and interrelated issues emerge that underscore the complexity and ideological tensions embedded in the current system. The first issue, alluded to previously, is the

inconsistency between the intended test purpose and their use described above: while language tests are designed to measure language proficiency, they are employed as high-stakes tools in the immigration process to implicitly judge one's employability, culture background, or financial status by evaluating their language ability. This disconnect raises concerns about the appropriateness of these assessments as gatekeepers in the immigration system and the potential for unintended consequences that may disproportionately impact applicants from diverse backgrounds (Blackledge, 2009; Dickie, 2016; Frost, 2021; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021; Van Avermaet, 2009).

Beyond the technical mismatch between test purpose and use, a more systemic issue emerges which involves the tension between Canada's multicultural ideals and the neoliberal orientation of its immigration policy. Although official policy frames language requirements as a means to support immigrant integration and participation, the design and implementation of these assessments often privilege individuals with specific socio-economic and educational advantages. As a result, language tests function not only as instruments of integration but also as filters that align the immigration pool with labor market demands and economic priorities. This tension highlights the ways in which multiculturalism, as a stated national goal, is increasingly shaped—and at times constrained—by neoliberal logics that prioritize economic utility over genuine inclusivity (Shohamy, 2001, 2006, 2009; Root et al., 2014; Van Avermaet, 2009).

The final issue I raise is the relative absence of test-taker perspectives in the body of research on language assessment for immigration purposes that highlights a critical area for further exploration (Carlsen & Rocca, 2021; Deygers, 2017; Frost, 2017, 2019; Mcleod, 2023). This omission is significant not only for what it excludes but for the broader implications it carries. The voices of those directly impacted by these policies – those whose futures often hinge

on the results of these assessments – are essential to any comprehensive understanding of the system. From a social justice perspective, it is fundamentally unjust to develop and evaluate policies that profoundly affect individuals without including their voices. To borrow the motto that has been used by disabled peoples organizations throughout the years: “nothing about us without us.” The exclusion of immigrants from this research reinforces a power imbalance; incorporating their perspectives not only acknowledges their lived experiences but also challenges the top-down narratives in this context. From an academic and research perspective, immigrants’ perspectives provide deep insights that complement other data sources. Although policy documents can provide to a certain extent immigrants’ intentions and outcomes indirectly, these documents are reporting on them and not by them. Participants’ narratives offer more critical information on how these policies are experienced and interpreted. Finally, from a community engagement perspective, including participant voices can foster local commitment to addressing social inequities and ensures that the research process benefits not just academics but the communities studied and contribute to the co-creation of knowledge that is both impactful and inclusive.

These key issues together underscore the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive framework to critically assess language testing within the Canadian immigration context. Rather than accepting existing practices as neutral or technical, it is important to critically evaluate the role of language testing and interrogate how it operates within the broader systems of power.

1.6 My approach and positionality to research

As the researcher of the study and an individual in the Chinese immigrant community myself, my own background, values, and experiences will inform my analysis as an insider. Rather than striving for objectivity and detachment from the study, this study is rooted in post-

positivist, poststructuralist understandings of research. In other words, I approach this research with the understanding that my insights are intertwined with my lived experiences. I am willing to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge with my participants and co-researchers. This positionality shapes my interpretations and emphasizes the importance of immigrant voices in revealing the nuanced impacts of language assessment in Canadian immigration system.

Born and raised in mainland China until the age of 18, I have experienced firsthand the cultural, political, and social values deeply embedded within the Chinese community. At the age of 18, I moved to Macau, a special administrative region of China that operates under a distinct political system, a legacy of its Portuguese colonial past. My experiences studying and working in Macau, and then the United States, and now in Canada have given me a distinct understanding of how language tests operate as gatekeepers in diverse national contexts. Fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English, I am intimately familiar with the nuances of linguistic and cultural identity that influence immigrants' journeys and opportunities.

I have been required to take numerous language proficiency tests for different purposes, including immigration. I recognize the pressures, costs, and barriers that accompany these assessments. This background has enabled me to engage deeply with the experiences of Chinese immigrants, understanding not only their linguistic needs but also the cultural and political contexts that shape their perspectives. This insight of the struggles faced by Chinese immigrants allows me to approach this study with empathy and a commitment to amplifying their voices. This positionality also shapes my interpretivist approach which allowed me to critically question the values embedded in the immigration process.

1.7 Thesis overview

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature related to immigration policy, language assessment, and the role of standardized testing in migrant selection. It begins with an overview of global and Canadian immigration trends and traces the emergence of test-based selection mechanisms in relation to broader policy shifts. Particular attention is given to how neoliberal discourses have reshaped Canadian immigration policy to prioritize economic productivity and adaptability, and how language tests have become a means of evaluating these traits. The chapter concludes by identifying limitations in existing validation frameworks and proposing the need for alternative approaches that consider broader social and ideological consequences.

Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual framework that guides this research project. Drawing from a poststructuralist tradition, this framework integrates two key elements: policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) and the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Policy archaeology is used to uncover the historical, discursive, and sociopolitical layers that shape immigration policy, especially its language component. The model of investment helps interpret immigrants' responses to language testing within intersecting dimensions of identity, ideology, and capital. Together, these approaches form a conceptual lens that bridges the analysis of policy structures with the analysis of immigrant experience.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodological orientation of the study. It outlines the qualitative and participatory nature of the research, including the use of focus groups and co-analysis sessions involving Chinese immigrants as both participants and co-researchers. The chapter details the recruitment process, ethical considerations, and the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. Emphasis is placed on methods that prioritize participants' interpretations and center their lived experiences within the research process.

Chapter 5 presents the key research findings from two data sources. The first set of results describes how language proficiency is framed as a problem in Canadian policy and media discourses. Four dominant discourses are identified from the document analysis: economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering. The second set of result centers on the voices of Chinese immigrants. Through focus groups and co-analysis sessions, 13 themes are developed to capture how participants experience and navigate language assessment. These themes illustrate the emotional, material, and social consequences of testing, and how immigrants respond to its demands in complex, sometimes contradictory ways.

Chapter 6 offers a critical discussion of the findings by mapping participants' experiences onto the model of investment as to show interaction between policy claims and lived realities. The chapter examines how identity, ideology, and capital intersect in shaping immigrant subjectivities under language testing regimes. This chapter also includes discussions on how language assessment serves as a mechanism of symbolic power and institutionalization. Tensions between the ideals of fairness, inclusion, and the actual functioning of immigration policy are as well highlighted.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the study's main contributions, including insights into the policy framing of language proficiency and the lived experiences of immigrants under testing regimes. The chapter includes a reflection on the implications of participatory methodologies and the potential of immigrant knowledge to inform more equitable assessment and policy design. Limitations of the study are acknowledged, and future research directions are proposed, with an emphasis on sustaining critical and inclusive approaches in language testing and migration studies.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I critically review the literature on immigration policies, language assessment, and neoliberal ideologies to provide a conceptual foundation for the present study. I begin this chapter by introducing global and Canadian trends in immigration policy, emphasizing the transition from liberal to neoliberal frameworks. This body of work has shown that contemporary immigration programs increasingly prioritize economic criteria and favor applicants whose profiles align with labor market demands and dominant cultural norms, which contribute to the construction of the so-called “ideal immigrant.”

In the next sections I review research on the less explicit functions of language testing within these policy regimes. While official rationales emphasize the role of tests in facilitating linguistic integration, recent scholarship has pointed to underlying policy goals that extend beyond linguistic ability. These include the selective inclusion of immigrants who are perceived as more economically productive or culturally compatible. This literature also introduces the concept of invisible borders, which means discursive and institutional boundaries that operate through neutral-seeming tools such as standardized language tests, yet contribute to different levels of access and recognition within immigrant communities.

Finally, I bring to light the limitations of traditional test validation frameworks in addressing these issues and the need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding language testing as a social practice instead of a measurement instrument. A poststructuralist lens

will provide the tools to interrogate the power dynamics and ideological assumptions of language assessment policies that shape identity, inclusion, and exclusion in the immigration context.

2.2. Global trends in immigration policy and standardized assessment

2.2.1 Overview of international immigration policies

Immigration policies around the world are shaped by a combination of complex social, economic, and political factors. Over the past several decades, these policies have undergone significant shifts in response to globalization, demographic changes, labor market demands, and security concerns. When talking about immigration policies and practices, the main focus in the existing literature is predominantly placed on European countries (e.g., Bauder, 2008; Carlson & Moe, 2016; Caviedes, 2015; Dustmann, Frattini, 2011; Eberl et al., 2018; Grande et al., 2019; Markaki & Longhi, 2013; Schildt, Deygers, Weideman, 2024; Shohamy, 2006; Sides & Citrin, 2007), and other traditional immigrant countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada (see e.g., Culic, 2010; Frost, 2017; Gubernskaya & Dreby, 2017; Gunn, 2021; Kunnan, 2009; McNamara, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2019, 2020; Root et al., 2014; Wells, 2004). These regions have historically received high volumes of immigrants and were among the first to develop formal systems for immigrant selection and integration.

In contrast, immigration policies in non-Western contexts remain less represented in the literature. While some countries in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia have adopted point-based systems to attract skilled labor, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations rely heavily on temporary labor migration, these realities have received comparatively little academic attention (Pochon-Berger & Lenz, 2014). More recently, Singapore introduced a point-based immigration model in 2023, extending the use of this approach beyond its traditional

Western settings. At the same time, Germany adopted a similar system in 2024, illustrating how even Western countries are revising their immigration frameworks in line with global trends. Taken together, these developments reflect the wider diffusion of selection models originally developed in Western contexts. However, studies of these newer cases remain limited, reinforcing the Western-centric nature of most academic literature on immigration policy.

Despite regional differences, one notable trend across many countries is the gradual tightening of immigration policies. While the 1970s and 1980s are sometimes characterized as a period of more humanitarian approaches, these policies still retained restrictive and racialized elements. The more recent shifts can therefore be seen less as a new development than as a reconfiguration or circling back on different grounds. As noted by Pochon-Berger and Lenz (2014), many countries have shifted toward stricter immigration and integration measures. This shift often reflects growing concerns about national security, cultural identity, and economic stability. As a result, these countries have adopted “an ‘assimilationist’ approach to the treatment of immigrants,” emphasizing conformity to national norms and values (p. 7). Comparing current immigration policies with those in the 1970s through 1990s, previous policies in European countries clearly indicate a more liberal approach by promoting integration and naturalization with simple conditions such as residency and basic language proficiency (Böcker & Strik, 2011). For instance, countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark have been known for their liberal immigration policies. As highly developed welfare states, they both historically guaranteed every inhabitant, including newcomers, a certain level of income, a certain standard of housing, access to health care, etc. as part of their broader commitment to equality and inclusion (Van Avermaet, 2009).

However, by the late 20th and early 21st century, rising immigration flows and growing economic pressures began to reshape national approaches to immigration. In particular, high-income countries in Europe and North America have increasingly adopted policies that prioritize economic criteria in selecting immigrants, marking a significant departure from earlier humanistic or rights-based frameworks.

2.2.2 Standardized assessments in immigration policy

As immigration policies around the world have become increasingly selective, standardized assessments have become more widespread as key tools for evaluating applicants. As observed by Pochon-Berger and Lenz (2014), formal and standardized assessment has been adopted by many countries and covers not only language proficiency but also national civic or cultural knowledge. These assessments serve as gatekeepers, determining eligibility based on predefined criteria. Although they are framed as neutral and objective measures because they do not discriminate against race, ethnicity, gender, etc., these tools are often understood in the literature as instruments for identifying individuals deemed more likely to align with host country expectations for integration.

Language proficiency tests are perhaps one of the most prominent examples of standardized assessments used in immigration policies. As presented in Chapter 1, countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom have integrated language testing into their point-based systems to quantify applicants' language abilities in the host country's official language(s). Similarly, civic integration exams in countries such as the Netherlands and the United States evaluate applicants' knowledge of national customs, legal systems, and cultural values, thereby reinforcing expectations for cultural conformity and integration.

This growing reliance on standardized assessments has been widely interpreted as part of a broader policy trend toward quantifiable metrics and outcome-based evaluation. Scholars have noted that such assessments translate complex social and cultural characteristics into discrete, measurable indicators (e.g., Cameron, 2012; Frost & McNamara, 2018). This market-driven approach reflects a shift toward policy models that emphasize efficiency, comparability, and alignment with labor market needs. In the next section, I will review the scholarship on neoliberalism to contextualize these developments and examine their influence on Canadian immigration policy.

2.3 From liberalism to neoliberalism in Canadian immigration policy

As noted in the introduction, Canada's implementation of the point-based immigration system in 1967 marked a significant departure from race- and ethnicity-based selection criteria toward a merit-based model intended to promote fairness and diversity. While the structural form of the point system remains, scholars have observed a notable evolution in Canadian immigration policy. Early reforms reflected liberal ideals and commitments to multicultural inclusion; however, more recent developments show increasing alignment with neoliberal values that emphasize market efficiency, economic utility, and individual responsibility (Abu-Laban, 2015; Sharma, 2020).

2.3.1 From liberal foundations to neoliberal restructuring

The term "neoliberalism" was originally coined by the Freiburg School of Economists as a moderate alternative to classical liberalism. Early conceptions emphasized the need to balance free-market principles with active government oversight to ensure fair competition and avoid authoritarianism (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Harvey, 2005). Rather than embracing unregulated

capitalism, early neoliberal thought supported limited welfare and social protections in the interest of long-term economic recovery (Gerber, 1994; Megay, 1970).

Since the 1960s, however, neoliberalism has undergone a transformation. Starting with the economic reforms in Chile and followed by a global adoption, the term has increasingly been associated with market fundamentalism and the minimization of state intervention. In his widely cited work, Harvey (2005) describes neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices that emphasizes the importance of private property rights and seek to limit the state's role in social welfare. Instead, the state is expected to maintain legal, military, and institutional force to market operations, while reducing its involvement in public services (Harvey, 2005).

Several recent literatures further elaborate on this transformation. Wilson (2017), for example, argues that while both classical liberalism and neoliberalism value individual liberties and free markets, neoliberalism diverges by asserting that the government's primary role is to support market competition instead of citizen welfare. Similarly, Centeno and Cohen (2012) emphasize neoliberalism's preference for private over public control, reshaping public policy around the logics of privatization and market efficiency.

Beyond its economic applications, neoliberalism has been examined as a cultural and ideological framework. For instance, Wilson (2017) introduced the notion of neoliberalism as a "social ontology," which is a structure that has affected everyday life and shaped social identities. Within this framework, individuals are encouraged to view themselves as entrepreneurial actors who must constantly optimize their economic value. This reasoning, as Wilson contends, operates as what Foucault would call a "regime of truth,"—a dominant discourse that normalizes certain assumptions about identity, knowledge, and governance. This

concept will be elaborated later in the chapter as a way of understanding how policy discourses assign value and legitimacy to specific immigrant identities.

Despite the different emphases of the literature, these all cover on a common theme: neoliberalism has a powerful influence on both economic and political practices. As this influence extends into international policy domains, researchers have increasingly used neoliberalism as a lens to examine changes in immigration policy and the construction of the “ideal immigrant.” In the next section, I will review how this framework has been applied to immigration policy reforms and public discourse.

2.3.2 Neoliberalism in contemporary immigration policy

In the late 20th and early 21st century, there have been significant increases in immigration flows driven by economic globalization and political instability in various regions, promoting significant political and public debates about the sustainability of liberal immigration policies, particularly in welfare states. A neoliberal approach prioritises quantifiable attributes such as skills, education, language proficiency, and economic self-sufficiency. Neoliberalism is regarded widely as a driving force behind the evolution of immigration policy, influencing its political, economic, and social dimensions (Bauder, 2008; Cerny et al. 2005; Harvey, 2005; Kymlicka, 2013; Root et al. 2014).

In this context, neoliberalism is understood not only as an economic doctrine but also as a guiding logic that reorients immigration policy objectives toward economic competitiveness and labor market optimization. Scholars have shown that immigration systems are increasingly designed to prioritize attributes such as education, work experience, language proficiency, and adaptability. These are all features that are measured, ranked, and aligned with national economic

goals. As Cohen (1987) argues, immigration under neoliberal governance functions as a tool for managing labor flows and coordinating national human capital needs. Neoliberalism thus operates as a regulatory rationale, which emphasizes productivity and self-reliance while downplaying resource redistribution and social justice considerations.

This global shift has also reshaped how immigration is conceptualized and operationalized across national contexts. Root et al. (2014) for example, identified two key implications of neoliberal influence on immigration policy. First, they note that neoliberal reforms have contributed to greater challenges in labor market integration for many immigrants, particularly for refugees and racialized individuals. Second, they argue that immigration policy has shifted away from long-term nation-building toward selecting “flexible” immigrants who can rapidly adapt to changing labor market demands and contribute economically in the short term. Arat-Koc (1999; 2012) similarly observes that while this market-oriented approach emphasizes immediate economic utility, it is often accompanied by a reduction in social support systems for newcomers. Scholars have suggested that such policies restructure labor markets in the host country by prioritizing applicants with “market-ready” skills, potentially at the expense of broader social integration goals.

These dynamics are particularly evident in the widespread adoption of points-based immigration systems. Countries such as Canada, Australia, Austria, and the United Kingdom have implemented policies that assign scores to applicants based on measurable attributes, including education, professional experience, and language ability. These systems translate human capital into a quantifiable format, allowing governments to evaluate and rank prospective immigrants according to their anticipated economic contributions. Joppke (2021) critiques these

systems as emblematic of a class-based logic wherein selection is driven less by humanitarian principles and more by economic valuation.

The broader international literature further supports this assessment. In Europe, Slade (2010) documents how the Netherlands adopted restrictive policies that emphasize economic self-sufficiency and limit access to public benefits for immigrants. Hagelund (2020) observes that Denmark's policies increasingly frame immigration in terms of national stability and security, considering migrants as potential threats to social cohesion. In a comparative study of thirty countries, Boucher and Gest (2018) find that immigration regimes have broadly shifted toward labor market-oriented models. Joppke (2021) then summarizes this trend as a global movement toward simultaneously “courting the top” and “fending off the bottom,” encouraging high-skilled migration while deterring the entry of low-skilled workers (p. 79).

This shift is not without contradiction. As Pickering and Weber (2006) and Varsanyi and Nevins (2007) highlight, neoliberalism encourages the fluid movement of capital while maintaining restrictive borders for people, especially those deemed unlikely to contribute economically. Varsanyi and Nevins (2007) characterize this tension as a “contradictory process,” in which economic liberalization coexists with political closure and exclusion (p. 225).

Taken together, the literature suggests that immigration policy in many contexts has undergone a neoliberal restructuring that privileges economic metrics over social or humanitarian concerns. These frameworks are foundational for understanding how contemporary discourses construct the figure of the “ideal immigrant.”

2.3.3 Canadian national narratives and “ideal immigrants”

As immigration policies have increasingly adopted neoliberal logics, the concept of the “ideal immigrant” has evolved in both policy and media discourses. In Canada, this evolution reflects a growing emphasis on economic self-sufficiency, linguistic proficiency, and the ability to integrate into Canadian labor markets. Scholars have observed that immigrants are increasingly valued not only for their possible economic contributions but also for their cultural compatibility with dominant national norms (Root et al., 2014; Sobel, 2015).

Sobel (2015) has traced these shifts through a semiological analysis of Canadian citizenship guides from 1976 to 2009. While early guides emphasized civic engagement and community participation, more recent versions stress individual responsibility and loyalty to the state. This change indicates a broader ideological shift in which citizenship is framed less as a social relationship and more as a set of responsibilities aligned with neoliberal values. Similarly, Root et al. (2014) examined how Canadian immigration policy has come to prioritize economic immigrants over family reunification. They argued that the “ideal immigrant” is increasingly framed as self-reliant in language and economic capability. This construction also promotes a mode of integration that centers on labor market participation, often at the expense of other forms of social inclusion.

Chatterjee (2015) extended this analysis by examining the Canadian Experience Class and the Federal Skilled Worker Program. She found that these programs privilege Canadian work experience and language proficiency, reinforcing a model of the “ideal immigrant” as one who already has the qualities favored by Canadian labor markets. Chatterjee (2015) argued that this approach allows a racialized and nationalist vision of Canadian identity, in which Whiteness and

Western values are implicitly upheld as standards. Language proficiency in these contexts thus become a marker of cultural fitness and economic readiness.

Furthermore, language testing also plays a critical role in these dynamics. Burkholder and Fillion (2015) analyzed Canada's 2012 language benchmark requirement for citizenship and argued that the new CLB standards creates structural barriers for immigrants with limited formal education. Their discourse analysis showed that official language proficiency is positioned as essential for Canadian identity, which helps to construct citizenship as something that must be earned through alignment with dominant linguistic and cultural norms.

In sum, the Canadian "ideal immigrant" is increasingly constructed as someone who is economically productive, linguistically proficient, and culturally aligned with dominant national narratives. This model reflects a broader ideological transformation in which neoliberal logics shape both immigration policies and the discourses that legitimize them.

Although scholars have noted that while national narratives surrounding Canadian identity often emphasize inclusion and diversity, they may also obscure underlying structural inequalities (Root et al., 2014; Chatterjee, 2015). A number of researchers have also examined how the concept of multiculturalism, originally grounded in liberal commitments, has been reshaped to reflect neoliberal priorities, particularly through policy mechanisms that favor immigrants who meet specific economic and cultural criteria (Dauvergne, 2016; Pochon-Berger & Lenz, 2014). In the next section, I will review how Canadian multiculturalism, both as policy and ideology, has evolved under this shifting paradigm.

2.3.4 Canadian multiculturalism: from liberal ideal to neoliberal instrument

Canadian multiculturalism has historically been regarded as a liberal framework grounded in the principles of diversity, inclusion, and civic participation. Scholars often conceptualize multiculturalism in three dimensions: as a sociological fact, as public policy, and as an ideology (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018).

As a sociological fact, multiculturalism reflects the demographic diversity of Canada's population, shaped by successive waves of immigration and colonial histories. According to the *2021 Census*, visible minorities accounted for 26.5% of the Canadian population. This figure is projected to reach 41% by 2041 (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

As a policy, multiculturalism was formally introduced in 1971 and later enshrined in the *Multiculturalism Act* (1988). This policy aimed to reduce discrimination, support cultural preservation, and promote inclusivity (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018). Kymlicka (2013) emphasized that multicultural policy should not only promote non-discriminatory practices but also enhance laws to better protect minority rights. However, while liberal multiculturalism originally supported belonging and civic integration (Bloemraad, 2006; Ghosh, 2018), others have argued that it obscures deeper structural inequalities (Gwyn, 1996; Pochon-Berger & Lenz, 2014).

Neoliberal influences have gradually shifted the function of multiculturalism. Scholars argue that Canada's immigration point system, originally designed to promote equity, has now increasingly serve as a mechanism for selecting economically desirable immigrants (Dauvergne, 2016; Joppke, 2021). The rise of temporary immigration further illustrates this shift, with permanent residency framed as a reward for labor market contribution rather than a right of settlement (Pochon-Berger & Lenz, 2014).

As an ideology, multiculturalism has also undergone transformation. Root et al. (2014) noted that early multiculturalism promoted civic voice and inclusion, while recent shifts reflect expectations that immigrants should embrace mainstream Canadian values and integrate economically. This ideological transition is reflected in political discourse and policy framing that increasingly prioritize economic utility over cultural recognition. Critics such as Joppke (2013) and Root et al. (2014) argue that in neoliberal multiculturalism, ethnicity is valued only insofar as it contributes to market or diplomatic interests, and cultural accommodation is replaced by expectations of assimilation.

Winter (2018) summarized this transformation and stated that multiculturalism has shifted “from being ‘about us’ to being ‘about them’” (p. 637). Neoliberal multiculturalism redefines diversity in economic and behavioral terms, rewards immigrants who conform but marginalizes those who do not. Rather than fostering a genuine inclusion, it positions cultural and linguistic conformity as prerequisites for full membership. As Wilson (2017) summarizes, neoliberal regimes of truth uphold three central beliefs: that market competition is the best way to organize society, that individuals should take personal responsibility even when facing structural barriers, and that the freedom to compete is the most important kind of freedom.

In short, while Canadian multiculturalism was originally a liberal design aimed at inclusion and anti-discrimination, recent literature suggests that it has increasingly reflected a selective and economically driven orientation. Scholars argue that under neoliberal influence, multiculturalism has shifted from broad accommodation toward conditional integration, with greater emphasis on cultural conformity and economic contribution as prerequisites for belonging (Root et al., 2014; Joppke, 2013; Winter, 2018).

The following section turns to the concept of “hidden agendas” and “invisible borders” in language testing, exploring how traditional validation frameworks are insufficient to account for the broader policy and ideological functions of language assessments. I also introduce the conception of neoliberalism as a “regime of truth,” setting the stage for a discussion of a poststructuralist framework that will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

2.4 Language testing in immigration: hidden agendas and invisible borders

2.4.1 Framing the debate: hidden agendas and invisible borders

In recent years, scholars have increasingly examined the broader implications of language testing on immigration, particularly through the lens of these tests’ underlying political and ideological functions. Within this literature, two interrelated concepts have emerged: hidden agendas and invisible borders. Hidden agendas refer to the implicit policy objectives embedded in language testing practices, the objectives that extend beyond the stated purposes of ensuring linguistic integration (Shohamy, 2001; Roever & McNamara, 2006). These hidden agendas may include economic filtering (Hawthorne, 2011), cultural selection (Ndhlovu, 2008), or the reproduction of national ideologies (Hoang, 2019; Creese, 2019). Invisible borders describe the less visible social, cultural, and racial boundaries that are constructed and reinforced through such testing regimes (Winter, 2018; Polanco & Zell, 2017). While hidden agendas are embedded in policymaking intentions, references to invisible borders emphasize the material and symbolic consequences these agendas produce in practice. Together, these two concepts offer a useful framework for unpacking how language assessments operate not only as tools of measurement but as instruments of social sorting.

2.4.2 The gatekeeping role of language tests

A substantial body of literature has documented the gatekeeping function of language tests in immigration systems. As Shohamy (2001) and Roever and McNamara (2006) have argued, language assessments are often presented as neutral mechanisms for ensuring that immigrants possess the language skills necessary to integrate into their new societies. However, these assessments also serve to restrict access by establishing thresholds that applicants must meet to be eligible for entry, permanent residence, or citizenship. This restriction function is especially prominent in point-based immigration systems, such as those in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where language test results contribute directly to candidates' overall scores (Anwar, 2014; Root et al., 2014).

In the Canadian context, studies have highlighted how language assessments intersect with other selection criteria to construct a model of the ideal immigrant. Anwar (2014) and Hawthorne (2011) have critiqued the emphasis on linguistic proficiency and age in the Canadian points system, arguing that it disadvantages older applicants and those from non-Anglophone backgrounds, regardless of their other qualifications. These findings align with critiques by Roever and McNamara (2006), who contend that language testing often ignores social and cultural capital that may be crucial to long-term integration. Hawthorne (2011) further notes that this policy direction creates tensions with Canada's broader multicultural commitments.

More researchers have drawn attention to how test score thresholds are adjusted in response to changing labor market needs and political priorities. Dickie (2016) and IRCC (2020b) report that language requirements in programs such as the Canadian Experience Class are subject to revision, and that applicants may have to compensate proactively if they have deficiencies in other areas, such as age, by improving their language scores. In practice, this

means that language testing serves not just to assess communication skills but to function as a flexible mechanism for controlling immigrant flows. From the perspective of applicants, language scores are often viewed as the most and maybe only aspect that can be manipulated during the application process, thus becoming a central target for strategic improvement.

2.4.3 Language testing and policy rationales: what is explicit and what is not

Although language testing is frequently justified on the grounds of promoting integration, scholars have pointed out a persistent misalignment between its official rationales and its actual uses in policy. Explicitly, governments frame language requirements as necessary for facilitating labor market participation, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Shohamy, 2009; Root et al., 2014; Van Avermaet, 2009). Implicitly, however, these tests often operate as proxies for other forms of selection, including socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or political ideology (Hoang, 2019; Ndhlovu, 2008).

Many critical studies have employed discourse analysis to uncover these discrepancies. For example, through a critical discourse analysis of the history of language policy, Ndhlovu (2008) revealed that language tests in Australia have been often (mis)used for racial exclusion. By increasing language requirements, governments can subtly limit immigrant intake from particular groups without explicit exclusionary policies, thereby enacting exclusionary agendas without overtly discriminatory language. In Canada, Hoang (2019) argues that language testing policies are often used to screen for cultural compatibility under the guise of linguistic assessment, therefore raising the language requirements for immigrants became a simple and low-cost measure for government to balance economic and political interests.

2.4.4 Creating invisible borders through assessment

The literature has explored how language testing creates invisible borders that reinforce social hierarchies. These borders manifest as barriers to entry, permanent residency, citizenship, and full participation in society. These are often structured around race, class, and linguistic background. Winter (2018), for instance, conceptualizes naturalization as a form of social closure that distinguishes between “Canadians by birth” and “Canadians by choice” (pp. 233-234). In other words, although both groups may hold the same legal status as citizens, their paths to citizenship are not perceived equally. Those who are born in Canada are not required to prove their belonging, while immigrants are often expected to demonstrate their worthiness through language testing and other evaluations. This distinction reinforces a hierarchy of legitimacy, in which naturalized citizens remain subject to ongoing scrutiny, and Western linguistic and cultural norms are positioned as the default standards of national identity.

At the provincial level, top-down approaches are used that helped to create "invisible walls" by prioritizing certain language skills and/or educational backgrounds, therefore subtly shaping immigrant selection without explicit exclusionary policies. Researchers have demonstrated how such policies are closely tied to regional immigration goals. Maganaka & Plaizier (2015) analyzed the interaction of immigration services, policymakers, and academia from the perspective of Alberta practitioners and underscored the fact that the language training needs of new immigrants may come at the expense of their professional skills development, which poses problems for the larger community. Chemin and Sayour (2016) examined Quebec's 2001 reform to its points-based immigration system, which aimed to increase French-speaking immigrants without compromising overall labor market performance. To achieve this, Quebec increased points for French proficiency and education (especially for bachelor's degrees) while

decreasing points for subjective "adaptability" assessments. Their findings confirmed that the reform effectively attracted more French-speaking and bachelor's degree-holding immigrants, showing how language components in a points-based system can tailor immigrant labor markets according to specific policy goals. Similarly, Jezak (2018) reviewed the French-English bilingual policy and its influence on immigration in Quebec. She highlighted the unique pressures on Francophone communities in Canada, where language policies not only protect linguistic duality but also emphasize integrating immigrants into minority French-speaking communities.

From a symbolic perspective, language functions as a form of capital that determines immigrants' access to resources and rights. Creese (2010), for example, adopted Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and conducted 38 interviews with African immigrants to Canada who were fluent in English prior to their arrival. From the immigrant experience, the author established the connection between accent discrimination and racism, which led to a more complex relationship among colonialism, linguistic capital, and migration. Creese (2010) also argues that the linguistic capital among English-speaking African immigrants was erased from the host society by the "standard language ideology," because the "celebration of multiculturalism often simultaneously denies the many and diverse ways racism" operates in Canadian nation building (pp. 309-310). Language competence here carries broader power relations and functions, again, as an invisible border between the immigrants with nonnative/ "nonstandard" English and native Canadian English speakers. Similarly, Polanco and Zell (2017) conducted a comparative study that explored how English language ability operates as a regulatory "border" in the global labor market, particularly affecting temporary migrant workers in Canada (as well as Mexico and the Philippines). They noticed that in Canada, language proficiency shapes access to employment in low-skilled, customer service roles. Employers

prefer worker who not only meet job-specific requirements but also have high proficiency in English. The authors argue that these practices favored certain worker profiles, aligning language requirements with broader social and economic controls. Language has therefore become a form of human capital that implies economic values, and thus national policies related to language skills will shape the cross-border mobility of immigrants. As a boundary that mediates the physical mobility of immigrants as well as their social positions, language tests are used to support the “process of racializing and classing both nations and people” (p. 286).

Taken together, these studies show that language testing in immigration extends beyond linguistic assessment to create and maintain symbolic boundaries.

2.4.5 Language testing within a regime of truth

While language testing is often presented as a neutral and technical tool, it is embedded within broader ideological frameworks that shape its design, implementation, and interpretation. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980), critical scholars have argued that language proficiency is not merely an indicator of communicative ability but a constructed measure of social desirability, filtered through political and economic logics (Wilson, 2017; Hoang, 2019). Within this regime, people start to believe that language skills naturally lead to successful integration, as if this connection were obvious and beyond question.

According to some scholarship, the discourse of objectivity legitimizes the use of language testing in immigration while masking its ideological underpinnings. Gaucher (2020) notes that immigration policies rooted in neoliberal assumptions portray market competition as the best way to manage social resources, framing the selection of “better immigrants” as a rational necessity. Under this logic, the individual’s failure to achieve a required language score

is therefore considered personal shortcomings, rather than the structural barriers embedded in the testing regime (McNamara & Ryan, 2011). The discourse thereby operates through what Foucault (1991) called governmentality, which is the techniques of governance that work through self-regulation and internalized norms rather than direct coercion.

In this context, language testing becomes a powerful biopolitical tool, classifying individuals based on perceived economic value and moral worth. The ability to perform in a standard language test becomes a proxy for belonging, reinforcing the idea that integration is a matter of personal effort and merit rather than collective responsibility or systemic reform.

2.4.6 Limitations of existing validation frameworks for language tests in immigration

Validity in language assessment is broadly understood as the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores for their intended purposes (Messick, 1989, 1995). In other words, validity concerns both whether an assessment measures what it is intended to measure and whether the inferences drawn from its results follow logically from the information it captures (B. Baker, personal communication, July 9, 2025). As discussed above, language assessments in immigration contexts are often framed as neutral tools for measuring linguistic ability for settlement purposes. However, the practical use of these tests frequently does not match with their intended purpose, which creates significant challenges to validity. While test developers design assessments to evaluate language proficiency, the broader sociopolitical application of these tests—such as controlling immigration numbers or prioritizing certain immigrants over others—extends their role far beyond measurement.

Traditional frameworks for test validation have struggled to account for the complex social and political roles that language assessments play in immigration. Frameworks such as

Messick's (1998) construct validity, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) test usefulness, Kane's (1992) argument-based validity, and Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive model emphasize psychometric rigor, fairness, and alignment between test purpose and use. While these approaches have significantly advanced the field, they remain limited in their ability to capture the broader implications of high-stakes language testing in immigration policy contexts.

Recent critiques argue that these frameworks often assume a clear boundary between technical and political dimensions of testing (McNamara, 2005; Frost, 2017, 2019). However, immigration policy blurs these boundaries and repurpose language assessments to regulate migration flows, manage public sentiment, or advance economic goals (Fulcher & Davidson, 2009). As a result, even well-validated tests may be used in ways that reproduce inequality and exclusion.

Critical Language Testing (CLT) challenges this tradition by examining how language assessments reinforce power structures and marginalize certain groups (Shohamy, 2001). CLT emphasizes that language tests should not be viewed solely as technical instruments, but as social practices embedded in broader ideological and political contexts. While validation frameworks help ensure that test items are reliable and unbiased, they are not sufficient to address how tests are used within sociopolitical agendas. For example, governments may increase test cut off scores by adjusting the total cut off scores in the point system or introduce new language requirements to manage immigration flows or address public concerns, which will further complicate the alignment between test design and use (Fulcher & Davidson, 2009). In this sense, test validation models often fall short of addressing the political, symbolic, and ideological dimensions of language assessment, particularly in the context of immigration.

To better account for these dimensions, a more comprehensive theoretical lens is needed—one that can unpack how assessments participate in the construction of subjectivities, regulate mobility, and produce social hierarchies. A poststructuralist approach is therefore ideally suited for this study. Rather than replacing validation frameworks, it complements them by asking different kinds of questions about power, discourse, and the symbolic function of language. In the next chapter, I will introduce a poststructuralist approach to language assessment and understand these dynamics by examining language tests as both measurement tools and instruments of symbolic control.

2.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have examined how neoliberal ideologies have reshaped immigration policy globally and in Canada, transforming the purpose of immigration from long-term nation-building to short-term economic gain. The literature reviewed in Section 2.3 traced this shift through the growing emphasis on quantifiable indicators in immigrant selection systems such as language proficiency, education, and economic self-sufficiency. Under these neoliberal logics, the image of the “ideal immigrant” is produced through policy discourses that prioritize market-oriented values, often at the expense of inclusion, equity, and social responsibility.

Building on this, Section 2.4 turned to the role of language assessment in immigration, drawing attention to the political functions embedded in testing practices. Rather than serving solely their intended purpose as measures of language ability for settlement, language tests have been deployed as gatekeeping mechanisms that reinforce hidden policy agendas and construct invisible social borders. Many researchers have highlighted how these assessments categorize individuals based on more than language ability, and reproduce hierarchies of class, race, and cultural capital. Through concepts such as regime of truth and governmentality, the literature

shows how language testing is embedded in broader systems of knowledge and power that shape who can enter, integrate, and belong.

In the next chapter, I introduce a poststructuralist conceptual framework that engages directly with these issues. Drawing on theories of discourse, identity, and symbolic power, this approach offers a critical lens for understanding the role of language testing within immigration contexts for this study.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Frameworks

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conceptual and methodological foundations for the study. As established in the previous chapters, language tests have evolved beyond tools of language proficiency measurement for settlement purposes and become instruments of sociopolitical control in the Canadian immigration system. Studying this transformation requires a theoretical framework that interrogates the power dynamics, hidden agendas, and social implications embedded in language assessment policies. Poststructuralism offers such a lens. It enables a critical examination of how language tests may shape identities, construct knowledge, and reinforce systemic inequalities.

The chapter begins by introducing a poststructuralist approach to language assessment, outlining its key concepts: the constitutive nature of language, the interplay of discourse, power, and knowledge, and the construction of subjectivity and identity. These theoretical insights have the potential to frame language testing not merely as a technical process but also as a social practice intertwined with broader systems of control and governance. Through a poststructuralist lens, I will examine how these concepts are operationalized in practice in the context of language assessment for immigration, and I aim to explore the language tests function as a tool of social control as well as shaping immigrant experiences.

Building on this orientation, policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) serves as the overarching analytical framework of this study. It provides the conceptual and methodological tools to interrogate how language testing policies are constructed, problematized, and institutionalized. Through policy archaeology, I highlight how immigration language policies do

not simply measure language ability but are embedded in broader discourses of nation-building, neoliberalism, and social control.

In addition to this policy-level analysis, I also draw on the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) in the results interpretation phase. While policy archaeology frames the overall investigation, the model of investment offers a complementary perspective to understand how immigrants negotiate identity, ideology, and capital in relation to language testing policies. This dual framework aligns with poststructuralism in emphasizing the dynamic interplay between discourse, power, and individual agency.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with a presentation of the study's research questions, which reflect the overarching aim of the study: to critically interrogate the role of language tests in the Canadian immigration system and to center immigrant perspectives and experiences in understanding their impact.

3.2 A poststructuralist approach to language assessment

As outlined in the previous chapters, language assessments play a dual role in the context of public policy: they serve not only as tools for measuring language proficiency but also as mechanisms that shape the beliefs, agendas, behaviors, and responses of diverse stakeholders. The interplay between language tests and immigration policy is embedded in broader ideological structures and power relations. Therefore, a critical and nuanced perspective is required to interrogate the underlying purposes and social effects of test use.

A poststructuralist approach offers the conceptual flexibility necessary to move beyond the conventional view of language proficiency as a neutral and objective construct. Rather than treating language tests such as IELTS, CELPIP, or PTE merely as instruments for assessing

communicative competence, this approach allows us to uncover how these assessments operate as technologies of governance (Foucault, 1991; Shohamy, 2001; McNamara & Shohamy, 2008). From a poststructuralist lens, language tests are understood as shaping and regulating the identities of test-takers, producing subjectivities, and delimiting the terms under which individuals are recognized as legitimate immigrants. This approach enables the discursive, institutional, and ideological forces that render certain forms of knowledge, language, and identity as valid, while marginalizing others.

Poststructuralism is associated with a series of works by French continental philosophers and critical theorists in the mid-20th century who came to be known internationally in the 1960s and 1970s. It has influenced a wider set of subjects, including literature, art, history, sociology, politics, and cultural criticism. It is a theoretical framework that has emerged as a critique of structuralism, challenging the idea that human culture may be understood by means of a structure—modeled on language (i.e., structural linguistics), and where meaning is stable, universal, and can be systematically understood. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, emphasizes the complexity, multiplicity, and instability of meaning, which is fluid, contingent, and constructed through language and social interactions. Proponents of poststructuralism argue against the reductionism of structuralism, viewing meaning as not inherently or necessarily rational. As Mason and Clarke (2010) explain, meaning is always partial and provisional in poststructuralism, coming from differences between words and changing depending on context. Jacques Derrida's concept on *différance* describes this process: meaning is created through the contrast between words (*difference*) and is always delayed or deferred because it relies on other words for explanation (*deferral*). This means that language does not directly reflect the real world but creates meaning through its own system, embedded in instability. In addition,

poststructuralists argue that structures should be considered within a cultural and historical view, and “systems of meaning are inextricably entangled with the cultural beliefs around sexuality, sanity and social order” (Davis, 2004, p. 124).

3.2.1 Understanding language as constitutive of reality

Poststructuralism posits that language is not merely a tool for describing reality but is constitutive of reality itself. It is through language that we make sense of the world, form identities, and engage in social practices. In this view, language is seen as a site of struggle where different meanings and interpretations compete for dominance. This perspective challenges traditional notions of language as a transparent medium through which objective truths are conveyed. Instead, it sees language as deeply intertwined with power, shaping and being shaped by the social contexts in which it is used. In other words, poststructuralism is considered a form of social and political engagement expressed “in a sustained critique of current social, political, and cultural forms and an ethical pre-occupation with questions of justice” (McNamara, 2012, p. 477).

Foucault (1977), one of the leading scholars in poststructuralism, suggests that power and knowledge are not separate entities but are intertwined, and are constructed by discourse, which goes beyond language, and determines which ideas and practices are legitimized as “truth.” Discourses shape what can be said, who can speak, and what is considered legitimate knowledge. They produce and constrain the possibilities for thinking, acting, and being. Consequently, knowledge cannot be explained in terms of direct correspondence with objective reality, but rather in terms of the (often hidden) structures, relationships, or coherences with language, individual beliefs, and official social norms or discourses. Similarly, meaning is argued to arise not in what is made present and explicit, but in what is absent and tacit (Shohamy, 2006).

Meaning and truth are thus not so much about the correspondences between references and referents, but the coherences in the forgotten and the no-longer-noticed (Dillet, 2017).

Poststructuralist discourses are not only concerned with how individuals shape personal understandings of the world (i.e., personal sense-making), but how understandings of the world are shaped for individuals (Davis, 2004)—in other words—how individuals’ own identities are shaped. For instance, for poststructuralist-influenced critical pedagogy, language is a socially shaped resource, steeped in culturally and historically sedimented attitudes, values, and assumptions, which precedes and exceeds, as well as inevitably influences any single individual (largely unconsciously).

Foucault’s idea of *disciplinary power* shows how language is used to categorize, normalize, and regulate behavior (Foucault, 1995). For example, the classification of individuals as “native speakers” or “non-native speakers” has real-world implications for how people are treated and understood. This classification system upholds certain norms while marginalizing others, shaping what is considered valuable or deviant. In other words, it challenges the idea of a “standard” language or an “ideal” speaker. Poststructuralism opens up space to explore how individuals navigate and resist these norms, and how multiple, hybrid identities emerge in response to the rigid categorizations imposed by dominant discourses.

3.2.2 Discourse, Power, and Knowledge

A key contribution of poststructuralism is its understanding of the relationship between discourse, power, and knowledge. Foucault (1995) argues that power and knowledge are not separate entities but are intricately interconnected. He introduces the concept of discourse as a system of knowledge that defines and regulates how we talk about and understand the world.

Discourse is not just about language; it encompasses the rules, practices, and power relations that establish what counts as ‘truth’ and who is authorized to speak that truth.

3.2.3 Subjectivity and identity construction

Poststructuralism provides a framework for understanding identity as a fluid, fragmented, and socially constructed phenomenon, rather than as a fixed and stable essence (Weedon, 1997). In this view, subjectivity is not something one possesses but is constantly being produced and reproduced through discourse. Language plays a crucial role in this process, as it mediates the ways in which individuals understand themselves and are understood by others. This perspective challenges the notion of a unified, coherent self. Instead, it posits that individuals are composed of multiple, often conflicting identities that are contingent on the discourses they engage with (Norton, 2013).

For immigrants, the experience of identity construction is very complex. They often find themselves negotiating multiple and sometimes contradictory identities—such as those of their country of origin and their new country of residence—while also dealing with the pressures and expectations imposed by immigration policies and language assessments (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Language assessments, in this context, can be seen as sites of subjectivity construction, where individuals are required to perform certain linguistic identities that align with the criteria set by the host country. For example, the classification of immigrants based on their language proficiency (e.g., "proficient" vs. "non-proficient" speaker) does more than merely describe their ability to use a language. It also constructs them as either "fit" or "unfit" for integration into the host society (Piller, 2016). Such categorizations have significant implications for how immigrants perceive themselves and are perceived by others. They are not simply being

tested for their language skills but are also being evaluated for their potential to contribute to the host society's social, economic, and cultural fabric (McNamara, 2005).

Poststructuralism thus allows us to examine how these identity constructions are regulated and constrained by the discourses embedded in language policies and assessments. It also highlights how individuals may resist these imposed identities by adopting alternative or hybrid identities that challenge the dominant narratives (Norton, 2013). This resistance is not a straightforward rejection but rather a negotiation where immigrants strategically align themselves with, or distance themselves from, certain aspects of the identities being imposed on them (Darvin & Norton, 2015). For instance, an immigrant might strategically present themselves as a "good" language learner in order to pass a language test, while internally rejecting the notion that their worth is tied to their language proficiency. This form of resistance demonstrates that identities are not passively assigned but are actively negotiated, even within restrictive and powerful discursive environments (Weedon, 1997). By using a poststructuralist lens, we can better understand these nuanced and complex processes of identity construction and the ways in which language assessments contribute to the formation of immigrant subjectivities.

Ultimately, examining subjectivity and identity construction through a poststructuralist framework allows us to uncover the power dynamics inherent in language assessments. It also enables us to see how immigrants navigate these dynamics in their efforts to construct identities that are both personally meaningful and socially acceptable within the context of their new environment.

3.2.4 Poststructuralism in practice: connecting to language assessment for immigration

As discussed earlier, language assessments, particularly in the context of immigration, serve as more than just measures of linguistic competence; they act as tools of social control. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) argues that tests and examinations are principal modes of surveillance in modern societies. They function as mechanisms for categorizing and differentiating individuals, thereby regulating access to resources, rights, and privileges.

In the case of immigration, language tests like CELPIP, IELTS, and PTE are used to determine who is allowed to enter or remain in the country, who is granted citizenship, and who is deemed capable of integration into the national community. These tests, therefore, play a pivotal role in constructing the boundaries of belonging. They regulate who is considered a “suitable” immigrant based on constructed norms of language ability, which often reflect broader societal biases and power structures.

Poststructuralism helps deconstruct the assumptions behind these language tests. For instance, why is a specific level of English proficiency considered essential for integration? Who defines this standard, and whose interests does it serve? These questions help to reveal the ways in which language assessments are embedded in power relations, serving to maintain certain social hierarchies. By scrutinizing these assumptions, a poststructuralist approach allows us to expose the role of language tests as gatekeeping tools that control not only physical borders but also the symbolic boundaries or the invisible borders of Canada.

The concept of shibboleth, explored by Derrida (2005), provides a powerful metaphor for understanding how language tests function as social control. A shibboleth is a linguistic marker used to differentiate between groups, often with severe consequences for those who fail to meet the linguistic standard. Historically, *Shibboleth* is a Hebrew word meaning either “an ear of

wheat” or “a stream.” The pronunciation of this particular word was used to distinguish friends from foes, as speakers of two related dialects pronounced the word slightly differently. Friends received protection, while foes faced death. Derrida’s interpretation of this concept pushes it further into the discussion of identity politics and social exclusion. In the context of immigration, language tests can function as shibboleths in the sense that the test results can determine who is allowed to integrate into a country and who is excluded. In other words, the test is not simply a measure of linguistic competence but a social tool for creating borders of belonging. McNamara (2012, 2019, 2020) has applied this concept in language testing. He highlighted how language tests, under the guise of objectivity, can serve covert political agendas. Language tests are used to maintain control over immigration flow, determining who is deemed ideal for inclusion, which is often considered a sign of broader cultural compatibility. As a result, language assessment reinforces a binary opinion towards insiders and outsiders, us and others, and fulfilling the test requirement is tied to the fulfillment of the socio-political expectations of the host society.

By examining these dynamics, poststructuralism helps to reveal the hidden power structures at play in language assessments and their role in shaping the identities and opportunities of immigrants. Only by recognizing these dynamics, we can understand the role of language tests in perpetuating inequalities and advocate for more equitable approaches that account for the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of immigrants.

3.2.5 From problematization to control: language assessment as governance

In traditional policy research, the starting point is always a description of the problem at hand, followed by a discussion of the competing solutions proposed by the policy, the implementation of the policy, and perhaps policy reform (Scheurich, 1994). However, the

introduction of a Foucauldian notion of discourse into policy studies changes the starting point of inquiry and forces researchers to reconsider the formation of the “problem” itself (Haque, 2019). The articulation of policy problems becomes a process of knowledge formation that is embedded in power relations and is not value-neutral. The problem may be constructed by the policy makers in the first place. One example of a politically loaded policy problem would be “immigration may threaten national interests.” Solutions may then be provided to solve the “problem” while in fact may advance another agenda entirely. Therefore, the whole process of policymaking is considered social performance (Haque, 2019). The purpose of social performance is to reassure citizens that the governing body/ies is/are proposing solutions to social problems (e.g., national unity), but in reality, these supposed solutions are intended to discipline and normalize.

In the immigration context, language assessments are not isolated practices but are deeply intertwined with official discourses of immigration, nationalism, and social cohesion. In this study, I will use a poststructuralist approach to critically examine these discourses to reveal their underlying assumptions, what they omit, and how they operate to maintain certain social orders. For instance, what are the implicit expectations about language proficiency and its link to successful integration into Canadian society? By focusing on what is ignored or oppressed within these discourses, this approach also highlights the experiences and perspectives of those who are marginalized by current language assessment practices. It also explores how these marginalized voices resist, negotiate, and potentially reshape these dominant discourses. Finally, this approach will reveal how language assessments are part of a larger apparatus that constructs and polices the boundaries of citizenship and belonging. It provides a nuanced understanding of how these

assessments impact the lives of immigrants, influence their opportunities for integration, and contribute to the broader project of nation-building in Canada.

While much of the existing research on language assessment for immigration has focused on test developers' intentions and policy makers' perspectives, these views do not fully capture the lived realities of immigrants. A poststructuralist approach emphasizes the importance of diverse voices, particularly those directly affected by language policies. In this context, incorporating immigrants' perspectives is crucial to understanding the broader social, cultural, and political implications of language testing within the immigration process.

3.2.6 Centering immigrant perspectives

Immigrants are uniquely positioned to perceive the disconnect between the intended purpose of language tests and their real-world consequences. As reviewed in previous chapters, much of the existing literature continues to prioritize the perspectives of test developers and policymakers, with limited attention to the lived experiences of test-takers themselves. It is only through immigrants' voices that we can access critical knowledge about how language assessment policies are felt, experienced, and interpreted. Their perspectives are not just important, they are indispensable.

Immigrants are the only ones who can speak to how language testing affects their decision-making, emotional well-being, and understanding of the immigration process. For example, they can provide firsthand accounts of whether the skills tested by IELTS, CELPIP, or PTE Core align with the actual linguistic demands of daily life, employment, or community integration. They can also describe how test expectations shape their perceptions of Canadian culture, as well as their evolving sense of belonging within it. From a poststructuralist

perspective, this knowledge revokes traditional top-down discourses and reveals how power operates through language assessment policies, and may misrepresent or marginalize the realities of immigrants who are subject to them (Foucault, 1977; Shohamy, 2001).

In addition, immigrants also experience the long-term consequences of testing. Language assessments are not isolated events, but they generate ongoing expectations and influence social and economic opportunities throughout one's immigration journey (Polanco & Zell, 2017; Winter, 2018). These consequences include not only institutional impacts such as access to permanent residency or employment, but also symbolic impacts such as internalized feelings of inadequacy, marginalization, or shame tied to test performance (Anya, 2020). Such effects are largely invisible to institutions but deeply affect the everyday lives and identities of immigrants. As Frost (2017) shows, repeated encounters with language tests can accumulate over time to shape perception, emotion, and behavior.

Finally, the inclusion of immigrant perspectives allows for a deeper understanding of how individuals make sense of their own linguistic capital, respond to normative ideologies of language and belonging, and navigate the expectations and responsibilities imposed upon them (Creese & Blackledge, 2019; Ağgün & Demir, 2019). These narratives offer an essential counterpoint to official discourses and expand our understanding of language assessment beyond its technical function. In doing so, immigrants perspectives help to expose the symbolic power of assessment and reveal how it helps in constructing social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1991; McNamara, 2006). By prioritizing immigrants' voices, researchers and policymakers alike can better understand the broader implications of language testing, including both its practical appeal and its social consequences, and move toward more just and responsive policies and practices.

3.3 Framing the study: policy archaeology and the model of investment

In examining the role of language assessment within Canadian immigration policies, this study is guided primarily by policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994), which serves as the overarching analytical framework. Rooted in poststructuralist thought, policy archaeology provides both the theoretical foundation and the methodological tools for interrogating how language testing policies are constructed, problematized, and institutionalized. I also draw on the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) as a complementary interpretive lens in the results chapter. It supports the analysis of immigrants' narratives and perspectives. While policy archaeology frames the study as a whole, the model of investment offers an additional way to view how immigrants negotiate identity, capital, and ideology in relation to language testing.

Rooted in poststructuralist thought, policy archaeology challenges traditional approaches to policy analysis, and enables a critical examination of how policy problems are constructed, questioning the hidden assumptions that shape language requirements in immigration contexts. Policy archaeology is particularly well suited for analyzing language assessment policies by deconstructing how language testing is positioned as a “neutral” requirement within Canadian immigration.

The model of investment provides a complementary perspective, centering the lived experiences of immigrants as they navigate the language testing process. This framework is grounded in the understanding that language learning and use are shaped by broader social structures, including access to resources, power relations, and individual agency. Although never previously used in language assessment studies, the model of investment allows us to focus on identity, capital, and ideology to illustrate how immigrants engage with language testing for immigration purposes. This model allows me to highlight the interplay between individual

aspirations and systemic constraints permitting a nuanced understanding of how language tests influence immigrants' decision making, social status, and opportunities.

3.3.1 Policy archaeology as a theoretical framework

Rooted in poststructuralist thought, policy archaeology provides a critical framework for examining the ideological underpinnings of policy. It interrogates how policy issues, rather than being straightforward responses to objective problems, are socially constructed in ways that align with certain power structures and discourses (Scheurich, 1994; Haque, 2017, 2019). Drawing on Foucauldian notions of discourse, this framework examines how policies construct specific identities and realities by dictating who can speak, which issues are recognized as legitimate, and what knowledge is privileged (Ball, 1993).

This framework allows for broader conceptual questions that challenge the assumptions underlying policy requirements in Canadian immigration. For instance: “What assumptions about citizenship and belonging shape language requirements for immigrants?” and “How does language testing reinforce or challenge social and political power structures?” Through the lens of policy archaeology, the role of language assessment can be examined not simply as a measurement tool of language competence, but as a mechanism to define the boundaries of national identity and eligibility for belonging. Therefore, policy archaeology provides a theoretical foundation that allows me to explore how Canadian immigration policies use language assessments to shape conceptions of the “ideal immigrant” and reinforce social and political structures.

3.3.2 Policy archaeology as a methodological framework

In addition to being a theoretical framework, policy archaeology also informs the methodological approach of this study, specifically the analysis of Canadian immigration policy and language testing requirements. The following four key dimensions in policy archaeology serve as methodological steps in the document analysis (Scheurich, 1994):

- The social construction of policy problems: this dimension allows for an investigation into how particular issues, such as language proficiency, are constructed as problems requiring policy intervention. In this study, policy archaeology will be used to allow me to question why immigrants' language ability have been framed as a political problem that need to be dealt with.
- Rules and regularities of policy formation: this dimension focuses on the often unspoken rules that determine what is considered a policy issue and what is dismissed or overlooked. In language assessment policies, one rule might be that language proficiency is seen as an objective indicator of integration success. This rule assumes that language testing is a neutral method for assessing an immigrants' readiness, leading policies to frame language proficiency as an unquestioned requirement. At the same time, social support systems for immigrants are rarely considered in these policies. By questioning these rules, policy archaeology can permit me to uncover how these restricted criteria dominate immigration policy discussions, pushing aside alternative mindsets on a broader and more nuanced understanding of immigrant success.
- Shaping the range of acceptable solutions: this dimension focuses on how the formulation of a problem also limits the range of solutions deemed acceptable. In this study, integration has been framed primarily to be associated with language ability; therefore,

immigration policy in Canada (and more countries) tends to favor standardized language tests while neglecting other factors that may also be essential, such as community-based support, and networks that facilitate social and economic participation for immigrants, etc. This dimension opens up space for discussing a more varied and equitable approach to immigrant support and integration.

- The social function of policy studies: lastly, policy archaeology questions the assumed neutrality of policy analysis itself, positioning it as a social practice embedded in power relations. For instance, policy studies on language testing in immigration may frame these tests as essential tools for selecting “qualified” immigrants who will integrate successfully. This focus reinforces a narrow definition of immigrant “success” that prioritizes economic contributions. Such studies often justify high language proficiency standards based on economic productivity metrics, suggesting that those with higher scores are more likely to contribute to the labor market. Scholarship in policy archaeology therefore calls for a reflexive approach to critically engage with the implications of policy studies on social dynamics and power structure.

Applying these dimensions as methodological steps allows me to reveal implicit discourses that frame language ability a determining factor in the point system, and how language assessment became a gatekeeping tool. Policy archaeology also provides an approach to systematically question the assumptions, rules, and functions within immigration policies and uncover the power relations embedded within them.

3.3.3 The model of investment as a complementary interpretive lens

The model of investment, developed by Darvin and Norton (2015), provides a sociolinguistic framework that examines how individuals’ interactions with language are shaped

by broader social, economic, and ideological forces. The model shifts attention from viewing language engagement as a matter of individual choice to considering it as a form of investment shaped by the interplay factors of capital, ideology, and identity. These constructs provide an organizing framework that helps interpret how immigrants experience language testing in their Canadian immigration journey and how their perspectives and struggles are situated within the broader structures of power and legitimacy.

The first key component of this model is capital. It emphasizes that language is not simply a communicative resource but a form of social, cultural, and economic value. For immigrants, preparing for and taking a high-stakes test is not only about demonstrating proficiency but also about competing and securing access to employment, education, and mobility. Immigrants' investment in the assessment is inherently tied to their aspirations, their sense of identity, and the opportunities they believe language skills will unlock within Canadian society. The second component is ideology. It adds another dimension by highlighting the normative assumptions embedded in immigration policies. Language tests are framed as indicators of integration and employability, but this framing reflects dominant ideologies that linguistic ability equals to productivity, social worth, and even belonging. This ideological frame also allows for an investigation into how the immigrants perceive the test itself. They may see it not only as an assessment of language abilities but as a gateway to social legitimacy and acceptance. Finally, the third component is identity. It is defined as “a struggle of habitus and desire, of competing ideologies and imagined identities” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). In the immigration context, this means that immigrants are positioned in certain ways by dominant ideologies and, at the same time, position themselves and others within social values of Canadian society. In other words, their desires and aspirations are shaped by societal expectations, while

their sense of self is negotiated through their interactions with language and broader social structures. This aligns with the poststructuralist view that “language constructs our sense of self, and that identity is multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 36).

Adopting the model of investment as a complementary lens in this study has two advantages. First, although language assessment for immigration has been studied across disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, and psychology, certain overarching concepts consistently emerge. These concepts include language ideology and linguistic ideology (Chatterjee, 2015; Creese, 2019; Polanco & Zell, 2017); linguistic capital and human capital (Burkholder & Fillion, 2014; Chatterjee, 2015; Creese, 2019; Polanco & Zell, 2017; Nakhaie, 2020); and immigrant identity, racial identity, and linguistic identity (Burkholder & Fillion, 2014; Chatterjee, 2015; Creese, 2019; Nakhaie, 2020). The model of investment explicitly brings these three strands together—capital, ideology, and identity—thereby offering a structured way to synthesize insights across fields. Second, it aligns with a poststructuralist perspective by recognizing that language assessments are not neutral tools of measurement but are embedded within power structures that position immigrants in multiple and often unequal ways.

In this study, the model of investment is not treated as a parallel theoretical framework but as a lens applied after the initial thematic analysis of focus group and interview data, with that initial analysis guided by insights from policy archaeology. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) is first used to generate and refine themes. The model of investment is then drawn upon to interpret these themes in relation to broader dynamics of power, capital, and belonging. For example, it helps to explain how participants’ resources are valued differently, how they internalize or resist dominant discourses, and how they perform identities within or against the constraints of testing. In this sense, the model provides a coherent

structure for situating personal narratives within the sociopolitical contexts that policy archaeology reveals at the policy level.

By combining these perspectives, policy archaeology functions as the overarching analytical framework that guides the dissertation as a whole. In other words, while policy archaeology explains how language testing becomes institutionalized as a policy problem, the model of investment deepens the analysis by examining how immigrants experience, negotiate, and respond to these institutional pressures in their everyday lives.

3.4 Research questions

Drawing on these two frameworks, I aim to investigate the role of English language assessments in Canadian immigration by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a social and political issue?

a) What discourses frame immigrant language proficiency as a problem requiring regulation?

b) How is language assessment used to legitimize and operationalize these discourses?

RQ2. What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and integration embedded in English language assessment?

3.5 Chapter summary

I have outlined in this chapter the theoretical and methodological framework that guides this study. Through a poststructuralist approach with two key frameworks: policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) and the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), I have introduced the

conceptual and practical tools needed to critically examine the role of language assessment within Canadian immigration policies and its impact on Chinese immigrants.

Poststructuralism serves as the foundational conceptual framework of this study, offering a lens to interrogate how language constructs reality, reinforces power dynamics, and shapes immigrant identities. Several key poststructuralist concepts, including discourse, power, knowledge, subjectivity, and identity construction, have been discussed to emphasize the complexities embedded in language assessment in immigration context. These concepts help me reveal how language tests are not neutral tools but are infused with ideological assumptions that perpetuate particular narratives about who qualifies as an “ideal immigrant.”

Building on this foundation, policy archaeology directs attention to the historical conditions, discursive formations, and institutional logics that shape the emergence and persistence of language testing in Canadian immigration. The model of investment sheds light on how immigrants’ interactions with these assessments are shaped by their access to capital, dominant ideologies, and evolving identities.

Together, these frameworks complement each other in exploring the research questions posed above. Policy archaeology focuses on the macro-level dynamics of policy construction, and policy change, while the model of investment captures the micro-level experiences of immigrants navigating their experiences with language tests.

The next chapter turns to the research design, including how these frameworks inform the data collection and analysis strategies used to address the research questions. Detailed information on study participants, data collection methods, and data analysis approaches are then provided.

Chapter 4 Research methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological foundations and structure of the study. Building on the conceptual discussion in Chapter 3, the study follows a three-phase design. Phase 1 analyzes policy and media documents using policy archaeology to uncover the discursive construction of immigrant language ability. Phase 2 involves focus group discussions with Chinese immigrants. This phase is designed to explore their collective experiences and reflections on language testing. Phase 3 engages selected participants in one-on-one co-analysis sessions, where they serve as my co-researchers to collaboratively analyse data from their focus groups. This study involved two forms of data: document data, which were collected from publicly available policy texts and media sources, and qualitative data generated through focus group discussions, and co-analysis sessions. A final set of 74 documents was selected for detailed analysis based on relevance and data richness and eight focus groups were conducted with a total of 30 Chinese immigrant participants. A sub-group of eight participants took part in one-on-one co-researcher analysis.

Following the qualitative design, I have used thematic and discourse-oriented analysis to understand the complex ways in which language testing intersects with immigration policy and immigrant identity. While the entire study centers participant perspectives, the participatory orientation is most evident in Phase 3, where participants take on active analytical roles. This tri-phase design enables the research to capture both macro-level policy discourses and micro-level lived experiences.

As outlined in Chapter 3, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a social and political issue?

a) What discourses frame immigrant language proficiency as a problem requiring regulation?

b) How is language assessment used to legitimize and operationalize these discourses?

RQ2. What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and integration embedded in English language assessment?

This chapter is organized chronologically according to the three phases of the study. For each phase, I present the methodological rationale, the data collection and generation procedures and the corresponding analytical approaches. The final section addresses ethical considerations and discusses the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The next section provides an overview of the study design.

4.2 Overview of the study design

I have adopted a qualitative methodology grounded in an interpretivist epistemology and a constructionist ontological stance. As Bryman (2012) notes, qualitative research aims to understand the social world through participants' interpretations, while constructionism emphasizes that social phenomena are not independent realities but are produced through interactions among individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This philosophical positioning aligns with the poststructuralist orientation of the study discussed in Chapter 3, which highlights the constitutive power of discourse in shaping knowledge, subjectivities, and policy agendas (Haque, 2019).

A qualitative design is particularly suited to address the research questions posed in this study, which require close engagement with meaning-making, identity, and discursive processes. Furthermore, this qualitative approach allows for a more dialogic and reflective research process, which emphasizes the complexity of participants' lived experiences and their interpretations of language assessment and immigration.

I have also incorporated a participatory dimension in the third phase of the study. Participatory research recognizes participants as co-constructors of knowledge and encourages collaborative inquiry that values their insights and lived realities (Cahill, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This is especially relevant in the co-analysis sessions, where participants take on the role of co-researchers. As Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) note, such engagement fosters openness and authenticity, while other researchers have emphasized its contribution to redistributing ownership of research between researchers and participants and to empowering participants by recognizing their agency in the research process (Blanco & Rossman, 2021; Wolf, 1996).

The three phases of this study are interconnected, each designed to address specific aspects of the research questions and to build upon the findings of the previous phase. The overall structure reflects both the chronological flow of the research process and the layered relationship between discourse, policy, and lived experience. As introduced in Chapter 3, this study is guided by the following two main research questions:

RQ1: How do Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a social and political issue?

RQ2: What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and belonging embedded in English language assessment?

In Phase 1, I conducted a critical document analysis to answer research question 1. Documents collected include Canadian immigration policies and English-language media resources related to language assessment. Using policy archaeology, this phase focused on uncovering the assumptions, rationales, and discursive strategies that frame immigrant language ability as a measurable and political concern. The results informed the discussion prompts used in subsequent focus groups.

In Phase 2, I facilitated focus group discussions with Chinese immigrants who had taken English language tests for immigration purposes, in order to answer research question 2. The conversations were designed to elicit collective reflections on their experiences with testing and were guided by themes identified in Phase 1. A preliminary thematic analysis was then conducted to identify patterns across group discussions and the themes were used to inform Phase 3.

In Phase 3, I conducted one-on-one co-analysis sessions with selected participants from the focus groups, also to answer research question 2. These sessions were designed as collaborative interpretive encounters in which participants acted as my co-researchers. We jointly reviewed excerpts from their focus group transcripts and discussed possible theme labels, inconsistencies, or missing perspectives.

While Phases 1 to 3 generated the empirical findings of this study, I later drew on the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to interpret and discuss the results of the co-

analysis sessions. By focusing on identity, ideology, and capital, this framework enabled a deeper understanding of how language testing shaped participants' lived experiences and their sense of belonging in Canada.

Figures 4 and 5 below present the timeline and structure of the study. Figure 4 outlines the sequence of research activities, while Figure 5 presents the phase-based design of the study.

	Steps	Document data retrieval	Preliminary document data analysis	Participant recruitment (focus groups)	Focus group pilot	Focus group discussions	Focus group data transcription	Preliminary focus group data analysis	Co-researcher recruitment (co-analysis sessions)	Co-analysis pilot	Co-analysis sessions	Co-analysis transcription	Final synthesis/interpretation
Phase 1	Sep - Dec 2022												
Phase 2	Jan-Apr 2023												
	May-Aug 2023												
Phase 3	Sep - Dec 2023												
	Jan - Apr 2024												

Figure 4 Timeline of research activities

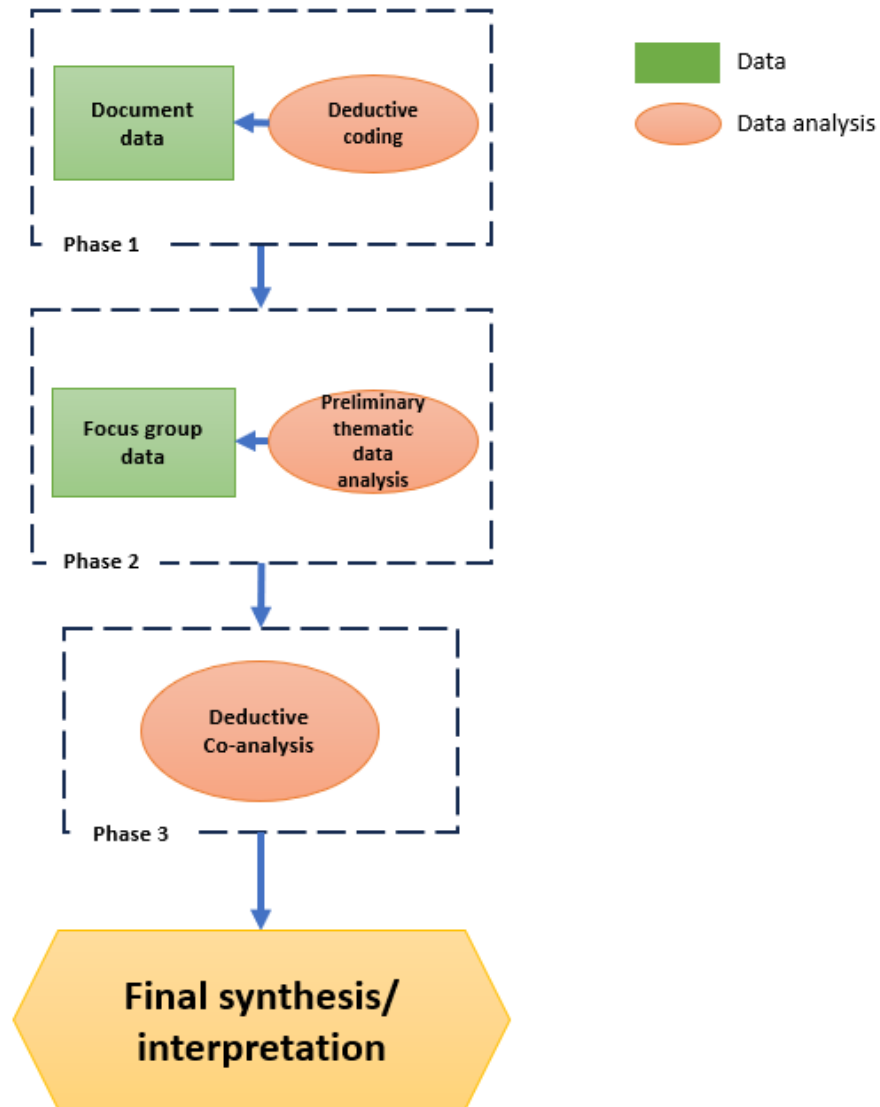


Figure 5 *Flowchart of study design*

This study design incorporates both policy-level analysis and participant-driven perspectives. Each of the three phases is interlinked, both conceptually and procedurally, with each phase building on the last to develop a multi-layered analysis of language assessment in immigration policy.

4.3 Phase 1: Document analysis

4.3.1 Methodological rationale

To understand how immigrant language ability is constructed as a social and political issue in Canada, document analysis is well-suited for uncovering the discursive framing of public policies, especially when paired with critical approaches. In this study, I employed policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994), a framework designed to expose the historical, ideological, and institutional conditions that enable certain policy "problems" to emerge. Rather than viewing policy as a response to neutral issues, policy archaeology reveals how problems are socially constructed and embedded in broader regimes of truth. As discussed in Chapter 3, this approach was appropriate for examining how language proficiency has become naturalized as a key criterion for immigration eligibility and how it is linked with national identity, economic value, and integration.

4.3.2 Data collection

Policy documents were retrieved from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) official website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship.html>), including press releases and ministerial speeches. Media articles were collected from Canada's two largest English-language daily newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, as well as the weekly current affairs magazine *Maclean's*. These sources were selected based on their wide circulation and prominence in English-language Canadian media, as well as their regular coverage of topics related to immigration and language policy. These texts were accessed through the Canadian Newsstand Database and *Maclean's* online archives. Keywords used included combinations of "immigrant," "Canada," "English," and "test."

Document collection focused on the period from 2012 onward, following major revisions to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) framework. The reason for choosing this starting point is that the 2012 CLB introduced more rigorous and nuanced proficiency levels, which reinforced its use in immigration and citizenship contexts and expanded its influence as a standardized language measure.

An initial total of 388 documents were retrieved. I then read these articles by their titles, abstracts, and sometimes detailed content, and eliminated the ones that were not relevant to this study. Seventy-four documents were retained for analysis. The articles I excluded were on topics such as Quebec related issues⁷, the Milestone tests, medical related tests, or any other information that were irrelevant. Table 1 presents the breakdown numbers of retrieved and retained documents. A full list is provided in Appendix C.

Table 1

Document data

Data source	No. of documents after keyword search	No. of documents retained
Policy documents and videos	37	28
The Globe and Mail	191	25
The National Post	118	15
Maclean's	42	6
Total	388	74

⁷ Given that Quebec has its own immigration system with unique selection criteria and language policies, media articles specifically addressing Quebec immigration were excluded from analysis.

Following retrieval, I further categorized the selected articles and documents according to themes adapted from Bhuyan et al. (2017), including (a) immigrant language skills; (b) Canadian values or Canadian identity; (c) language requirements in different immigration streams; and (d) immigration as related to the labor market.

4.3.3 Data analysis

As introduced in Chapter 3, the analysis of document data followed the policy archaeology framework (Scheurich, 1994), which offers a critical approach to understanding how policy issues are discursively constructed and maintained. Rather than treating documents as sources of objective content, this approach views policy texts as active participants in shaping knowledge, truth, and systems of control. The analysis was deductive in nature, guided by the four analytical dimensions of policy archaeology discussed in section 3.3.2: the social construction of the policy problem, the social regularities that sustain it, the policy solutions proposed, and the social function of policy studies. Document analysis was conducted in several stages to address these dimensions systematically.

- In stage one, I explored the background of each text by examining its social and historical context, along with the possible motivations of the text producers. This stage established a foundational understanding of each document's origins and purpose.
- In stage two, I conducted iterative rounds of close reading using Transana, a qualitative data analysis software capable of managing both text and video documents, to trace recurrent metaphors, framings, and ideological cues.
- In stage three, I identified and organized major themes under the four dimensions of policy archaeology, using deductive thematic coding to analyze how immigrant language ability was problematized and managed in public discourse. For example, documents

often described immigrants in economic terms as “influx,” “human capital,” or “talent pipeline,” which frames language testing as a filtering mechanism to regulate this perceived flow. The themes were then presented along with meaningful description and sample quotations from the texts (Mullet, 2018).

- In stage four, I examined the social relations that influenced or controlled the production of each text, as well as how the texts have influenced social practices. For instance, policy documents like *Modernizing Canada’s immigration system to support economic recovery and improve client experience* were released alongside economic strategy announcements, suggesting immigration policies are embedded within broader government economic structures that prioritize immigration for workforce development. This stage provided insight into the social forces shaping both the content and the reception of the documents.
- Finally, in stage five, I revisited key textual structures and narrative fragments to refine the thematic organization and verify analytical coherence across the data set. For example, I re-examined statistics such as “...even after four years, about 15% of immigrant women reported they either cannot speak or, manage to speak an official language poorly” (Anisef et al., 2012, p. 4) or emotionally charged statements in headlines from the *Globe and Mail* such as “*Canadian experience*” hurdle kills too many newcomers’ job hopes” (Rana, 2021). These fragments were mapped into the broader themes to reinforce the coherence between the textual construction and the critical interpretation.

Although the analysis systematically applied all four dimensions of the policy archaeology framework, the findings from Dimensions 1 and 2 proved to be most relevant to the

aims of this study. Dimension 1—identifying how the “problem” of immigrant language proficiency is named and framed—directly informed the design of focus group discussions and served as the foundation for exploring how immigrants interpret and respond to language testing. Dimension 2—mapping the rules and regularities that sustain this framing—further highlighted the underlying assumptions that position language proficiency as an unquestioned marker of integration. These two dimensions therefore structure the presentation of findings in Chapter 5. Dimensions 3 and 4 were also considered during analysis, but their insights are not reported in detail, as their relevance to the specific research questions was more limited.

The analysis led to the identification of four major themes, which informed the development of the focus group protocol. These themes are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

4.4 Phase 2: Focus groups

4.4.1 Methodological rationale

A focus group is a special type of group with members sharing similar characteristics that relate to the research topic (Krueger & Casey, 2014). In this study, the purpose of conducting focus groups is to gain a deeper understanding of how Chinese immigrants perceive and experience the language tests they took during the immigration process, and to reflect on the broader influence of language tests. Since the intent of focus group is to “promote self-disclosure among participants” (Krueger & Casey, 2014, p. 30), I adopted this method for Phase 2 for four reasons. First, they are considered more natural than individual interviews because they simulate everyday discussions and the dynamics of real-life social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2013). This setting encourages participants to engage freely, allowing me to capture a range of authentic

reactions and perspectives. Second, focus groups allow members of the same community to respond to each other's viewpoints and explore common experiences. This collective discussion enriches the information gathered as it highlights the way individuals make sense of their experiences as a community. Third, compared to individual interviews, focus groups involve more people in a single discussion, which is better at eliciting a wide variety of different views and offer opportunities to allow people to probe deeper into each other's reason for holding a view. Finally, they allow the researcher to study the way in which "individuals collectively make sense of a phenomena and construct meanings around it" (Bryman, 2012, p. 504). By focusing on shared and divergent interpretations, I was able to explore how participants co-construct meaning around language testing, which is crucial for understanding its impact on their identities, ideologies, and capital in their immigration journeys.

4.4.2 Data generation

To recruit participants for focus group discussions, I first contacted local Chinese communities in Ottawa and Toronto (see Appendix D for the contact list), with Toronto chosen as an additional location due to its larger Chinese community base. An initial contact recruitment email (see Appendix E) was sent to the contact person in the organizations. If the contact person deemed the research interesting and appropriate, the recruitment letter (see Appendix F) was forwarded to the community members. The individuals potentially interested in participating in the study were invited to contact me directly using the email address provided in the recruitment email. However, after reaching out to all communities on the contact list, only two organizations responded: the Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre (OCCSC) and University of Ottawa Chinese Students Association (UOCSA). Consequently, I organized two focus groups in collaboration with these organizations. Additional participants, both from Ottawa and from

Toronto, were subsequently recruited through personal referrals and through posts I shared on social media platforms including WeChat and Little Red Book.

Before the focus group, each participant received a consent form (see Appendix G) that included the project's purpose, a description of participation, participants' rights, contact details for the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Office, and procedures for filing complaints. Following informed consent, I prepared a screening questionnaire (see Appendix H) to select eligible participants and gather demographic information. However, this questionnaire was only used for the first two groups. Beginning with the third group, eligibility and demographic information was verified through individual conversations with each participant, and therefore the questionnaire was excluded for the subsequent groups. Eligible participants were invited to join the focus group discussion based on the following criteria: (a) they are permanent residents or citizens of Canada, (b) they have taken English language tests (IELTS and/or CELPIP) as part of their immigration process, and (c) they are over 18 years old. Table 2 below provides contextual information about the focus group participants, including their language background, test type, and years of residence in Canada. The purpose of this table is to offer readers a general overview of the participant pool while preserving anonymity.

Table 2

Summary of focus group participant characteristics (N=30)

Characteristic	Count
Gender	Female 24; Male 6
Test taken	IELTS 21; CELPIP 5; Both 4
Preferred discussion language	Mandarin 24; Cantonese 4; English 2

	< 2 years: 5
	2–5 years: 4
Years living in Canada	6–10 years: 18
	>10 years: 10

The focus groups were conducted either in person or online, depending on participants' availability. The in-person sessions were audio recorded. While online sessions conducted via Microsoft Teams were video-recorded, only the audio files were retained and transcribed, in accordance with the consent form. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, I explained the expectations of the discussion: to discuss openly and honestly in the language of their choice (English, Mandarin or Cantonese), and I explained how responses would be recorded. I stated that a mix of languages use in the discussion was acceptable too if it helped the discussion flow naturally. I also assured the participants that when reporting the data and findings of the research, I would not identify any speaker. To allow participants to feel more comfortable in sharing their viewpoints and observations and ensure recording quality, the in-person sessions were conducted in a reserved space free from distraction such as a private meeting room in the library at the University of Ottawa or the University of Toronto. Each discussion lasted about 90 minutes (see table 3 for details).

Because the strength of focus groups lies in group dynamics, I also paid attention to how participants interacted with each other and how I could facilitate balanced contributions. At the start of each session, I established ground rules that encouraged participants to listen to one another, to feel free to share divergent views, and to avoid dominating the floor. During the discussions, when one participant began to monopolize the conversation, I redirected the

question to others and explicitly invited quieter members to contribute. When there were moments of silence, I used prompts or follow-up questions to restart the dialogue. These strategies helped to ensure that multiple voices were heard and that the discussion reflected both shared perspectives and differences within the group.

A total of 11 focus groups with 39 participants were conducted; however, only eight groups with 30 participants were retained for subsequent analysis. The first and second groups were used as pilot studies, and substantive revisions were made to the discussion guide and procedures based on insights from these sessions. For example, I initially asked broad questions such as those about integration and national values, before turning to personal experiences, thinking this would ease participants into the discussion without the immediate pressure of revealing personal test scores. However, I found that participants in the pilot groups often responded from the imagined perspective of policymakers or other stakeholders, rather than grounding their responses in their own lived realities. As a result, I revised the structure to begin with more concrete, experience-based prompts (e.g., number of test attempts, test scores), which helped participants reflect on their own journeys before moving toward broader, more abstract questions. This led to more grounded and focused discussions on language testing itself. Group 6, which has only two participants due to “no shows,” did not generate sufficiently fruitful discussion. Therefore, these three groups were excluded from subsequent data analysis.

Table 3

Focus groups schedule and duration

Groups	No. of participants	Discussion language	Meeting date	Duration (h:m:s)	Notes
1	3	Mandarin	Feb 11, 2023	1:09:03	Pilot, in person

2	4	Mandarin	Feb 12, 2023	1:03:22	Pilot, online
3	3	Mandarin	Feb 19, 2023	1:20:30	in person
4	3	Mandarin and English	Mar 5, 2023	1:21:19	online
5	4	Mandarin and English	Apr 5, 2023	1:31:50	online
6	2	Mandarin and English	Apr 6, 2023	43:37	Discarded
7	4	Mandarin	Jul 30, 2023	1:23:49	in person
8	4	Mandarin and English	Aug 6, 2023	1:26:29	online
9	4	Mandarin	Sep 29, 2023	1:39:35	online
10	4	Cantonese and English	Oct 20, 2023	1:41:02	online
11	4	Mandarin and English	Nov 6, 2023	1:30:25	online
					Total retained
Total	-			-	11:54:59

Note: eight focus groups (N = 30) were retained for analysis after excluding pilot and incomplete sessions, with a total 11:54:59 of audio data.

The focus group discussion questions were developed deductively from the first two dimensions of the policy archaeology framework: the construction of immigrant language ability as a policy problem (Dimension 1) and the rules and regularities that sustain this construction (Dimension 2). In the document analysis, these dimensions revealed recurring framings of integration and national identity as well as assumptions that linked language proficiency with readiness for settlement. To translate these insights into prompts for participants, I designed two strands of questions (see Appendix I for the full protocol): broader discursive questions, which asked participants to reflect on ideas such as integration and Canadian values (e.g., “*What does integration mean to you?*”; “*Do you see language as a key factor in being accepted as part of Canadian society?*”), and concrete, experience-based questions, which addressed test-taking histories that mirrored policy assumptions about language sufficiency (e.g., “*How many times did you take the test?*”; “*What scores were you aiming for, and did you achieve them?*”). In this

way, the broader discursive and concrete experience-based questions directly reflected how policy discourses were constructed in the documents. The substantive themes emerging from this document analysis are presented in Chapter 5, but at this stage the analysis served primarily to inform the development of the focus group protocol.

After the focus groups, I maintained regular contact with many of the participants over the period of the study through email or phone. This regular contact was an important part of getting to know participants and of building mutual trust and rapport. It both helped with participant recruitment for the follow up co-analysis sessions and allowed me to draw on a broader context of understanding and interpreting focus group and co-analysis data.

4.4.3 Preliminary thematic analysis

Data from the focus group discussions were first transcribed verbatim in the original language(s). Because my supervisor works primarily in English, I translated three focus group transcripts into English for the purpose of collaborative preliminary coding. My supervisor and I each coded these three translated transcripts independently using color coding, then met to discuss our interpretations and reach consensus on initial themes. These initial themes informed my coding of the remaining five focus groups, which was conducted using the original-language transcripts. English translations of excerpts were then produced after analysis for reporting and writing purposes.

In total, nine initial themes were identified from the focus group data, which subsequently guided the co-analysis sessions in phase 3. These themes are listed and discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Throughout the process, I employed a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach. RTA is an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that helps to identify and analyze patterns or themes in a given dataset

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Braun et al., 2019). It involves six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Although the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) was not used during this phase, it was later applied in Phase 3 as an interpretive lens.

To establish coding reliability and reduce the possibility of inadvertent coder biases, two rounds of repeated coding procedure, as suggested by Mackey and Gass (2015), were adopted over an extended period of two months. I also adopted a reflexive and iterative stance throughout, allowing space for unexpected patterns and participant insights to inform ongoing analysis. This preliminary thematic analysis laid the foundation for the more participatory, collaborative interpretation in the next phase.

Table 4 below provides two examples of how a portion of transcript data was coded into a theme. These examples highlight how participants' discussions were categorized and interpreted as part of the initial thematic analysis process.

Table 4

Example of coding focus group data into a theme

Initial codes	Transcript excerpt	Annotation
Strategies for test taking and immigration procedure	<i>"You just throw yourself into the pool first, and then slowly update (your language scores) later!" (FG3-P07)</i> <i>"When I registered for the tests back then, it was just like ordering from a menu—bam bam bam—I signed up for whatever date was available. Once I got my scores and they were good enough, I just cancelled the rest." (FG3-P08)</i>	These are the common tactics used, similar to FG6 when they talked about date selection, location choice, and registration of the test.
English necessity for survival or	<i>"If you want to work and have long-term development in a professional field, then indeed, English is crucial." (FG8-P26)</i>	They've divided different scenarios mainly for work, for daily lives. Some mentioned job

advancement in Canada	<i>"...for example, my mom lives in Toronto, she doesn't speak any English. I mean, you can live quite well without language because you might not need it." (FG7-P21)</i>	position promotion requires higher language skills. It also depends on the social circles one has (Group 3). So this is about to what extent do Chinese immigrants need English to survive, or to be successful (career, social, etc.) in Canada.
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4.5 Phase 3: Co-analysis sessions

4.5.1 Methodological rationale

The third phase of this study draws from a participatory research approach, which recognizes participants as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive sources of data. Unlike traditional methodologies that position researchers as sole experts, participatory research involves collaboration with participants in shaping the direction, analysis, and interpretation of the research (Cahill, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This approach aligns with the poststructuralist epistemology and critical orientation of this study by challenging traditional power dynamics and privileging the voices and insights of those directly affected by the policies under investigation (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

While Phase 2 focused on collective meaning-making in community-based discussions, Phase 3 extended the participatory commitment by engaging a smaller group of participants as co-researchers in part of the data analysis process. This co-analysis approach draws inspiration from participatory action research (PAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR). Both of them emphasize collaborative interpretation and shared authority in research processes.

Rather than relying on member checking or feedback sessions, which often limit participants to validating a researcher's pre-formulated interpretations, I used this method to position my participants as active interpreters of data, allowing them to shape the meanings and themes directly (Birt et al., 2016; Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Doyle, 2007).

This method is particularly valuable for research with immigrant communities, where cultural differences, lived experiences, and social values are often overlooked or misunderstood in top-down analyses. In the context of this study, by including Chinese immigrants as co-analysts, I was able to generate findings that are both contextually grounded and methodologically reflexive. In addition, as a member of the Chinese immigrant community myself, I embraced my role as a visible, active participant throughout this process. Rather than concealing myself behind a formal guide or a researcher, I positioned myself as a knowledge-producing participant alongside my co-researchers. This reflexive stance allowed me to connect with participants on common ground, fostering rapport and openness during our sessions. This approach also aligns with reflexive participatory practices that emphasize empathy, transparency, and shared meaning-making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4.5.2 Procedure and session design

Eight participants for the co-analysis sessions were drawn from the focus group members on a first-come, first-served basis. These participants were invited to engage more deeply with the study findings by taking on the role of my co-researchers. Each participant was required to sign the consent form for co-analysis sessions (see Appendix J). Each session was designed to conduct a collaborative data analysis using the co-analysis protocol (see Appendix K).

All eight co-researchers were themselves Chinese immigrants, sharing a common linguistic and cultural background with the larger participant pool, while also differing in age, immigration stream, and language repertoire. Importantly, each co-researcher represented the focus group in which they had originally participated in, ensuring that the perspectives they carried forward in the co-analysis were grounded in, and reflective of, the diversity of the initial group discussions. This group identity both grounded their interpretations in lived experience and added diversity to the perspectives brought into the co-analysis.

Each co-analysis session was conducted either in-person or via Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant's preference. In-person sessions were audio recorded, and while online sessions were video-recorded, only the audio files were retained and transcribed, in line with the consent form. To prepare for each session, I followed a structured protocol:

- a. One week prior to the session, I sent each participant the transcript of the focus group discussion in which they had participated. These transcripts included color-coded excerpts corresponding to three or four themes identified in my preliminary analysis. However, no theme labels were shared in advance. This allowed participants time to review the data and familiarize themselves with the highlighted patterns without being influenced by my interpretations. Participants were also already aware, from the earlier focus group discussions, that policy analysis was part of the broader study, but they were not provided with the findings of that analysis either. The co-analysis sessions therefore focused solely on their own focus group transcripts, ensuring that their contributions remained grounded in lived experience and independent from the policy analysis results. Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of the themes to each co-analysis sessions. The first three themes were selected based on their direct relevance

with the research questions, while the fourth theme, if time allowed, was the one that they spent most time discussing in their focus group.

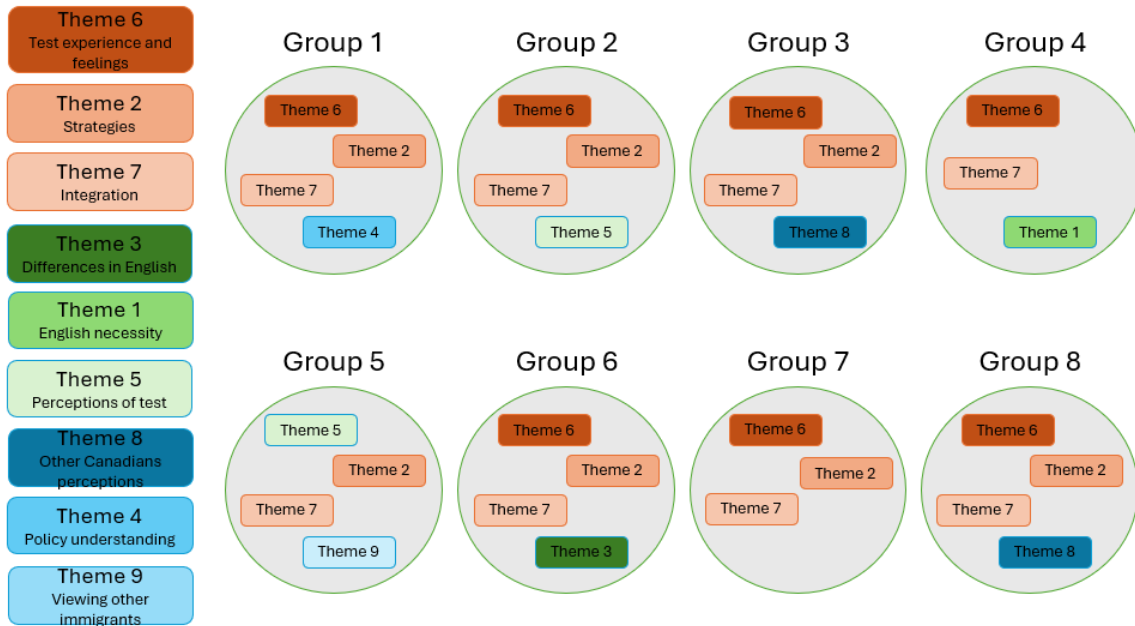


Figure 6 Theme distribution for co-analysis sessions

- b. At the beginning of each session, I explained my expectations for them to perform as my co-researchers and analyze the data with me. I then invited them to read through the color-coded data and decide if the same color-coded data should belong together. If so, I asked what the names of the themes should be. We were all able to comment on, question, or critique these themes and suggest any additional themes if they felt relevant.

Throughout the co-analysis process, I avoided academic jargon and used accessible language when referencing earlier findings. My goal was to ensure that participants fully understood the content and could engage meaningfully in the discussion. Each session lasted

approximately 90 minutes, providing ample time for collaborative analysis. Table 5 shows the co-analysis sessions schedule and duration.

Table 5

Co-analysis sessions schedule and duration

Co-researchers	Language	Meeting date	Mode	Duration (h:m:s)
CR1	Mandarin	Oct 30, 2023	In person	1:33:41
CR2	Mandarin and English	Nov 11, 2023	In person	1:11:06
CR3	Mandarin and English	Nov 17, 2023	Online	1:36:05
CR4	Mandarin	Dec 05, 2023	Online	1:27:32
CR5	Mandarin and English	Jan 07, 2024	Online	1:22:48
CR6	Mandarin	Jan 21, 2024	Online	2:57:03
CR7	Cantonese and English	Feb 02, 2024	Online	2:18:11
CR8	Mandarin and English	Feb 20, 2024	Online	1:30:27
Total				13:56:53

This collaborative analysis process empowered my participants to verify and reinterpret the thematic structure of the study. It also facilitated a deeper understanding of the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of language testing as experienced by Chinese immigrants.

4.5.3 Collaborative data analysis

Collaborative data analysis sessions were conducted primarily in Mandarin or Cantonese, depending on participants' preferences. All excerpts discussed during these sessions were drawn from the original-language transcripts rather than English translations. This approach ensured that participants could engage with the data using their own linguistic and cultural resources and

that meaning-making during co-analysis remained grounded in participants' lived language practices.

My co-researchers actively challenged, refined, and re-labeled the color-coded excerpts based on their own interpretations. Several themes were split into more specific sub-themes, while others were reframed to better reflect participants' lived experiences. For instance, one co-researcher proposed changing the theme *"Participants' experiences (经验) and feelings taking the tests"* to *"Participants' testing history (经历) and feelings taking the test."* She drew on the attention to a subtle but significant distinction between two Chinese terms that are often mistranslated into English. This correction reflects not only a linguistic nuance but also a culturally grounded clarification.

Another example involved an initially broad theme, *"Comments on integration and integration efforts."* Through collaborative discussion, my co-researchers helped refine this theme and suggested developing two additional themes alongside it: *"Self-identity within a multicultural context"* and *"Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits."* This process of refinement demonstrates the depth and rigor of our co-analysis. Rather than passively reviewing my initial codes, my co-researchers critically examined the data, voiced disagreements, and engaged in dialogue to negotiate new thematic structures. In doing so, we co-constructed more meaningful and precise representations of the data.

It is worth mentioning that the emergence of the theme *"Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits"* is particularly significant. It reflects a deeply felt dimension of our collective identity, something that may not have been surfaced or interpreted with the same resonance if this study was conducted by a researcher unfamiliar with the Chinese immigrant experience. This

example demonstrates the value of engaging participants as co-researchers, particularly in studies involving marginalized communities. It also speaks directly to the importance of community engagement in research: not just as a methodological choice, but as an epistemological stance where meaning is co-produced through mutual recognition and shared understanding.

As a result of these collaborative revisions, the number of themes expanded from nine to thirteen. These final themes more accurately reflected both the complexity and diversity of participant experiences.

4.6 Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

Several measures were implemented to safeguard participants' rights and protect their identities. First, ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics board prior to any data collection. Second, recruitment materials were sent to the potential participants in a language they knew and understood (Mandarin, Cantonese, and English), with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, the level of involvement required of the participants, and the time span of the study. The consent forms also explicitly indicate that participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and that each participant has the right to withdraw from the study for any reason at any point, although requests to remove all or part of her/his data might not be able to be fulfilled because participants interacted and reacted to each other's comments, but there were no foreseeable risks during and after the study. Third, the names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms before data analysis. The connection between participants' names and the pseudonyms were kept in a coded document in case any participant requests to withdraw from the study. Fourth, all personal data, including focus group discussion and co-analysis sessions, are secured and concealed. Access to the data was restricted to me and my supervisor. Finally, as the researcher of the study, although I have made clear in the consent form that I cannot

guarantee absolute confidentiality of group discussions. I encouraged the participants to keep the identity of their fellow participants as well as the content of our discussions confidential.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several strategies were employed across the dimensions of credibility, dependability, and transferability, following qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility was enhanced through the participatory co-analysis process and reflexive engagement. In Phase 3, participants were not merely asked to confirm pre-existing interpretations; instead, they actively interrogated, revised, and sometimes rejected the themes I initially proposed. Their contributions resulted in the emergence of new themes and reframing of existing ones, and shifted the analytic direction of the study in meaningful ways. This dynamic and dialogic approach ensured that the findings were not solely researcher-imposed but co-constructed through collaborative reflection and negotiation. My shared cultural and linguistic background with participants further supported credibility by fostering mutual understanding and deeper interpretive insight.

Dependability was addressed through careful documentation of the research process and transparent analytic procedures. I maintained a research journal throughout data collection and analysis that recorded methodological decisions, coding changes, and reflections on emerging interpretations. Additionally, two rounds of coding were conducted to refine theme development and identify discrepancies, contributing to internal consistency. The preliminary co-coding process with my supervisor also served as an external check, adding an additional layer of reliability.

Transferability was supported by the inclusion of thick descriptions, both in the form of detailed participant profiles and in the presentation of data excerpts in the findings chapter. These were accompanied by contextual information and analytic commentary, so the readers can evaluate how and why certain interpretations were made and whether they might apply to other contexts.

Together, these ethical and methodological practices strengthened the study's integrity and ensured that participants' voices were represented with care, cultural sensitivity, and analytical rigor.

4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the research design, methodology, and procedures undertaken to explore the role of language assessment in the immigration experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada. Through document analysis, focus group discussions, and co-analysis sessions, I investigated both policy structures and the lived experiences of those navigating language assessments. The chapter detailed the methods used to gather, analyze, and interpret data, guided by frameworks such as policy archaeology and the model of investment. These frameworks provided critical lenses for examining the social and political dynamics embedded in language policies.

I have also presented measures to ensure the trustworthiness of this study including strategies for credibility, dependability, and transferability. With this foundation, the subsequent chapter contains the study's findings, showcasing the themes and insights that emerged from participants' experiences and perspectives on language assessment as a tool within Canadian immigration. These findings offer a nuanced understanding of how language testing intersects

with identity, social integration, and policy, setting the stage for further discussion and implications.

Chapter 5 Research findings: policy discourses and immigrant perspectives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the study based on two main sources of data: Canadian policy documents and media discourses, and the lived experiences of Chinese immigrants generated through focus groups and co-analysis sessions. Together, these two sources are examined in dialogue, with document analysis revealing the dominant discourses underpinning immigration policy and participants' accounts illustrating how these discourses are taken up, resisted, or reinterpreted in everyday life. In this way, I highlight through this chapter how language assessment functions both as a policy mechanism and as a lived experience that shapes immigrant subjectivities.

The first part of this chapter draws on the results of Phase 1, the document analysis, in response to the first research question. Policy archaeology informed the analysis across four dimensions. In reporting the findings, I focus on Dimensions 1 and 2. Dimension 1 examines how the “problem” of immigrant language proficiency is named and framed, while Dimension 2 highlights the underlying rules and regularities that shape policy formation, such as assumptions about language proficiency as a marker of integration. Together, these findings point to four dominant discourses: economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering.

The second part of the chapter centers on the voices of Chinese immigrants, presenting findings from focus group discussions. In addition to thematic findings, I also reflect briefly on the group dynamics that shaped how participants expressed, negotiated, and occasionally revised their perspectives in the collective setting. Through a collaborative approach, 13 themes were

developed through the co-analysis sessions to capture how immigrants experience language assessment policies and navigate their implications in daily life. This part also presents a few relevant comments made by the co-researchers during the co-analysis sessions for each theme. These findings highlight the emotional, social, and material consequences of language testing and the complex ways immigrants negotiate their identities, ideologies, and resources within the Canadian immigration system.

Together, the findings presented in this chapter provide a comprehensive foundation for the discussion in Chapter 6, where the policy discourses are discussed and lived experiences of Chinese immigrants are mapped to the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to present the broader dynamics of language, power, and immigrant subjectivity.

5.2 Part 1: Document analysis results

This section presents the findings from the first and second dimensions of policy archaeology, which examines how the issue of language ability is constructed as a policy problem in Canadian immigration system and the underlying rules that sustain this framing. Through analysis of government documents and media sources, four key themes were identified that reflect dominant narratives about the role of language in immigrant integration. They are economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering. These themes also shaped the discussion questions later used in the focus groups. The following subsections present each theme, with examples from both policy and media texts.

While the focus group protocol was developed from the first dimension of policy archaeology (the construction of immigrant language ability as a policy “problem”), brief

references to the second dimension (rules and regularities that stabilize this framing) are included to show how these discourses are implicitly reinforced.

For easier reference, all analyzed sources were assigned identification numbers. Government policy documents are labeled as Doc. 1, Doc. 2, ..., while media sources are labeled as Media 1, Media 2, These numbers are used throughout the chapter when citing excerpts. A full list of documents is available in Appendix C.

5.2.1 Economic justification: language as a tool for workforce integration

Policy documents and media frequently frame language proficiency as a key condition for economic participation. At the 11th National Metropolis Conference, the former Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism (as the Ministry was formerly named), Jason Kenney, described proficiency in Canada's official languages as "a pathway to socio-economic integration" (Galiev & Masoodi, 2012). His statement reflects a broad policy discourse that positions English (and French) proficiency as essential for newcomers to fully participate in Canadian society. Many sources support the idea that language acquisition is a necessary step toward economic and social mobility. For example, a 2012 study commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada reported an evaluation of language proficiency gains among immigrant women. This report asserts that "*language proficiency is one of the most important factors contributing to the successful integration of immigrants.*" (Doc. 1).

Similarly, government-funded evaluations of language instruction programs highlight how language barriers are directly linked to economic marginalization, which reinforces the notion that immigrants who fail to acquire language skills are at risk of unemployment or underemployment. For example, a federal research article published by Statistics Canada

examined the relationship between official language proficiency and immigrant labor market outcomes and reported evidence from test-based measures of language skills. They found that the test-based language measures serve as a strong predictor of positive effects of immigrants' earnings, and stated that:

“Compared with other human capital factors, the tested official language skills were as important as pre-immigration Canadian work experience and much more important than the educational level and age at immigration in predicting earnings in the initial years after immigration.” (Doc. 14).

These framings construct language ability as a form of human capital that determines whether newcomers will succeed in the labour market and, by extension, integrate into Canadian society.

Beneath this framing are the rules and regularities that sustain it (Scheurich, 1994). These implicit assumptions include the belief that integration is primarily the immigrant's responsibility, that official language proficiency functions as a proxy for both loyalty and productivity, and that successful settlement must be earned through measurable performance. Within this logic, standardized testing appears as a neutral policy tool, offering numerical “evidence” that applicants either meet or fall short of requirements. By operationalizing language through CLB scores and high-stakes exams, the system validates the very framing it is built upon, at the same time, it also justifies ongoing exclusions whenever standards are raised or adjusted to match labour market priorities.

5.2.2 National identity discourse: language as a measure of belonging

Policy discourses frequently present proficiency in English as essential for full civic participation, which links language ability to Canadian values, unity, and social cohesion. This framing not only positions language as a practical skill but also a symbol of belonging, even though a definition of Canadian values is never explicitly given in the documents. For example, a survey report published by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in 2021 explored Canadians' opinions on official languages and bilingualism. The survey results show the following:

“Support for official languages is high and it is consistent; it appears to be a core Canadian value in 2021 as it was in 2016.” and “Correlation between attitudes towards official languages and other contemporary issues is modest, suggesting overall support for official languages across a spectrum of social values.” (Doc. 13).

Meanwhile, several media sources reported opinions from “local” people regarding the language ability of immigrants and the broader significance they attribute to them. For instance, a 2018 *National Post* article titled *A City's Search for 'Cultural Harmony'* describes public concerns about linguistic and cultural integration in Richmond, B.C. A local person was complaining about the large number of Chinese-language business signs in Richmond and how it has “upset” them:

"My wife and I understand that the world is changing. However, when our ancestors came over and took on Canadian citizenship, they took on the customs, languages and day-to-day Canadian practices," ... "We are losing what Canada was..." (Media. 5)

Media discourses also sometimes frame immigration as conditional upon alignment with presumed national values. One *National Post* article explicitly ties national belonging to ideological conformity,

“This is a liberal, democratic, pluralist society. If you want to live here, you'd better be a liberal, a democrat and a pluralist.” (Media. 13)

Although this quote does not directly mention language, it offers insight into the broader ideological framework in which language becomes symbolic of value alignment. By connecting language abilities with social values, these quotes have framed language learning as a moral and civic responsibility, which reinforces the expectation that immigrants should assimilate linguistically to fully integrate into Canadian society. In other words, these quotes are examples of the perception that the burden should be on immigrants to demonstrate their commitment to “Canadian values” by acquiring the official language skills that are aligned with moral expectations (Haque, 2012; Piller, 2016).

This framing becomes even more complex when considering that “Canadian values” are themselves ambiguously defined. As Satzewich (2016) notes in *The Globe and Mail* “...even if it were practical to screen for ‘Canadian values,’ coming up with a universal set of our nation's values would be impossible.” (Media. 32)

Satzewich also critiques the past practices such as the “personal suitability” assessment once used in the Canadian immigration system, which was ultimately abandoned due to inconsistency and legal challenges.

Beneath these discourses lies a set of implicit assumptions that reinforce the taken-for-granted link between language and belonging. Canadian identity is presented as inseparable from

official language proficiency, while linguistic assimilation is framed as both a civic duty and a moral expectation. These rules and regularities position English and French not simply as tools for communication, but as symbolic tests of loyalty and alignment with national identity. Within this logic, standardized language testing is normalized as the mechanism that verifies such belonging, making linguistic conformity appear to be an unquestioned requirement for full civic membership.

Combining the results of these two themes already bring a certain perception into focus: the framing of the “problem” has become clearer. If language proficiency is constructed as essential for economic contribution and ideological integration, the next plausible question to ask is then whether immigrants truly have adequate language ability to contribute economically and integrate ideologically.

5.2.3 Deficit framing: constructing immigrants as lacking adequate language skills

Both government policies and media narratives frequently frame immigrants as linguistically deficient, which justifies government’s measures of intervention such as mandatory language testing and formal language instruction programs. This deficit perspective is exemplified in documents where immigrant language skills are presented as a “problem” that needs to be corrected, which reinforce the notion that newcomers are unprepared for integration without structured intervention. This logic is evident in national policy discourse. For instance, a federal report emphasized that, *“older women, those who were visible minorities, and those with less education tended to perceive language barriers as the greatest impediment to settlement.”* (Doc. 1). While presented as an observation of immigrant perceptions, such statements are frequently mobilized in policy documents to underscore language deficiency and the need for intervention.

Similar statements appear across multiple reports, particularly those evaluating language training programs or reporting on immigrant women's experiences (e.g., *Explaining Self-Reported Language Proficiency Gains of Immigrant Women*, *Evaluation of the language instruction for newcomers to LINC program*, *Official Languages and Immigration: Obstacles and Opportunities for Immigrants and Communities*). These documents frequently highlight older women, racialized immigrants, or those with limited education as struggling with language acquisition. Such repetition reinforces a deficit-oriented narrative that portrays certain immigrant groups as inherently lacking the language skills needed for success.

Media narratives similarly reproduce this deficit logic, especially in coverage of international student experiences. A *Globe and Mail* article on Cape Breton University describes how the rapid increasing of international students, many from non-English-speaking backgrounds, led faculty members to change their teaching to accommodate perceived language deficiencies. One professor comments:

“‘There’s no way that you can keep the exact same curriculum, if you’ve got a large proportion of your students who struggle with English language skills,’ Prof. Stewart says. ‘I changed assignments to make it so that students had to write much less. They could write short-answer stuff and not essays. We went over things much more slowly. None of these things are necessarily bad in and of themselves. But it certainly creates a change.’”

Brian Tennyson, a historian who has taught at CBU, and its predecessor, for more than 40 years, says that in his experience, the students are capable but struggle with the language. ‘Their writing skills are shaky. You have to cut them a lot of slack...’” (Media. 30).

These quotes reflect a perception that international students' language skills often fall short of institutional expectations, forcing instructors to adjust assignments and teaching approaches. This reinforces the view that structured language intervention is necessary for successful participation.

Underlying these deficit narratives are taken-for-granted assumptions about what counts as “sufficient” linguistic competence. The implicit rule is that proficiency in English or French must reach an institutionally defined threshold for immigrants to be considered ready for integration, regardless of their other skills or experiences. Deficiency is therefore constructed not only through explicit policy requirements but also through the unspoken norm that newcomers begin from a position of lack. Within this logic, language testing and training programs appear as neutral remedies, when in fact they might also reproduce the very problem framing by continuously generating evidence of immigrant shortfall. This cycle naturalizes the expectation that integration is only possible through government-validated linguistic correction, and that those who cannot meet such standards remain outside the boundaries of full participation.

5.2.4 Cultural othering: framing non-English speakers as outsiders

Unlike government policies, which tend to frame language issues in economic and civic terms, media sources appear to be more likely to emphasize linguistic and cultural divisions. Immigrants who use non-official languages in public spaces are frequently portrayed as resistant to integration, which emphasizes an “us versus them” dynamic. For example, in a *National Post* article on intercultural tensions in Richmond, B.C., city councillors expressed concern about newcomers' language use and their perceived lack of cultural integration:

“At a January council meeting, Councillor Chak Au said immigrants need to know what's expected of them, ‘how do we expect them to integrate ... and do their part, such as acquiring the language, knowing the culture and becoming part of us. ‘Asked what he meant by ‘us,’ Au told the Post someone who has put down roots in the community, as opposed to someone who is always ‘looking back, as if (they) have another alternative.’”

“‘They don't meld together,’ says Arnold. ‘One of the things about multiculturalism ... is it gives people who are not particularly eager to assimilate to a new culture too many excuses not to do that.’” (Media. 5)

A resident interviewed by *National Post* expressed discomfort with immigrants using non-official languages in public, stating that *“they don't speak to us,”* and that this linguistic separation made her feel *“outnumbered by all these Asian people.”* (Media. 8)

This quotation demonstrates how language differences are interpreted not only as a communication issue, but as a symbol of exclusion. The speaker in this quote expresses a sense of loss over their perceived dominant status in the community, which reveals a deep anxiety about the demographic change in her surroundings. Here, linguistic diversity is not seen as part of multiculturalism, which they encourage and consider is part of the “Canadian values” that can enrich Canadian society, but rather as a threat to social cohesion. Such fear of losing the value of “us” is so strong and sometimes people even move on to talk about a “value test” in addition to the language test:

“The idea of a ‘values test’ for immigrants is popular because many people believe some newcomers are reluctant to integrate.”

“People are wary of too much diversity. They fear that it threatens social cohesion.”

(Media. 28)

The recurring media narrative suggests that immigrants who do not speak English are unwilling to participate in Canadian society.

Beneath these narratives lies an implicit rule that public use of non-official languages is equated with non-belonging. The regularity is that “true” integration is associated with visible conformity to dominant linguistic and cultural practices, while continued use of other languages signals reluctance or even refusal to integrate. This assumption positions English (and French) not only as tools of communication but as moral indicators of loyalty and readiness for inclusion. As a result, linguistic diversity becomes reinterpreted as cultural distance, and language tests appear as instruments to keep this boundary. In practice, this reinforces a cycle where immigrants are expected to demonstrate their belonging through linguistic assimilation, and any deviation is read as cultural resistance rather than as a normal feature of multilingual societies.

5.2.5 Summary of Part 1: Document analysis results

The document analysis has demonstrated how immigrant language proficiency is framed as a problem requiring state intervention, structured through dominant discourses in both government policy documents and media narratives. Through the themes of economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering, language proficiency is positioned as a predictor of economic success, a marker of national belonging, and a barrier to integration that immigrants must overcome, even if “there is no systematic research to date to support the assumption that language requirements have a positive effect on integration” (Carlsen & Rocca, 2021, p. 483).

At the same time, the analysis also revealed the underlying rules and regularities that sustain these framings. Dimension 1 of policy archaeology identified the overt construction of immigrant language ability as a policy problem, while Dimension 2 highlighted the implicit assumptions that helped actualize these constructions. These assumptions include the belief that integration is primarily an individual responsibility, that official language proficiency is a proxy for both loyalty and productivity, and that successful immigration must be earned through measurable performance. From these assumptions, policy tools such as the CLB and standardized language tests appear to be neutral and technical, but in practice they reinforce the original framing of immigrants as deficient and in need of regulation.

Table 6 below presents the four major themes together with their sources and the legitimization strategies used to establish their validity. Immigrants' language ability is framed as a determinant of economic success, a marker of national belonging, a site of deficit, a source of cultural division, a moral responsibility, and a justification for success or failure narratives about immigrants. Numbers in brackets refer to the document numbers in which these themes were identified. The questions derived from these themes for the focus group discussions are listed in the table as well.

Table 6

Framing of immigrants' language ability as a policy issue in government and media discourses and related focus group questions

Themes	Description	Source	Legitimation strategy	Linked focus group questions (designed based on document analysis findings)
Economic justification	Language proficiency is essential for workforce integration	Government policy document (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 16, 20, 28)	Rationalization (Economic success)	Q1 and Q5 were designed to explore how participants experienced language testing as a factor in immigration, work, and settlement, reflecting discourses that position language as economically necessary.
National identity discourse & Public responsibility	Speaking English is fundamental to Canadian values, and immigrants are expected to learn it to show commitment.	Government policy document (9, 13, 18, 19, 20) Media sources (4, 13, 24, 32)	Moral evaluation (National unity and public fear)	Q4 focuses on how participants interpret Canadian identity and whether language contributes to national belonging, responding to framings that link language to civic values.
Deficit framing	Immigrants lack adequate language skills, requiring intervention	Government policy document (1, 6, 7, 15), Media sources (1, 17, 30, 41)	Authorization (Expert justifications)	Q2 examines whether participants believe their test scores align with their real communicative needs, reflecting deficit-based portrayals of immigrants' language skills.
Cultural othering	Immigrants who speak a different language are seen as outsiders and not making an effort to integrate	Media sources (2, 4, 5, 8, 24, 28, 32, 44)	Cultural stereotyping	Q3 explores participants' experiences of social inclusion and expectations of assimilation, in response to narratives that position non-English speakers as cultural outsiders.

Note. Legitimation strategies are interpreted based on Scheurich's (1994) policy archaeology framework, focusing on how policy problems are socially constructed and justified.

The next section will shift from document analysis to focus group and co-analysis results and provide an immigrant-centered perspective on these policies. While this section showed how language testing is justified and institutionalized at the policy level, the focus group and co-

analysis findings will explore how these policies are experienced, interpreted, and challenged by the immigrants themselves who are directly affected.

5.3 Part 2: Immigrants' lived experiences (Focus groups & comments made during the co-analysis sessions)

This section presents findings from the focus groups and subsequent co-analysis sessions. The focus groups provided an initial exploration of how Chinese immigrants in Canada experience, navigate, and interpret language policies, language tests, and social integration. In the second phase of co-analysis sessions, participants transformed into my co-researchers. As explained in Chapter four, this method ensured that the final themes were not solely constructed by the researcher myself, but co-constructed through collaborative interpretation with those who experience these policies firsthand. As a result, in the preliminary focus group analysis, nine major themes emerged. During the co-analysis process, my co-researchers and I expanded, challenged, and reinterpreted these themes, and refined them to a final set of 13 themes.

The excerpts presented in this chapter are drawn from the results of the focus group discussions and comments made by my co-researchers during the co-analysis sessions. Participants from focus groups are labeled as FGx-Py, where *x* refers to the focus group number, and *y* indicates the participant number within that group. Comments from co-analysis sessions with my co-researcher are labeled as CRz, with *z* representing the sequence of our co-analysis meetings. These comments are not research results but they are included to provide a view into the valuable contributions of my co-researchers.

All participant quotes were originally produced in Mandarin or Cantonese, often involving translanguaging with English, and have been translated into English by me.

Translations aim to preserve the speaker's intent and tone while ensuring clarity for the reader. Minor repetitions and filler words (e.g., “um,” “uh,” or “你知道吧”) have been removed for readability, unless they contribute meaningfully to the participant's expression. Square brackets [] are used to add clarifying information, and ellipses (...) indicate omitted content.

5.3.1 From document analysis to dialogue: focus group questions

The design of the focus group discussions was directly shaped by insights from the document analysis. If language proficiency is constructed as a policy issue in government documents and media narratives, then it is important to examine how immigrants themselves experience, internalize, and respond to these narratives. These discourses present language ability as a requirement for economic participation, a marker of Canadian identity, and a measurable deficit that must be corrected through standardized testing.

Q1. Standardized testing as gatekeeping

- How many times did you take the test?
- What scores were you aiming for? And did you achieve them?
- How did testing affect your immigration process and decision?

Q2. Language and everyday life:

- How does language proficiency affect your daily experiences in work, education, and/or social life?
- Do language test scores reflect your actual language needs in Canada?

Q3. Belonging, integration, and responsibility

- What does “integration” mean to you?

- Do you see language as a key factor in being accepted as part of Canadian society?
- Do you feel responsible integrating, and if so, how is that responsibility defined?

Q4. Canadian identity and values

- What does “Canadian identity” mean to you?
- Who gets to be considered “Canadian”? Is language a defining factor?
- Do you feel that Canadian values align with your own experiences?

Q5. The broader impact of language testing policies

- How has language testing affected your family members and social circles?
- Has it influenced decisions about work, schooling, or where to live?

5.3.2 Refined themes from co-analysis

After the preliminary analysis of the focus group data, I identified a preliminary set of nine themes that captured how Chinese immigrants in Canada experience, navigate, and interpret language policies, language tests, and social integration. However, these themes were not treated as fixed categories, but rather as starting points for further critical engagement with my co-researchers.

Through the co-analysis process, the subset of my participants who volunteered to become my co-researchers were invited to challenge, refine, and expand these initial themes based on their lived experiences and insights. This collaborative process led to the final set of 13 themes. Some original themes were merged, some were reworded, and others were expanded to reflect key dimensions that the co-researchers and I determined as missing from the initial analysis.

Table 7 below presents a side-by-side comparison of the original themes from the focus groups and the refined themes after the co-analysis sessions. The middle column marks how specific themes were modified or expanded. This evolution of new set of themes demonstrates not only the iterative nature of qualitative analysis but also the value of participatory research methods in ensuring that findings should be co-constructed with those who experienced these policies first-hand.

Table 7

Comparison of original and refined themes using co-analysis

Original theme No.	Original theme	Changes made	Refined theme No.	Refined theme
1	英语在加拿大生存或成功的必要性 English necessity for survival or advancement in Canada	Reworded	1	英语或法语在加拿大生存或成功的必要性 English or French necessity for survival or advancement in Canada
2	语言测试和移民政策的策略 Strategies for test taking and immigration procedure	Reworded	2	移民过程中采用的语言测试和移民政策的策略 Strategic decision-making in the immigration process
3	考试语言与融入语言 English on test vs. English in daily life in Canada	Expanded to include an additional theme	3	考试语言与融入语言 English on test vs. English in daily life in Canada
			10	对语言考试的策略与准备 Micro strategies for test preparation
4	对政策的熟悉程度 Policy understandings	Expanded to include an additional theme	4	对政策的熟悉程度和评价 Policy understanding and commentary
			11	对加拿大价值观和文化的评价 Critique of Canadian values and

				culture and the underlying construction of policy
5	对于考试的本身的评价 Perceptions towards English language tests	No change	5	对于考试的本身的评价 Perceptions towards English language tests
6	考试经验及对考试的感觉 Participants' experiences and feelings taking the test	Reworded	6	考试经验及对考试的感觉 Participants' testing history and feelings taking the test
7	关于融入的讨论和融入的尝试 Comments on integration and integration efforts	Expanded to include two additional themes	7	关于融入的讨论和融入的尝试 Comments on integration and integration efforts
			12	多重文化背景中的自我认同 Self-identity within a multicultural context
			13	中国人身份的内在特质 Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits
8	本地人对待加拿大移民的态度 How other Canadians might perceive immigrants	Reworded	8	中国人眼中本地人对待加拿大移民的态度 Chinese immigrants' perceptions of how Canadians view them
9	对其他加拿大移民/难民的讨论 The discussion of the experiences and attitudes with other immigrants/refugees groups (positive/negative/neutral)	No change	9	对其他加拿大移民/难民的讨论 The discussion of the experiences and attitudes with other immigrants/refugees groups

As shown in Table 7, some themes were broadened to include French as a second official language, others were divided to distinguish between macro policy strategies and micro individual test taking strategies. In addition, some new themes also emerged to capture aspects of self-identity and cultural belonging. The following sections will provide a detailed discussion of

each theme, including participants' insights and direct excerpts from focus groups and co-analysis sessions.

To facilitate clarity, the following sections present the refined themes in a progression from more immediate test-related experiences to broader questions of policy, culture, and identity. The discussion begins with themes most closely tied to test-taking and immigration strategies (Themes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10), then moves to themes addressing participants' understandings and critiques of policies and Canadian values (Themes 4, 8, 9, 11), and finally considers themes that capture issues of integration, self-identity, and cultural belonging (Themes 7, 12, 13). This order is intended to reflect the ways participants themselves moved between recounting personal experiences and situating those experiences in wider social and ideological contexts. In Chapter 6, these themes are revisited through the model of investment, which helped interpreting them within the dimensions of identity, ideology, and capital.

5.3.2.1 English or French necessity for survival or advancement in Canada (Theme 1)

This theme captures participants' nuanced views on whether English (or French) is truly necessary for survival or success in Canada.

The initial theme developed was "*English necessity for survival or advancement in Canada.*" My co-researcher suggested to add French as well. Although all participants came through taking English language assessment during immigration, some of them chose to live in French speaking areas and had to use French for their daily lives. A few of them also talked about French necessity in addition to English, in order to access certain employment opportunities, especially in government. As my co-researcher pointed out,

“...你刚刚那个我基本同意，但是他们有时候去看医生和家长会可能是要求是法语来帮他们进行沟通，所以你可能把英语的这个改语语言是不是更能涵盖这个？” “...I mostly agree with what you just said, but sometimes when they go to the doctor or parent-teacher meetings, they might need to communicate in French. So perhaps changing the language requirement from English to include French would be more inclusive?” (CR6)

The dominant policy and media discourses often frame official language proficiency as a fundamental requirement for integration and participation. However, participants' lived experiences tell a more complex story, which is shaped by regional context, employment situation, and personal networks.

Several participants emphasized that English is indeed crucial for professional advancement and long-term development, especially in fields where communication, collaboration, and upward socialization (向上社交) are tied to language proficiency. As one participant put it:

“如果你是想找工作，然后在专业领域里面有一个长期的发展，那你确实需要语言这个东西。” “If you want to work and have long-term development in a professional field, then indeed, English is crucial.” (FG8-P26)

However, many others pointed out that language necessity is not universal. For example, in large Chinese-speaking communities such as Toronto or Vancouver, some participants felt that it was completely possible to live comfortably and access services without relying heavily on English. For example:

“我跟大家的观点差不多吧，就是如果只是活着的话，那当然就是哪怕在渥太华，没有多少华人，也可以有自己的小圈子，生活得很好。” *“My opinion is pretty similar to everyone else's. If it's just about getting by, then of course—even in a place like Ottawa where there aren't many Chinese people—you can still have your own small circle and live quite well.”* (FG3-P09)

Even when it comes to the working environment, many participants seem to believe that you only need a certain level of English for communication. Beyond that, English level should not be considered as a key factor for promotion anymore:

“就确实如果是作为一个外国人在国外工作会遇到这样的情况，但我觉的可能就是跟呃向上社交的这些朋友，他们的这种 *connection*，他可以说他是为你锦上添花的一个东西，但并不是说就是你一定要有这个你才能够就是晋升。这不是唯一的渠道，就是总是如果想要晋升总是会有办法的，就不一定我一定要跟他有共同语言，然后聊的特别好，我才能晋升。对我是这么想的，所以就是语言如果是很，如果是好的，那当然是，对大家生活啊，工作很便利的，但如果没有那么好，其实也并不那么重要。” *“It's true that, as a foreigner working abroad, you might run into these kinds of situations. But I think, when it comes to networking upward—those connections can be like the icing on the cake. It's not like you must have them in order to be promoted. It's not the only path. If you want to move up, there's always a way. It's not necessarily that you have to speak the same language or have really deep conversations with someone in order to be promoted. That's how I see it. So, yes, if your language skills are good, of course it makes life and work more convenient. But even if your language isn't that good, it's actually not that important.”* (FG3-P09)

These reflections highlight a disjuncture between policy framings of language as universally necessary and the lived flexibility some immigrants experience, especially where the population of Chinese immigrants is higher.

Still, most participants acknowledged that while basic survival might be possible with minimal language skills, upward socialization, economic opportunities, and deeper integration do require a higher level of language proficiency. This reality challenges the singular narrative promoted in official discourse and opens up new space to rethink what language necessity really means in a multilingual Canada, and how the high cut-off scores are justified in the immigration system.

5.3.2.2 Strategic decision-making in the immigration process (Theme 2)

This theme initially emerged as “*Strategies for test taking and immigration procedure*,” which combined participants’ comments on both practical test preparation tactics (e.g., choosing test dates, managing timing, or preparing specific test sections) and broader planning strategies for navigating the immigration system. During co-analysis, my co-researcher pointed out that this theme was too broad and suggested we distinguish between micro-level test strategies and macro-level immigration decision-making. She noted that many participants had a higher level of strategic thinking that went beyond language preparation itself, such as adjusting immigration timelines, choosing provinces, or aligning their test attempts with program deadlines. As she commented during our co-analysis,

“...就是，其实大家都不只是单纯为这个考试准备，他们是在围绕这个考试的这个要求，他反过来规划他整个移民的路径。” “*The thing is, nobody’s just prepping for this test*

itself, they're reverse-engineering their entire immigration pathway around the exam's requirements." (CR6)

In response, we reframed the theme as *"Strategic decision-making in the immigration process,"* to specifically focus on participants' macro-level navigation of language policy and immigration structures. This theme captures the strategic ways in which participants navigated the Canadian immigration system and language testing. Rather than approaching the process passively or assuming the system operates neutrally, participants have shared with me their deliberate, calculated decisions around when, where, and how to take language tests, submit scores, and position themselves advantageously within the immigration system.

For many of them, the process was not a linear one. Many participants described multiple attempts in registering for the tests, carefully monitoring scores, cancelling tests based on test outcomes, and finally shift immigration targets. One focus group participant explained:

“我当时报考是跟就是点菜一样，就是噔噔噔，有的报我就报报报，等考完分数出来后够用我就再取消嘛。” “When I registered for the tests back then, it was just like ordering from a menu—bam bam bam—I signed up for whatever date was available. Once I got my scores and they were good enough, I just cancelled the rest.” (FG3-P08)

Others discussed the logic of “diving” in the immigration pool first, and then adjusting their strategy based on how the system responded. This reflects an understanding of immigration as an evolving game with opaque rules, rather than a straightforward checklist:

“你就先把自己扔进池子，再慢慢更新（语言成绩）嘛！” “You just throw yourself into the pool first, and then slowly update (your language scores) later!” (FG3-P07)

This theme demonstrated how participants navigated immigration and language assessment at a structural level. They treated language tests not as isolated hurdles but as one component within a larger strategic process.

5.3.2.3 English on test vs. English in daily life in Canada (Theme 3)

This theme captures the perceived disconnect between the English that participants had to master for immigration tests and the English they actually needed to use in everyday life in Canada. Although standardized language tests like IELTS and CELPIP claim to evaluate “real-world” communication skills, participants consistently point out that the English on the test are not the same thing with the English in their daily life in Canada. This gap lies not just in linguistic features such as vocabulary and/or grammar, but in cultural familiarity and social interactions.

Several focus group participants described the test as “academic” or “technical,” requiring formulaic writing and rehearsed speaking strategies. However, once in Canada, the language ability demands from them are far more context-dependent and culturally embedded. For example:

“我是感觉哈就是 *Small Talk* 和这个 *professional Talk* 这两个是完全不一样的，因为 *Small Talk* 他要求的这个文化理解太多了，就是什么就美剧，你要看很多很多人听那个，比如说听那个这边的音乐啊，就是所有的就是一些，怎么说呢就是更加 *cultural* 的东西啊，它要有一个背景，要有一个积累，那很多年的积累才能达到一个一个，怎么说呢，跟他有共鸣的那种感觉似的...比如说他这个音乐我没听过，就是好像他说了一个大家全加拿大都知道的一个，比如说什么文化 *icon* 吧，就是我一下不知道，就好像很 *out*。嗯，然后

跟同事交流也会有这种现象。” *“I feel that small talk and professional talk are completely different. Small talk requires a lot more cultural understanding. Like, you have to watch a lot of American TV shows, listen to music here—basically, all these more ‘cultural’ things. You need background knowledge and years of accumulation to reach a point where you can, how should I put it, resonate with others... For example, if someone brings up a song I’ve never heard, or mentions a cultural icon that everyone in Canada knows and I don’t, I immediately feel kind of out of place. Yeah, and this kind of thing also happens when talking with colleagues.”* (FG3-P06)

Another focus group participant shared the experience of being left out during conversations filled with North American idioms and jokes:

“有些人说话会夹杂很多 idiom, 还有一些北美文化梗, 大家都在笑, 可是你虽然知道发生了什么, 但你不知道它背后的意思。” *“Some people talk using idioms or North American cultural references, making everyone laugh, but although you clearly understand the scenario, you don't know what's behind it.”* (FG3-P09)

This challenge becomes even more pronounced in professional advancement. As one Cantonese speaking participant explained:

“即系嗰啲叫做... 特別係同事之間, 或者係即係你見到你老闆即系, 你會經常見到佢咁好舒服喺度, 即係嗰啲 small talk。我想講, 但係我又唔知點樣點樣即系好似人咁咁樣咁自然囉嗱... 即係話你尤其係你要 climb the ladder 嗰陣時你你要 social 㗎嘛。返工係夠, 咁樣人先係夠用你 maintain 喺呢個 technical level 係夠用, 但係你要 climb the ladder,

你要向上爬就要同佢地 social 要，要識佢哋嗰啲文化就係囉，就會顯得【捉襟見肘】。”

“It's like... especially among colleagues, or when you see your boss—you often see them comfortably engaging in small talk. I want to join in, but I don't know how to do it naturally like they do... You know, especially when you want to climb the ladder, you have to socialize. Just doing your job is enough to maintain your technical role, but if you want to move up, you need to socialize with them, understand their culture—that's it. Otherwise, you'll come across as inadequate or out of place.” (FG7-P21)

They described feeling out of place and under-equipped for these moments, even if they could technically follow the conversation. Another common frustration was the memorization-heavy nature of English test vocabulary, which did not seem to be useful in Canada.

“嗯，雅思的很多词汇，我感觉好像都用不太到，而且当时背的那些英文单词，其实你没有用到它的那个相应的这个语境当中，我觉得很多雅思的这个单词你背过了，可能也就是背过了，但是你真正用的时候可能还是会有问题，因为它有很多意思，相近的这种词……你在生活当中，你用到了或者是人家给你说了一下这两种不太一样的这种区别，你才能真正的就是会用这个词。所以说就是你这个备考和你真正的使用，我觉得。。。差异还是蛮大的。” *“Yeah, I feel like a lot of the vocabulary from the IELTS isn't really that useful in daily life. The words I memorized back then—I didn't really get to use them in their actual contexts. I think many IELTS words, even if you've memorized them, that's all it is—just memorization. When it comes time to actually use them, there are still problems, because many of them have multiple meanings or similar alternatives... It's only when you've used them in real-life situations, or someone points out the subtle differences, that you really learn how to use them*

properly. So I'd say there's a pretty big gap between test prep and real-world usage." (FG6-P18)

However, participants did not dismiss the test entirely. A few actually found parts of the English test useful for daily lives in Canada, especially the IELTS writing task:

“嗯就是那个 G 类雅思，它有一部分是要写一个小作文嘛，然后那个小作文其中很重要的一个主题是写投诉信，然后我就觉得特别有用，然后我觉得我在加拿大刚来了一个月里面，我大概写了十几封投诉信，吧嗯对，然后我觉得说，嗯，所以说写写信还是挺重要的。哦还有 cover letter。” “So for the General Training IELTS, there's a section where you have to write a short essay, and one important type is a complaint letter. I actually found that really useful. In my first month after coming to Canada, I probably wrote over a dozen complaint letters. Yeah... so I think letter writing is actually quite important. Oh, and cover letters too.” (FG6-P17)

These quotes illustrate the perception that some standardized writing formats such as complaint letters and cover letter, did transfer directly to participants' lived experiences.

Together, these reflections highlight a key tension between standardized testing and real-life language use. While tests may assess grammar and structure, they often fail to capture the communicative skills needed for daily life, workplace interaction, and cultural integration, which are the areas that participants felt were essential but overlooked in immigration language assessments.

5.3.2.4 Perceptions towards English language tests (Theme 5)

This theme looks at how participants formed their opinions about the language tests themselves, not just from their personal experiences, but also from what they have heard from friends, online forums, or immigration consultants. These second-hand stories often shaped their expectations and strategies even before they took the test. For example, one participant said:

“我听说大陆的雅思口语会压分，但凡在大陆考的都分数特别低。以至于后来有些人就直接跑到冬天南亚去考试了，或者到了加拿大之后在这边考。” *“I heard that the IELTS speaking scores tend to be marked lower in Mainland China — like, anyone who takes the test there gets unusually low scores. So later on, some people just flew to Southeast Asia in the winter to take the test or waited until they got to Canada to take it here.”* (FG8-P25)

Another participant described their personal experience in even more detail, reflecting her frustration also for the speaking test:

“尤其是A类的中国大陆的打分，他就不会卡你，但是如果考G类的，他知道你移民想要达到8777这个门槛，所以他很乐于给你6.5，哪怕你的水平也许在七左右。我是个人有这样深刻的体会……我不觉得我的语言水平会下降，会从七变成6.5，比起几年前考A类，我考G类永远是刷不到8777这个组合……压分现象很严重……有失于雅思作为一个公允的考试。” *“Especially when it comes to the General Training (G category) IELTS for Mainland Chinese test-takers—if you’re taking the Academic version, they won’t deliberately lower your score. But for the General one, they know you’re trying to hit the 8777 benchmark for immigration, so they’re quite happy to give you a 6.5, even if your actual level might be closer to a 7. I personally experienced this... I don’t think my language skills have declined. I shouldn’t be*

dropping from a 7 to a 6.5. Compared to when I took the Academic test a few years ago, I can never seem to hit that 8777 combo in the General test. The score suppression is real... and it really undermines IELTS as a supposedly fair and objective exam.” (FG5-P16)

Others compared IELTS and CELPIP directly. Some found CELPIP easier or more “Canadian,” and said it better matched their lived experience:

“他不比雅思难，就是因为雅思，他总是差我 0.5 分，但是考 CELPIP 的一次就过了……CELPIP 的听力，我觉得是加拿大的 context……你在加拿大生活过，会对你考 CELPIP 有一些帮助。” “It’s not that CELPIP is harder than IELTS—it’s actually because IELTS always kept me 0.5 points short. But with CELPIP, I passed it in one go... I think the CELPIP listening is based on a Canadian context, so if you’ve lived in Canada, it kind of gives you an advantage when taking CELPIP.” (FG5-P16)

Another perception related to the language tests had to do with the test score validity period. Participants questioned why scores expire after two years, especially because many feel their language ability remains the same or even improves with after living in English speaking countries or using English regularly. Some suspected commercial interests were involved:

“A: 据说什么……linguist 说过，语言在两年以后如果你不学习的话会退化……但我不知道这个有没有商业因素在里边哈，因为如果一直不过期的话，他生意可能不会这么好。”

R: 对我觉得应该也是有一些商业考量，对。”

“A: I heard that... some linguist once said that language skills start to decline if you don’t keep learning after two years... but I’m not sure if there’s some commercial factor behind that too, like, if the scores never expired, maybe the business wouldn’t be doing so well.

R: Yeah, I think there’s probably some commercial consideration behind it too.” (FG1-P03, P01)

Taken together, these reflections reveal that participants were not just passive test-takers but critical observers of the systems that assess them. While some accepted standardized tests as necessary, many expressed skeptical opinions toward the fairness, cultural relevance, and commercial motivations of standardized testing. This skepticism also shaped how they interpreted their own scores and their broader understanding of immigration policy.

5.3.2.5 Participants' testing history and feelings taking the test (Theme 6)

This theme was initially named *“Participants’ experiences and feelings taking the test,”* which aimed to capture participants’ reflections on how they felt during the language test and how they perceived its difficulty, pressure, and fairness. However, during co-analysis, my co-researcher noted that the term “经验 experience” might not fully convey the structured and event-based nature of what participants were describing. She commented that, as non-native speakers, we often interpret “experience” more as a general impression, whereas native speakers tend to associate it with specific events or timelines, more like a record (经历) . As she explained,

“英文係第一反應會係 experience, 嘩, 我覺得呢個就係母語者同埋非母語者一個 [区别]... 有時你去睇醫生, 人哋醫生問你你有冇過往病史, 你就會答我幾時幾時做過咩手

術……呢個係我 *medical history*. ” “*In English the first reaction would be ‘experience’. I think this is exactly one of the differences between native and non-native speakers... Sometimes when you go to see a doctor, the doctor will ask you whether you have any past illnesses, and you would answer by saying when you had a certain surgery... This is what I mean by my medical ‘history.’*”(CR7)

Drawing on this insight, we revised the theme to “*Participants’ testing history and feelings taking the test.*” While the previous theme focused on perceptions of the tests themselves, this theme highlights participants’ emotional experiences with the testing process. These reflections often revealed frustration, exhaustion, and a deep sense of pressure—especially when success felt just out of reach despite repeated efforts. One participant shared:

“因为考试费用也很高，然后人的精力也是有限的，然后承受一次就是心灵上的这种折磨。” “*Because the test fees are really expensive, and people only have so much energy—it’s mentally exhausting every time you go through it.*” (FG1-P03)

Many had taken the IELTS multiple times. They described the process as draining and demoralizing, especially when small changes in scores could make or break their immigration applications:

“雅思，我前后一共考过13次啊，就是为了那个8777，从18年考到19年...然后当时我大概有一个小群，我们群很多人考二三十次...所以他就只能通过提升考试数量来提高这个运气。反正我就多考几次，总会考到想要的分数吧。” “*IELTS, I took it 13 times in total—just to get that 8777. I was taking it from 2018 all the way through 2019... back then I was in this small group chat, and a lot of people in the group had taken the test 20 or 30 times... So*

the only way for them to improve their chances was just to keep taking the test and hope they got lucky eventually. I'll just take the test a few more times; I'll eventually get the score I want."

(FG6-P18)

Others explained how the emotional toll went beyond the test day itself. It extended into their sense of self-worth and future planning:

“因为那个时候就是想考到8777 这样子的一个分数，但是就是感觉就是命运吧，就是感觉自己就水平够，每次就是单项就总会有一项啊，就是有的时候就很意外，然后在听力上出现一点点问题，就总是会差一点点就差0.5，就是一个单项差0.5，所以最后就刷的就也没有信心...” “At the time, I just really wanted to get that 8777 score, but it honestly felt like fate or something. I knew my level was good enough, but every single time, there would be one section—just one—that went wrong. Sometimes it was something unexpected, like a small issue in listening, and I'd end up just 0.5 short. Always just 0.5 in one section. After a while, I kept retaking it but started to lose confidence...” (FG6-P17)

“你考得越多，就越沮丧。你会开始怀疑这个东西到底是在考你的语言能力，还是别的什么鬼。” “The more you try, the more frustrated you get. You start to wonder if the test is about your real ability or something else.” (FG8-P27)

These experiences show how standardized language testing is not only a bureaucratic requirement but also an emotionally taxing experience for many Chinese immigrants. For those who depend on test results to determine their future, each test attempt becomes a high-stakes gamble. It can cause doubt, guilt, and discouragement, not to mention the extremely high financial burden it brings.

5.3.2.6 Micro strategies for test preparation (Theme 10)

This theme originally emerged as part of original Theme 3 but was later distinguished during the co-analysis sessions, as several of my co-researchers pointed out, there is a need to analyze test preparation as a distinct area of lived experience. While the previous theme explored the disconnect between test-oriented and real-life English use, this theme zooms in on participants' preparation tactics and mental strategies when facing the high-stakes language exams. Participants also shared their detailed accounts of their test preparation journeys, revealing not only individual study routines but also the industrialized nature of test-prep culture in China.

For many participants, preparing for IELTS or CELPIP was less about improving general English proficiency, but more about decoding the test itself to get a higher score. Some of them focused heavily on identifying test patterns, others used memorized strategies to fight the test:

“我买了一堆真题，还下了好多听力录音。听力对我来说是最难了，嗯。我基本上每天晚上都做听力，就是想考试的时候能做得完。” *“I bought a bunch of past exam papers and downloaded a lot of listening recordings. Listening was the hardest part for me. I basically did listening practice every night, just so I could finish everything during the actual test.”* (FG2-P05)

Another participant described their classes in intensive cram schools, which are widely seen as efficient solutions to getting a high test score through test-wiseness alone:

“那个在在在多的中国老师教的雅思，他是怎么教的呢？就是就是应试，他就是告诉我，你不需要去读阅读题，你直接把那个答案找出来，我告诉你怎么找。我不得不说

它这个方法帮助我拿到了 7.5 分，但是你说我的英语水平和国内考 7.5 分的人能比吗？根本比不了，就是我纯粹是混的。” *“That Chinese IELTS teacher in Toronto—how did he teach? It was all about test-taking strategies. He literally told me, “You don’t need to actually read the reading passages—just go straight to the answers, and I’ll show you how to find them.” I have to admit, that method helped me get a 7.5, but if you ask whether my English level compares to someone in China who also scored 7.5? Not even close. Honestly, I was just winging it.”* (FG6-P20)

These descriptions point to a broader, systemic issue: the normalization of "teaching to the test" practices, where test-taking becomes a strategic game rather than a meaningful demonstration of communicative ability. Some participants also reflected critically on how these strategies helped them pass but did little to prepare them for real-world communication after immigration:

“我们准备的雅思跟这里人说的英语的方式完全不一样。我感觉自己就是在攻略考试，根本没学什么语言。” *“The way we prepared for IELTS was so different from how people actually talk here. I felt like I was gaming the test—not learning English.”* (FG2-P05)

These insights demonstrate how test takers often navigate the testing system with extreme pragmatism. The high stakes of immigration-based testing as well as the competition factor embedded in the immigration system has pushed them toward results-oriented learning where passing the test has the highest priority.

Taken together, these six themes above show how participants handled the immediate demands of language testing. They weighed when and where tests were needed, planned their

immigration timelines around test dates, compared test formats, and managed the pressure of repeated attempts. They also pointed to a gap between test English and the language needed for daily life and advancement. These test-centred accounts lead directly to questions about the system behind the tests. The next section turns to how participants understand and evaluate immigration policies and public narratives, and how these broader frames shape the way they read language requirements, cut off scores, and ideas of fairness.

5.3.2.7 Policy understanding and commentary (Theme 4)

This theme was initially coded as “*Policy understandings*,” based on participants’ varying levels of familiarity with immigration rules, language requirements, and system procedures. However, during co-analysis, my co-researcher pointed out that many participants were not only describing what they knew about the policy, but also offering direct commentary on its fairness, purpose, and logic. She noted that several excerpts sounded more like “政策分析” (“*analysis of the policy*”) (CR1) than just recollection or description. This theme now includes how participants understood immigration policies and how have those understandings affected their decisions. Some were very familiar with details like language test requirements and cut-off scores. Others felt confused or frustrated by sudden policy changes or unclear rules. Many of them questioned the purpose behind these policies and whether they truly supported immigrant integration. One participant, for example, noticed how the policy shifted after 2015:

“我有个印象，好像省提名的语言要求后来变高了。大概是 2015、2016 年的时候吧，申请的人变多了，然后那个分数线就一下子提高了。” “*I have an impression that the language of the Provincial Nomination Program, the requirements got higher later. It was about*

2015 or 2016, there were more applicants then the cut-off score got higher suddenly.” (FG8-P28)

Others shared that they felt immigration policies were not really about helping immigrants to settle, but more about selecting those who could bring economic value:

“感觉其实这里的移民政策更看重的是你能不能带来经济利益，带来钱，而不是你能不能融入。” “It feels like the immigration policy here cares more about whether you can bring economic benefits—bring money—rather than whether you can truly integrate.” (FG8-P26)

These reflections show that people are not just passively following policy, instead, they are watching, interpreting, and reacting. Some of them tried to adapt to changing rules, others questioned whether these policies truly reflect Canada’s image as an immigrant-friendly countries. The emotional weight of these decisions was very clear in their voices, especially when it ties to test scores and economic policies.

5.3.2.8 Chinese immigrants’ perceptions of how Canadians view them (Theme 8)

Many participants shared mixed views on how they believe native-born Canadians perceive immigrants, particularly those from China. Some comments reflected frustration over stereotyping and public narratives that blame Chinese immigrants for social and economic problems. One frequently mentioned example was the housing crisis in major urban areas:

“他们都觉得是我们中国人抬高了多伦多的房价。” “They all think it’s us Chinese who drove up the housing prices in Toronto.” (FG3-P03)

This type of commentary revealed how broader public discourses can position Chinese immigrants as scapegoats for larger systemic issues such as housing prices and housing needs. Even without direct confrontation, participants expressed awareness of being viewed as outsiders who are not fully accepted, despite having lived, worked, or studied in Canada for years.

At the same time, however, some participants recognized that on the government level, the official policy of multiculturalism does promote inclusivity and cultural preservation:

“从政府层面上看，至少他们提倡要关注各国的文化，而且愿意让你保留自己的文化身份。” “From the government’s perspective, at least they promote awareness of different cultures and are willing to let you preserve your cultural identity.” (FG8-P25)

This acknowledgement was often followed by reflections on the gap between official discourse and lived experience, suggesting that cultural and racial hierarchies continued to shape participants’ everyday interactions.

These reflections reveal a complex understanding of how immigrants perceive their place in Canadian society, not only through policy but also through social signals, public narratives, and unspoken expectations. In the next section, we explore how participants extend this discussion to their interactions and comparisons with other immigrant and refugee groups.

5.3.2.9 The discussion of the experiences and attitudes with other immigrants/refugees groups (Theme 9)

This theme focuses on participants’ perceptions of other immigrant and refugee groups in Canada. While the participants themselves are immigrants, they did not always see their own experiences as aligned with those of other communities. In fact, many participants clearly

distinguished between “immigrants like us” and “those refugees,” especially when discussing public benefits, work ethic, or social integration. Some participants expressed their dissatisfaction toward the disproportionate resources given to refugees, though their knowledge of refugee issues is often shaped by media narratives or hearsay rather than direct experience.

“移民太多了? 那是不是应该考虑一下他们为什么要设置这么这么多的移民。而且还有, 而且我觉得现在难民的比例太离谱了。我感觉影响到正常社会上面的... 而且对治安的影响太大了。你不觉得这两年来真的渥太华, 虽然人是越来越多, 但是我觉得是会有点, 就是没有以前那么 *peace* 了, 就感觉。” *“Too many immigrants? Then maybe we should ask why the government is setting such high immigration targets in the first place. And honestly, I think the proportion of refugees right now is kind of outrageous. I feel like it’s affecting normal life in society... and the impact on public safety is significant. Don’t you think? Like, in the past two years, Ottawa has gotten more crowded, but it just doesn’t feel as peaceful as before—it really feels different.”* (FG1-P01)

Another participant echoed a sense of unfairness when comparing the perceived contributions and benefits among immigrant groups, as this comment about refugees illustrates:

“你知道他们每个月从政府那里拿多少钱吗? 他们都不工作的, 是用我们交的税养着他们。这不公平啊!” *“Do you know how much money they are getting from the government every month? They don’t work but we are paying for them. This is not fair.”*

Yet, not all participant comments were purely negative. Some of them expressed internal conflict about their views, which both recognizes the perceived importance and flaws of the refugee system. One participant shared:

“Anyways 啦，就是吐槽一下啦。其实我理解这个制度。Somehow 我会觉得，难民这个体制还是需要的。因为你保不齐自己哪天会变成难民。你也许需要离开这个国家，你也许需要去到其他国家。我觉得一切皆有可能。就是需要去到一个地方，他需要一个可以接受难民的一个...所以我觉的以难民这个东西是人道主义需要，但是 you know，有一些...他好像这个系统越来越有点问题了。” “Anyway, I’m just venting a bit. Honestly, I do understand the system. In some way, I think the refugee system is still necessary—because you never know, one day it could be you. You might need to leave your country and go somewhere else. I think anything is possible. There needs to be a place that accepts refugees—that’s a humanitarian need. But you know... some parts of the system, it just feels like it’s starting to have more and more problems.” (FG3-P08)

Another conversation between two participants revealed the unfairness sensed by skilled immigrants, however, they still acknowledged the emotional root of that feeling:

“R：我觉得对移民来说，他们可能不是特别接受很多难民。就是你觉得你自己很努力去拿到这样的时候，那凭什么别人就这么容易就进来，而且还拿着你的税金在那逍遥快活。就是少数没有关系，但是如果太多了，你就会觉得这东西不值钱了。

M：明白，因为大家觉得这是一个自己有拼搏奋斗过之后才能拿到的东西。但是对其他人来讲太轻易获得了就变得这件事儿没有那么公平了。”

“R: I think for immigrants, many of them aren’t particularly accepting of refugees. Like, you’ve worked so hard to earn your way in, and then you wonder—why should someone else get

in so easily and even live comfortably off your tax money? A small number is fine, but when there are too many, it starts to feel like what you've worked for isn't worth as much anymore.

M: I get it. It's because people feel like this is something they had to fight and work really hard for. But when others seem to get it so easily, it makes the whole thing feel less fair.” (FG1-P01, P02)

These quotes added important nuance to this theme. While some participants criticized the refugee system for being too lenient or unfair, others simultaneously acknowledged its humanitarian necessity and reflected on the emotional tension between fairness and merit. Rather than presenting a singular stance, these discussions illustrate the complexity of immigrant perspectives. Their personal effort, structural inequality, and ethical responsibility are constantly being negotiated.

5.3.2.10 Critique of Canadian values and culture and the underlying construction of policy (Theme 11)

This theme focuses on participants' ideological critiques of Canadian values and their embeddedness in immigration policy. It emerged during co-analysis as a refinement of Theme 4, *“Policy understanding and commentary”*, with a shift from interpreting policies to questioning the normative assumptions that underlies them. While Theme 5.3.2.7 also presents participants' comments on their own efforts to integrate, including what they tried, why, and how they were received, this theme zooms out to capture a deeper, more structural critique: how “integration” itself is framed, and whether Canadian values like multiculturalism and tolerance are genuinely practiced or merely symbolic.

Several participants reflected critically on what counts as “Canadian values,” who gets to define them, and whether these values are consistent. For example, one participant questioned the logic of multiculturalism by saying:

“那既然 *multiculturalism* 就是 *Canadian value* 的话, 那我应该是一部分了。嗯, 我为什么还要主动去融入。 *I'm already here!* ” “*If multiculturalism is a Canadian value, then I'm already part of it. Why do I still have to make a special effort to integrate? I'm already here!*” (FG1-P02)

Another participant shared a more critical view. She believed that mainstream society still sees White privilege, Western culture as the dominant norm. Even though the official narrative promotes inclusion, many immigrants still feel excluded or judged:

“虽然说他们一直标榜就是我是一个多元化的一个非常包容的这样一个文化, 但是我并不觉得他们真真正正的是会有到什么包容……我觉得他们对于自己的这个白人文化是非常非常自信的……他们是非常自信的, 把自己当作这片领土的主人公开拓者以及创造者……其实就是对于我们这些外来的这些移民, 并不总是那么友好。” “*They say they're inclusive, but I don't really see it. I think they're very confident in their white culture and see themselves as the true founders of this land. Honestly, immigrants like us are not always welcomed.*” (FG6-P17)

Some other participants challenged the assumption that “Canadian values” are well-defined or universally embraced. One participant noted:

“它加拿大人的友善是基于在他们并不是很在意任何事情的一个基础上的，就是说你的 culture，你的 value 就是他可以接受你存在，但是他并不 care。嗯，就是它可以...就是他，他不会 disagree，但是他也不会 agree with you 就是每一个人其实都还是会跟自己的 culture stick 在一起。” *“Canadians’ friendliness is kind of based on the fact that they don’t really care that much about anything. Like, your culture or your values—they’re okay with you existing, but they don’t really care. They won’t disagree with you, but they won’t fully agree with you either. Everyone still sticks to their own culture in the end.”* (FG5-P14)

This comment reflected a more disillusioned perspective—that multiculturalism may sometimes mean passive tolerance rather than meaningful inclusion. Some participants also pointed out the mismatch between stated values and lived experience. While the government promotes multiculturalism and inclusion, people still feel the pressure to fit into a narrow definition of “Canadian.” These reflections also show how these participants feel that values like integration and belonging are unevenly distributed and often come with hidden expectations.

Taken together, these four themes show how participants read policy and public narratives and located themselves within them. They tracked rule changes, especially rising point cut-offs, and questioned whether policies serve integration or mainly sort by economic value. They were also alert to stereotyping in everyday talk such as housing and, when comparing with other immigrant and refugee groups, they showed complex emotions with a mixture of a sense of unfairness and a recognition of humanitarian needs. In these four themes, language tests appeared mainly as instruments of policy, thresholds and cut-offs to monitor and react to, rather than as everyday experiences. These themes set the conditions for the next set of themes: how people talk about belonging and who is counted as worthy, and how they negotiate identity in a

system where proving value, often through language requirements, is expected. The following section turns to integration, self-identity, and Chinese-ness (Themes 7, 12, 13).

5.3.2.11 Comments on integration and integration efforts (Theme 7)

This theme focuses on participants' views on what it means to integrate and whose responsibility integration should be. While some participants accepted the idea that immigrants need to adapt to Canadian society, many of them questioned the assumption that immigrants must actively “fit in,” especially when Canadian society presents itself as multicultural.

Several participants noted that as their language improved, their feelings of inclusion also increased. However, this process was not easy. One participant described how language proficiency helped them participate better in society, but also acknowledged the cultural barriers that can never be erased.

“我觉得这是先有鸡还是先有蛋的问题。因为既然选择移民加拿大的话，他肯定是认可加拿大的这个世界观啊，或者这个观点。我觉得它向往的是加拿大，比如说我喜欢这里的包容、我喜欢这里的自由、我喜欢这里的多样性……所以应该是反了。所以看来还是人跟人的想法还是不太一样。可能加拿大他们政治家觉得，你到我这个国家，你必须要符合我的这种观点，但是实际上，他要是不符合我的观点，我也不会移到他那边去。” “*I think it's a chicken-and-egg question. If someone chooses to immigrate to Canada, that already means they recognize and accept Canada's worldview or values. They're drawn to Canada—maybe they admire the inclusiveness, the freedom, the diversity... so actually, it should be the other way around. But I guess people think differently. Maybe Canadian politicians believe that*

if you come to this country, you have to align with their values. But honestly, if I didn't already share those values, I wouldn't choose to immigrate here in the first place.” (FG4-P11)

This reflection offers a sharp reversal of the dominant integration narrative. It challenges the argument that immigrants must take the initiative to integrate by emphasizing that choosing to immigrate is already an act of value alignment. Similarly, other participants pointed out how the concept of “responsibility” in integration sounds condescending:

“我个人觉得 integrate 没有问题，但是要主动……这个姿态可能有一点 condescending，可能有点我高于你啊，你是移民，你是外来者，你要融入我的文化，服从我的什么……” “Personally, I don't think there's anything wrong with integration itself. But the idea of having to 'actively' integrate... that attitude can come off a bit condescending. Like, it implies a sense of superiority—I'm above you, you're the immigrant, the outsider, and you need to blend into my culture and follow my norms...” (FG5-P16)

Still, other participants took a more pragmatic stance, suggesting that regardless of ideology, taking the initiative to understand local culture and society does make life easier in Canada:

“我还是比较同意就是确实你需要去，有你的责任。还有你确实会比较好主动去想要去融入这个社会，因为毕竟你来了一个新的环境的话……起码不要去放弃一个去深入了解另外一个文化的一个机会。你要融入，首先是你接受这里的文化，不是说别人要来接纳你” “I do agree to some extent that yes, you do have a responsibility. And it's definitely better if you take the initiative to try to integrate into society—after all, you've come into a new environment... At the very least, you shouldn't give up the chance to truly understand another

culture. If you want to integrate, you must first accept the culture here. It's not that others have to come accept you.” (FG4-P12)

For many participants, the idea of integration was strongly linked to economic self-sufficiency and not being perceived as a burden. As one participant explained:

“基本上就是尽快找到工作、开始交税，这样才不会成为加拿大政府的负担吧。”
“Basically, it's about finding a job and paying taxes as soon as possible so as not to be a burden on the Canadian government” (FG8-P28)

In this framing, being a "good immigrant" means being economically productive and invisible in terms of public support needs. Another direction is to emphasize conformity to social systems rather than deep cultural assimilation:

“我觉得我融入这个社会的方式就是我遵守它的规则。我交税、我做好垃圾分类、我守法。我的理解是按照它这个社会制度去生活，但是它的 cultural diversity 允许我们保留自己的特色。” *“I think my way of integrating into this society is by following its rules. I pay taxes, I sort my trash properly, and I follow the law. My understanding is that integration means living according to the system here—but its cultural diversity allows us to keep our own uniqueness.” (FG4-P10)*

Some participants offered a direct critique of the mainstream understanding of "integration," arguing that it often reflects a sense of superiority embedded in Canadian society, particularly when "integration" is equated with joining the white, Anglo-majority culture. They emphasized that immigrants are often willing to integrate, but the actual structural and cultural barriers make it very difficult. As one participant put it:

“有沒有哪一個新移民說，哦我不想來融入加拿大。I don't want to talk to white people, I don't want to talk to Indians, I just want to hang out with my Chinese buddies. Nobody, right? 現實的情況是有些人他由於語言啊或者是文化啊宗教啊各種原因，他沒有辦法融入加拿大的主流社會，我們講主流社會，因為華人也是加拿大社會啊，他也能融入。他總能呆下去他就叫融入社會了。所以這句話我認為是一句傲慢的，讓人不開心的，廢話。這是我對於這句話的看法。這句話能不能改？當然可以改。如果要for political correctness，這句話是需要改變的，是加拿大政府有義務讓新移民能夠更好的融入加拿大這個社會。。。 ” “Has any new immigrant ever said, ‘Oh, I don't want to integrate into Canada. I don't want to talk to white people, I don't want to talk to Indians, I just want to hang out with my Chinese buddies’? Nobody, right? The reality is, some people just aren't able to integrate into Canadian mainstream society—not because they don't want to, but because of language, culture, religion, or other reasons. And when we talk about ‘mainstream society,’ we have to remember that Chinese communities are part of Canadian society too. If someone can live here long-term, that itself is a form of integration. So I think that statement—‘immigrants need to integrate’—is arrogant, unpleasant, and frankly, meaningless. That's my view. Can the statement be revised? Of course. If we're talking about political correctness, then yes, it absolutely should be revised. It's the Canadian government's responsibility to help new immigrants better integrate into Canadian society...” (FG7-P24)

This perspective challenges the dominant discourse that places the burden of integration solely on immigrants. It also highlighted the role that Canadian society and institutions should play in supporting inclusion. For some participants, the call to “take responsibility” feels like a subtle demand for assimilation, which contradicts the official multicultural narrative of Canada.

5.3.2.12 Self-identity within a multicultural context (Theme 12)

This theme explains how participants navigate their self-identity while adapting to a new cultural environment. It was refined during the co-analysis sessions as well. It originated from the broader theme on integration and integration efforts, but became a separate theme to reflect a specific focus on immigrants' internal identity—how participants position themselves in between cultures.

Several participants shared that adapting to Canadian life does not mean abandoning their Chinese identity. Instead, they often feel like they are juggling multiple ways of being. One participant described it as:

“想融入加拿大社会，又想保留自己的中国文化，其实挺难的。有时候真的不知道该怎么拿捏那个度。” *“Trying to fit into Canadian society while keeping my Chinese roots—it’s actually pretty hard. Sometimes I honestly don’t know how to find the right balance.”* (FG1-P02)

Other participants echoed the feeling of being caught in-between. They are never fully accepted as Canadians, but also feeling distanced from their former lives in China. For example, another participant said:

“因为主要是身份认同方面的话，还是会觉得自己是个中国人，但是确实很多生活小习惯的话，其实也会比较偏加拿大靠。现在处于一种可能会有点尴尬的一个状态，就是在加拿大生活的也挺好的，但是你如果想要融入主流的白人社会的话，基本上也是比较难的。但是呢，当你回国的话，人一多起来，可能也会有感觉到有一些和国外不一样的感觉，所以就是相当于处在一个中间的一个状态，其实也比较尴尬。” *“When it comes to*

identity, I still see myself as Chinese, but honestly, a lot of my daily habits have started leaning more toward the Canadian side. Right now, I feel like I'm in this kind of awkward in-between state—life in Canada is good, but if I really wanted to fully integrate into the mainstream white society⁸, that's still pretty difficult. At the same time, when I go back to China and there are crowds of people, I also feel this subtle difference, like something just isn't quite the same as it is abroad. So I guess I'm kind of stuck in the middle, and yeah... it feels a bit awkward.” (FG2-P04)

Some other participants also reflected on how long-standing cultural conditioning have shaped their internal identity, regardless of their outward adaptation. One participant said:

“我出来的时候我我也二十七八岁了，所以我受过的很长时间的教育也好，观念也好，都是我在国内的时候的，然后那你让我在这几年就因为在加拿大生活了几年，或者读了几年书就有一个完全的身份认同的转变，那肯定也是不可能的...或者一些 social norms 去 behave 我自己，或者去过他们的节啊，这些我都是会做的，但是我自己内心深处肯定不会是觉得我就已经变成了一个加拿大人。” “When I came here, I was already 27 or 28, so most of my education and the way I think had already been shaped back in China. You can't expect me to completely change my sense of identity just because I've lived in Canada for a few years or studied here for a while—that's just not realistic. Sure, I'll follow certain social norms, adjust my behavior, celebrate their holidays and all that—but deep down, I definitely don't feel like I've become a Canadian.” (FG5-P13)

⁸ The participant's use of the phrase “mainstream white society” reflects a personal perception of social belonging and visibility, which may not correspond to the demographic or cultural realities of Canada. Rather than treating this view as representative or accurate, I present it here as part of the participant's lived experience and sensemaking during integration.

Several participants also reflected on how their professional identities had to be reconfigured upon settling in Canada. One participant described transitioning from a senior media professional in China to an officer in a Canadian government office and said:

“我觉得我现在我可以跟你透露，我现在的工资也没有达到离开北京时候的那个年薪的水平。” *“I think I can tell you now—my current salary still hasn't reached the level of my annual income back when I left Beijing.”* (CR05)

This participant has been living and working in Canada for six years now and her salary is still lower than her previous annual income in Beijing. She went on to describe her husband's situation: despite years of corporate management experience, he ended up working in the prepared food section of a local supermarket due to language-related hiring barriers.

“...他的落差比较大，他可能从一个500强变成现在在大统华上班，然后嗯...但是经过这几年之后，我感觉他好像也，承认了这个现实。就是他，他也在努力的提高他的英语...他法语的基础也打的不错。” *“The contrast is pretty stark—he went from working at a Fortune 500 company to now being at T&T Supermarket... But over these past few years, I feel like he's come to terms with it. Like, he's been actively working on improving his English... and his French foundation is actually pretty solid now.”* (CR05)

These changes were not simply economic but deeply symbolic. Participants felt that their prior accomplishments and accumulated capital were rendered invisible or irrelevant in the new social field. This process of downward occupational mobility also challenged their sense of competence and belonging.

This kind of in-betweenness was so common in many participants' reflections. Some of them embraced the mixed cultural identities, others found it confusing. Identity became not just about where they live or what language they speak, but about how much they feel they belong--anywhere. Integration is therefore an ongoing process of negotiation between cultures, not a final destination.

5.3.2.13 Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits (Theme 13)

This theme was developed gradually from the initial theme "*Comments on integration and integration efforts.*" While the original focus was on how participants tried to adapt to Canadian society, during the co-analysis sessions, we began noticing that many of their reflections also revealed shared ways of thinking and behaving. There are patterns that seemed to originate from their cultural upbringing, social environment, and collective memories shaped in China. During co-analysis, my co-researcher and I discussed how participants were no longer just speaking as individuals navigating integration, but increasingly as members of a group with shared cultural traits. They often contrasted their own group with other immigrant communities, and implicitly or explicitly marking what they saw as "Chinese" ways of handling pressure, identity, or adaptation. As this pattern became clearer, we reframed the theme as "*Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits*" to better capture this collective orientation and its role in shaping participants' interpretations of immigration and integration.

Rather than being defined by some surface-level cultural practices or national affiliations, Chinese-ness in these discussions was characterized through deeply held values, dispositions, and behaviors that shape how participants relate to immigration and integration.

Many participants pointed out that being Chinese often meant not relying on external support systems even when they were available. One participant said:

“可能是因为我们在国内接受的教育，就是说你最好要靠自己，然后不要去麻烦别人，然后的话，呃，你要先学会自己解决，所以这个的话就导致可能我们遇到困难之后，我们不会先去寻求别人的帮助，会去想说，呃，想要去自己解决。但是我感觉，呃，就确实比如说在工作上面如果出现什么问题的话，我觉得中国人基本上，呃，第一反应是我先去看看到底是不是我自己出了问题。但是我发现国外的很多同事，他们第一个呃反应就是会先去叫别的同事过来看看，说，哎，你觉得我这个东西做的对不对，你能不能帮帮我。就是我觉得外国人更加乐于去寻求别人的帮助，然后呃，国内的人的话，就是因为从小受到的教育的问题，所以我们，第一的反应是先去啊，向我们自己求助，而不是先去求外边人的帮助。” *“Maybe it’s because of the way we were educated back in China—we’re taught that it’s best to rely on yourself, not to trouble others, and that you should first learn how to solve problems on your own. So when we run into difficulties, our first instinct usually isn’t to ask others for help, but to try and handle it ourselves. I’ve noticed that, for example, at work, when something goes wrong, most Chinese people will first think, “Did I do something wrong?” and start trying to figure it out on their own. But I’ve seen that many of my colleagues here—foreigners—their first reaction is to immediately ask someone else to take a look. Like, “Hey, do you think I did this right? Can you help me out?” I feel like people here are much more open to asking for help, while for us, because of how we were raised, our default is to turn inward first rather than reaching out to others.”* (FG2-P04)

As one participant explicitly explained, this tendency may be rooted in long-standing social experiences that shape how Chinese people interpret help and vulnerability:

“我跟我朋友也讨论过这个问题，然后他说是觉得因为在国内大家没有接受，或者说没有怎么接受到过来自陌生人的善意... 第二就是我现在在低谷时期，然后有点不好意思，然后需要靠我的努力来完成一些事情啊。然后第三就是... 反正我过去的工作经历就是在我需要帮助的时候来帮我的人都是想拿捏我的，所以就是我不敢随意去接受帮助，因为怕欠他什么东西。” *“I’ve talked about this with my friend too, and he said it might be because back in China, most of us haven’t really experienced much kindness from strangers—or at least, not consistently. The second reason is that I’m kind of going through a low point right now, and I feel a bit embarrassed... like I need to prove myself and get through it on my own. And third... well, based on my past work experience, whenever someone offered help when I really needed it, it often came with strings attached. Like, they were trying to gain leverage over me or hold something over my head. So now I hesitate to accept help easily—I’m afraid it means I’ll owe them something.”* (FG2-P05)

Here, the participant revealed a deep discomfort with asking for or receiving help—not out of pride alone, but out of a fear of emotional debt, of being manipulated, or simply from not having experienced unconditional support in the past. This nuanced reflection reminds us that self-reliance is not only cultural but also historical and emotional which is shaped by trust (or the lack of it), power dynamics, and past trauma. For some Chinese people, integrating into a new country is not only about learning the language or getting a job, but also slowly unlearning the fear of being vulnerable.

This tendency toward self-reliance was also frequently accompanied by a strong internalized sense of competition. Several participants reflected on how this competition habit was not only common in academic or career settings but also extended into areas like immigration and social comparison. For many, being Chinese meant not only standing on your own, but also striving to do better than others, though often silently and intensely. This spirit of competition is not always about beating others, but rather about personal excellence and gaining the upper hand within a system of limited opportunities. For instance, one participant said:

“因为他移民也会有一些就是资金的要求啊，或者经济实力的要求之类的。嗯，那这个时候如果没有那么多经济实力的人的话，那是否有通道给他们呢？就是我觉得就是人本身也是一种人力资源嘛，那钱也是一种资源嘛，但是你用钱去撬动你的想你当一个杠杆，那我也可以用我这个人当一个杠杆，那你给了我一个这样用人力当杠杆的机会，那我覺得还是蛮好，最起码我比大部分那些要移民的，呃，姐姐辈儿的或者阿姨辈儿的人们，那英语是要强的。” *“There are financial requirements for immigration too—like you need a certain level of economic resources. So then the question is, what about people who don’t have that kind of financial strength? Is there a pathway for them? I feel like people themselves are a kind of resource—human capital—and money is just another kind of resource. If others can use money as leverage, then I should be able to use myself—my skills, my potential—as leverage too. So if there’s a path that allows people to use their human capital instead of just financial capital, I think that’s actually pretty fair. At least, compared to many of the older folks trying to immigrate—like those auntie-age applicants—my English is definitely stronger.”* (FG1-P03)

Here, immigration is imagined as a kind of leverage system: some use money as a resource, others must rely on their own human capital, such as their language scores, resilience,

and effort. This framing reflects an internalized logic of self-commodification. By using the same language (human capital) as the immigration points system, the participant positions herself not as a person, but as a competitive resource. Her value is therefore measured not by who she is, but by how efficiently she can exchange her skills and efforts for a place in Canadian society. This reveals how deeply the economic logic of immigration policy has shaped not only policy structures but also how immigrants evaluate their own worth.

The three themes above show how participants talked about integration, self-identity, and Chinese-ness while living in Canada. They described the push and pull between fitting in and holding on to their roots, the frustrations of downward mobility, and the sense of competition and self-reliance they carried with them. While not always linked directly to the tests, these reflections were shaped by the same policy logic that makes language testing so powerful—an emphasis on proving value, demonstrating responsibility, and showing readiness to belong. In this way, the themes of identity and belonging connect back to the broader system in which language assessments operate.

5.3.3 Group dynamics of focus group discussion

In addition to the substantive themes presented above, the focus groups also revealed notable dynamics of interaction that shaped how perspectives were voiced and negotiated.

Across groups, some participants tended to dominate the floor, speaking at length and steering the discussion in particular directions. At such points, I occasionally intervened playfully, such as joking about “muting” a participant, to create space for others to speak. This light intervention often led to laughter and opened the door for quieter members to contribute. On the contrary, several participants rarely contributed unless explicitly invited to do so,

suggesting that individual voices sometimes required active facilitation to be heard. In addition, disagreement was not always voiced directly. At times, it was conveyed through subtle non-verbal cues such as frowns or sidelong glances while others were talking. For example, in one group a participant strongly insisted that “...只有说好英语才能真的融入啊” “...good English is the only way to integrate” (FG8-P26). Others exchanged looks for a while until another member quietly voiced her disagreement. This tension then opened up a broader discussion about different forms of belonging that do not depend solely on language.

Different to the assumptions of how Chinese participants might avoid disagreement in group settings, every group had diversity of opinions. These differences were typically expressed in a respectful manner. In some cases, emotional intensity would lead to digressions, but other members of the group stepped in to redirect the conversation for me, which demonstrate a degree of collective regulation. There were also moments when participants visibly shifted their perspectives, reacting with surprise or acknowledgment to others’ comments, for example, “这, 我还真没这么想过...” “I had never thought about it that way...” (FG7-P21). And they sometimes even revise their own positions to align with new insights.

These patterns illustrate how the focus group setting not only elicited individual experiences but also created opportunities for participants to co-construct, challenge, and refine their understandings of language testing in dialogue with others. The emergence of tension, subtle resistance, and occasional consensus showed how data were dynamically built through collective discussion, which is an aspect that would have been less visible in one-to-one interviews.

5.3.4 Summary of Part 2

This section presented participants' lived experiences navigating language testing and integration in Canada. Through focus groups and co-analysis sessions, thirteen refined themes were developed that capture participants' emotional responses, test-taking and immigration strategies, frustrations, and reflections on identity and belonging. In addition to these findings, the focus groups also revealed important patterns of group interaction, showing how participants expressed, negotiated, and sometimes revised their views in dialogue with one another. The co-analysis process was particularly helpful in validating the preliminary themes and also in expanding the scope of interpretation through participants' own insights as co-researchers.

Together, these themes describe the disconnection between standardized policy expectations and the lived realities of immigrants. Participants' voices revealed that integration is not merely a matter of language scores, but an ongoing negotiation of values, self-perception, and structural constraints. Their experiences challenged the dominant discourses of fairness and neutrality embedded in Canada's immigration policies, and highlighted how language tests function not just as assessments of linguistic ability, but as tools that can shape access, identity, integration, and the immigrant experience itself.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the research findings from two interconnected areas of analysis. The first part focused on how Canadian immigration policies and media discourses frame language proficiency as a policy problem. Using the first stage of the policy archaeology framework, four dominant frames were identified: economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering. These frames construct language ability as a key determinant of economic productivity, social belonging, and moral responsibility, reinforcing the

expectation that immigrants must demonstrate language proficiency to prove their worthiness for inclusion in Canadian society.

The second part of the chapter explored the lived experiences of Chinese immigrants, highlighting how language assessment policies are encountered, negotiated, and resisted in everyday life. Through focus groups and the co-analysis sessions, 13 themes were developed that illustrate how language testing influences immigrants' decisions, shapes their perceptions of identity and belonging, and affects their access to economic, social, and cultural resources. The focus group setting itself also played a role, as group dynamics created opportunities for participants to build on, challenge, or refine each other's perspectives, and further enrich the findings. These findings demonstrate that language testing operates not only as an administrative requirement but also as a powerful force that shapes immigrant subjectivities and reinforces broader systems of social inequality.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an integrated discussion of the research findings of this study, and addresses the central research questions outlined in Chapter 3: (1) How do Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a social and political issue? And (2) What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and belonging embedded in English language assessment? Building on the results reported in Chapter 5, this chapter brings together insights from results in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to critically discuss the role of language assessment in the Canadian immigration system. Focus was placed on how language tests, though positioned as simple technical tools for measuring linguistic competence, could function as mechanisms of policy control and social regulation. I also discuss the complex ways in which Chinese immigrants navigate, internalize, and contest these policy mechanisms through their lived experiences with language assessment.

The discussion is organized into two main parts. The first part focuses on discussing the policy-level discourses, drawing on the document analysis results informed by the first and second dimensions of policy archaeology, highlighting the dominant narratives of economic justification, national identity, deficit framing, and cultural othering. The second part focuses on the lived experiences of Chinese immigrants, applying the model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to revisit and discuss the 13 themes developed through focus groups and the co-analysis sessions. Through this framework, the results demonstrate how language assessment shapes immigrant subjectivities by influencing their identities, ideologies, and access to various forms of capital.

By bringing these two strands of analysis together, this chapter offers a comprehensive account of how language assessment functions simultaneously at the policy level and within the intimate spaces of immigrant lives. This chapter concludes with theoretical and methodological reflections, highlighting how this study contributes to broader debates in language policy, social justice, and immigrant inclusion.

6.2 Part I: Policy-level interpretation and discussion

This section draws on the first dimension of Scheurich's (1994) policy archaeology framework to examine how Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language proficiency as a "problem." Rather than treating language ability as a neutral, measurable skill, these texts frame it as a deficit, a barrier to integration, or a condition for economic participation and national belonging. The question of "how well immigrants speak English or French" is not posed in a vacuum; it is shaped by broader ideological assumptions about productivity, loyalty, and cultural conformity. As previous researchers have observed, states often embed language within broader ideological projects of productivity and loyalty (Bannerji, 2000; Haque, 2012), and these findings reinforce critiques of immigration policy as privileging quantifiable indicators of integration while obscuring broader forms of social and cultural capital (McNamara, 2005; Blommaert, 2010). This also resonates with the notion of "hidden agendas" discussed in Chapter 2, where language testing operates not only to promote integration but also to filter immigrants by economic utility (Hawthorne, 2011) and cultural compatibility (Hoang, 2019). These are objectives that extend far beyond the stated purpose of supporting integration.

Table 8 summarizes four dominant discourses identified in the document analysis including economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural

othering. The table also shows the core concerns, key concepts, and institutional mechanisms of the four main discourses. These frames align with what previous studies described as the neoliberalization and commodification of language (Piller, 2016; Chiswick & Miller, 2007), however, findings of this study suggest that the Canadian case has a particularly explicit institutionalization: language test scores are not only symbolic of human capital but are formally included in the points system. In other words, the commodification here is not just metaphorical but operational, transforming test results into the very currency of immigration selection. These findings extend Roever and McNamara's (2006) critique of tests as gatekeeping devices by showing how gatekeeping is intensified through quantification, as linguistic ability becomes a measurable proxy for both employability and civic worth. This quantification illustrates the misalignment between explicit rationales and actual policy uses: while framed as integration tools, tests could operate as instruments of labor market management and immigrant flow control.

Table 8

The four main discourses from document analysis

Section	Core Concern	Key Concepts	Institutional Mechanisms	Theoretical Grounding
6.2.1 Economic Justification	Language is framed as human capital, directly tied to immigrants' economic value	Human capital, meritocracy, individual responsibility, neoliberalism	Express Entry point system, CLB scores, economic policy narratives	Neoliberalism and the commodification of language (Piller, Chiswick & Miller)
6.2.2 National Identity Discourse	Language is positioned as a moral obligation and a marker of civic belonging	Citizenship, loyalty, national values, bilingualism,	Language proficiency for citizenship; point rewards for French/English;	Institutional identity-building (Bannerji, Haque); language and

		civic responsibility	legal emphasis on official languages	national unity (Heller, Haque)
6.2.3 Deficit Framing	Immigrants are portrayed as lacking sufficient language ability, legitimizing state intervention and reinforcing processes of exclusion	Linguistic deficiency, integration readiness, personal failure, responsibility to adapt	High-stakes testing (IELTS, CELPIP); policy narratives about immigrant readiness	Symbolic power of language standards (Shohamy, Bourdieu)
6.2.4 Cultural Othering	Public use of non-official languages is portrayed as threatening national cohesion and social unity	Visibility, signage, cultural separation, outsider status, un-Canadian behavior	Media narratives, signage controversies, soft pressures around public language use	Symbolic boundaries and imagined community (Anderson); linguistic legitimacy (Bourdieu, Shohamy)

In the first stage of this logic, immigrants' language proficiency is named and framed as a policy issue: some immigrants may be seen as either lacking the language skills necessary for economic success or as culturally incompatible due to their continued use of non-official languages. This naming sets the stage for a deeper set of assumptions, or what Scheurich (1994) refers as "rules and regularities," which is the implicit truths that guide how the problem is understood. The rules and regularities include the belief that integration is a matter of individual responsibility, that official language proficiency is a proxy for loyalty and productivity, and that successful immigration must be earned through measurable performance. These assumptions complicate the view of standardized testing as measurable evidence of readiness, instead, they confirm Shohamy's (2006) and Ricento's (2015) critiques that tests embed ideological

expectations into seemingly technical measures. In the Canadian case, they also reproduce, as described in Chapter 2, “invisible borders” (Winter, 2018; Polanco & Zell, 2017), where naturalized citizens remain under scrutiny while Canadian-born citizens are not required to prove belonging. By equating proficiency with loyalty and readiness, policies could introduce hierarchies of legitimacy and normalize differential treatment among citizens.

From these assumptions, policy solutions emerge that appear neutral and technical: standardized language tests, which are implemented as instruments to measure, classify, and select. Yet these tools do more than assessing language abilities; they also validate the very framing that created the problem in the first place. In practice, this logic often operates through simplified equations such as *language test scores = language ability = level of integration* Or, within the point system, *language test scores = human capital value = labor market value*. These equivalences are oversimplification of the complex processes of integration to quantifiable metrics, which aligns immigrants’ social and economic worth with broader labor market priorities and government quotas. In doing so, these equivalences extend prior critiques of neoliberal selection logics (Ferrer, Picot & Riddell, 2014; Pottie-Sherman, 2018) by showing how shifting labor market needs can continually redefine what counts as “sufficient” language ability. The reliance on CLB scores then offers apparent “evidence” that immigrants fail to meet these standards (when the standards are often not fixed but change in response to labor market needs). Exclusion is therefore not as an accident but as a systemic feature of policy design.

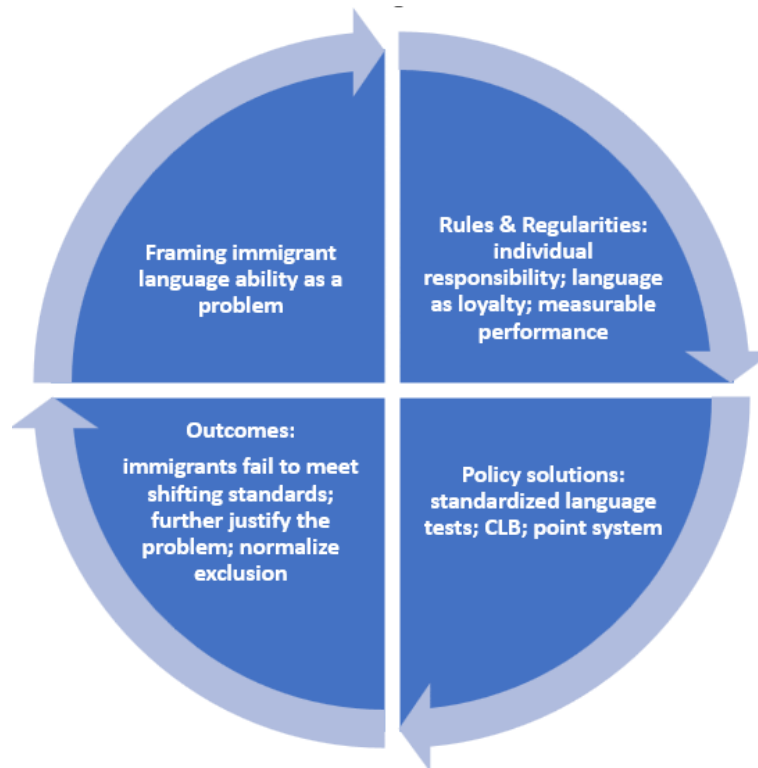


Figure 7 *The Circular Logic of Canadian Immigration Language Policy*

This is a closed loop (as shown in Figure 7). In this loop, language proficiency is first framed as a problem, then justified through implicit rules and regularities, implemented through technical policy solutions, and finally reinforced by outcomes that appear to validate the original framing. The outcomes, such as immigrants failing to meet ever-shifting benchmarks, do not undermine the system but instead provide the rationale for further tightening standards, completing the loop. This closed loop resembles what Foucault (1980, 1991) described as a regime of truth: repeated practices create the illusion of neutrality and inevitability, leading policymakers and the public to believe that language proficiency naturally determines integration success. While the system presents itself as fair, merit-based, and objective, the findings here show how symbolic, economic, and cultural logics intertwined in Canada's points system to

produce a particularly powerful mechanism of ideological reproduction that defines who belongs, who is valued, and who remains excluded

The insights summarized in Figure 7 were not only conceptual conclusions but also served a methodological function. This analysis of policy discourses, including how language proficiency was framed as a problem and justified through specific rules, practices, and outcomes, informed the development of the focus group protocol. Each component of the loop helped identify a cluster of assumptions to be probed further: how participants understood the framing of language as a gatekeeping tool, how they encountered standardized policies, and how they experienced the outcomes of these institutional logics in daily life. This recursive design demonstrates the value of policy archaeology in linking macro-level discourses with micro-level immigrant experiences, which bridges the hidden agendas and invisible borders identified in the literature with the lived realities captured in Phase 2.

Together, these findings address the first research question directly by showing that Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a problem through four dominant discourses. They also show how standardized assessments and the points system legitimize and operationalize these discourses, making exclusion appears normal.

In the next section, I will turn to immigrant experiences to discuss how these discourses and policy practices are encountered, internalized, or resisted.

6.3 Part II: Discussion of focus group results

In this section, I will present a critical discussion of the results of the focus groups, specifically how Chinese immigrants have experienced language testing in the Canadian

immigration process, and how they have made sense of and responded to these policies in their own lives. This discussion addresses the second research question: What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and belonging embedded in English language assessment?

The discussion is guided by the model of investment (Darvin and Norton, 2015), which offers a framework for interpreting how language learning and assessment are shaped by broader systems of power. The model focuses on three interrelated dimensions: identity, ideology, and capital. It also highlights how individuals navigate unequal conditions of access and recognition in different social and institutional contexts.

The 13 themes developed through the focus group discussions and the co-analysis sessions are grouped accordingly in the following discussion. First, I focus on how participants' self-perceptions and social identities were affected by language testing, especially in terms of confidence, belonging, and cultural in-betweenness. Second, I reflect on how participants made sense of dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, neoliberalism, and multiculturalism. I also highlight how these ideas were accepted, questioned, or interpreted. Third, I consider how participants' economic, social, and cultural capital interacted with language requirements and test scores, and how capital was either activated or devalued in the immigration process.

While many of these themes align closely with the three dimensions, not all fit neatly within the framework. This discussion is therefore divided into four parts, the first three parts each corresponds to one of the model's core dimensions and the last one discusses the themes that did not fit into those categories. This model is used here not to force alignment, but to deepen the understanding of how language testing functions as a site of power in immigrants'

lives. By returning to the voices of participants and the themes co-constructed in the research process, my goal in this section is to highlight the complex and often contradictory ways language assessment shapes immigrant subjectivity, social positioning, and access to opportunity.

6.3.1 Identity: the struggle between positioning and desire

Participants experiences reported in the results of Chapter 5 show that English language assessment played a significant role in shaping their self-perceptions and social identities throughout the immigration process. For many of them, language test scores were not experienced as a neutral indicator of their language proficiency, instead, they felt that the scores represent some sort of judgement of their values as immigrants, and whether they were good enough to belong in Canadian society. Particularly in these high-stakes contexts, language performance is linked to worthiness, legitimacy, and belonging.

As reported in Chapter 5, many participants had studied or worked in English-speaking environments before immigrating, but they still shared their feelings of frustration or shame when they failed to achieve the required scores. Rather than interpreting these scores as a measure of merely language ability, many of them internalized them as evaluations of their personal or social fitness. In other words, they felt it said something about who they were. This means that language testing did not only affect their immigration eligibility but also shaped how they saw themselves in relation to Canadian society. This internalization aligns with Shohamy's (2001, 2006) argument that tests operate as instruments of social control, and with Wilson's (2017) account of neoliberal "regimes of truth," where market-like metrics are taken as natural evidence of merit and character. Under such logics, falling short on a required score is readily read as individual failure rather than a signal of structural constraint (McNamara & Ryan, 2011). These experiences also reflect how immigrants' identities are constructed through an ongoing

negotiation between external positioning and internal desires. Through the model of investment, this dimension of identity can be understood as the interaction between two concepts: habitus, which is the social positioning shaped by dominant ideologies; and desire, which is participants' imagined identities and aspirations for who they hoped to become. I grouped themes 7, 12, and 13 together to discuss how Chinese immigrants navigate integration, self-identification, and cultural norms during and after language assessment.

In Theme 7 (Comments on integration and integration efforts), participants repeatedly described “integration” as something they must do proactively. This expectation often does not come from formal policy but from internalized discourses about what “good immigrants” should do. The concept of “主动融入” (*actively integrate*) appeared frequently, but participants revealed mixed feelings about what it meant. Some accepted it as a personal responsibility, for example, “你要融入，首先是你要接受这里的文化，不是说别人要来接纳你。” (*If you want to integrate, you must first accept the culture here. It's not that others have to come accept you.*) This comment shows how participants internalized a one-directional view of integration. They see themselves as the ones who needed to adjust, conform, and initiate change, which aligns with the neoliberal ideals of self-governance. Some others critique the power hierarchy it implies: “...主动.....这个姿态可能有一点 *condescending*，可能有点我高于你啊...” (*...the idea of having to 'actively' integrate... that attitude can come off a bit condescending. Like, it implies a sense of superiority—I'm above you...*) These examples highlight how participants were both positioned by discourses of integration and positioned themselves either as compliant actors or critical observers. This contradiction between being subject to power and exercising agency is central to how Darwin and Norton (2015) define identity. In this sense, immigrants are

caught in between compliance and critique, which indicate that the “ideal immigrant” norm functions as a moral horizon that can be either embraced or contested in practice (Arat-Koç, 2012; Joppke, 2021).

Theme 12 (Self-identity within a multicultural context) further reveals identity as a space of instability. Many participants described themselves as being “*处在一个中间的一个状态，其实也比较尴尬。*” (*I’m kind of stuck in the middle, and yeah... it feels a bit awkward.*) This status captures the disorientation of cultural in-betweenness. These experiences demonstrate how desire is always shaped by the constraints of habitus. Although participants imagined themselves as future Canadians, their symbolic legitimacy was often deferred or denied. They were constantly adjusting their performances of identity through language or behavior, but they have never been certain of recognition, which led to a fragmented sense of self.

This struggle was further intensified by cultural dispositions tied to their Chinese upbringing, and I call it the “Chinese-ness” of the immigrants. In theme 13 (中国人身份的内在特质 Chinese-ness and shared cultural traits), participants described a shared reluctance to ask for help, which is a clear tendency of self-reliance. This is a deeply internalized drive to prove oneself through quiet endurance, and this characteristic, as what one participant called “*我们在国内接受的教育*” (*“the way we were educated back in China”*). It formed part of their habitus and shaped how they approached language testing and immigration more broadly. One participant shared their instinct in the face of difficulty was “*...你最好要靠自己，然后不要去麻烦别人...*” (*“it’s best to rely on yourself, not to trouble others...”*) which is a trait connected to both cultural upbringing and survival in competitive systems. These traits sometimes helped

them to endure challenges, but they also limit their ability to access social support, reinforce their positioning as isolated individuals navigating complex institutional structures alone. Creese's (2010) work on linguistic capital and racialization shows how "standard language" erases certain speakers' legitimacy. However, the findings here show that participants' reliance on self-endurance sometimes amplified this erasure, as they navigated tests and integration without drawing on support systems that might have buffered these pressures. In this way, even strong language proficiency could not dissolve the 'invisible borders' regulating access and recognition (Polanco & Zell, 2017).

Together, these narratives reflect how identity is constructed through tension and contradiction. On the one hand, participants considered themselves as competent, adaptable, and deserving of belonging. On the other hand, the difficult requirements of immigration policy and their experiences of partial recognition often left them feeling stuck between worlds. They did not passively receive identity labels from Canadian society, nor were they fully free to shape their identities on their own terms. As Darwin and Norton argue, identity is formed in the space between being positioned by systems of power and positioning oneself in relation to them. In this context, language assessment acts as both a sorting mechanism and a symbolic mirror which brings not only test scores but also broader judgements about worthiness, legitimacy, and belonging.

In short, participants discussions reveal that identity is a layered and negotiated process. It is shaped by dominant discourses of integration and ideal immigrant behavior, through culturally specific dispositions, and driven by imagined futures that are not always accessible. In this context, language assessment became a process in which immigrants struggled with who they were, who they were allowed to be, and who they still hope to become.

6.3.2 Ideology: the negotiation between dominant values and lived realities

The second dimension of the model of investment is ideology. It draws attention to the discourses that shape what counts as legitimate, fair, or valuable in social systems. Here, ideology is not defined merely as a personal belief, but a structuring force that defines how reality is constructed, which norms are naturalized, by whom, and how people are positioned in relation to a system of power. Ideology operates through policy, institutional practices, and public discourses. It is often subtle or invisible. In the context of language assessment for immigration, participants did not engage with ideology as a fixed set of ideas, but as shifting values they had to navigate. Themes 4, 8, 9, and 11 reflect how participants negotiated these dominant values. They sometimes align with them, sometimes resist them, and often living within their personal contradictions.

Theme 4 (Policy understanding and commentary) reveals a nuanced understanding of the immigrants on the shifting criteria for legitimacy. For instance, one participant observed “大概是 2015、2016 年的时候吧，申请的人变多了，然后那个分数线就一下子提高了。（“I have an impression that the language of the PNP, the requirements got higher later. It was about 2015 or 2016; there were more applicants than the cut-off score got higher suddenly.”) This adjustment was not seen as a technical update, but as evidence of a deeper policy logic which privileged numbers, efficiency, and economic sorting over inclusion or fairness. In other words, participants generally accepted the merit-based point system of immigration policy and attributed the rising cut-off scores to an increased number of applicants. However, I think their observations hinted at an unconscious questioning of whether such adjustments were entirely fair or neutral as they imply subtle discomforts and latent tensions. These responses also suggest how

policy ideology operates: by presenting itself as neutral and data-driven, while quietly reinforcing symbolic hierarchies by producing selective exclusions (Russell et al., 2024).

Theme 11 (Critique of Canadian values and culture and the underlying construction of policy) extends this critique to broader national narratives. While Canada promotes multiculturalism as a foundational value, participants pointed out the tensions between this public image and their lived experiences. One participant questioned the expectation to “actively integrate” despite being in a supposed inclusive society: “那既然 *multiculturalism* 就是 *Canadian value* 的话, 那我已经是—部分了... 我为什么还要主动去融入...” (“If *multiculturalism* is a *Canadian value*, then I’m already part of it. Why do I still have to make a special effort to integrate?...”) Some others described an underlying cultural confidence in “white Canadian” identity, suggesting that the dominant culture is open to difference only when it remains comfortably peripheral. To the participants, multiculturalism functions less as an open embrace of diversity and more as a managed tolerance with boundaries set by the dominant culture. Immigrants are welcomed, but only if they can perform their belonging in ways that align with pre-existing expectations of behavior, language, and attitude. These unspoken rules contribute to what might be called a symbolic hierarchy of legitimacy, which is a structure not only enforced by legal requirements but also by everyday social expectations. To be seen as fully legitimate, immigrants must navigate not only formal language policies but also informal norms of civility and deference that define “acceptable” diversity. This dynamic resonates with findings that multicultural policy can mask underlying assimilationist pressure where acceptance is contingent upon conformity to dominant cultural norms (Shiholo, 2024).

Participants also reflected on how they were perceived by Canadian society, particularly in relation to language, accent, and economic behavior. In theme 8, (Commentary on Canadian perceptions and believes of Chinese immigrants), some described being scapegoated for social issues such as housing inflation. As one participant noted:

“他们都觉得是我们中国人抬高了多伦多的房价...”(“*They all think it’s us Chinese who drove up the housing prices in Toronto...*”) This concern was not just about housing. It reflected a broader pattern in which the economic presence of Chinese immigrants was viewed with suspicion. Rather than being seen as contributing capital or economic value to the country, Chinese immigrants were often portrayed as outsiders who distorted local markets and disrupted social equality. While local narratives assumed Chinese immigrants were all financially well-off, this assumption was rarely framed positively. Their economical capital was not interpreted as a resource for development but as a threat to the interests of “real” Canadians, especially when linked to property ownership. In other words, the housing example should not be read as separate from language or identity. It illustrates how ideology operates by projecting broader social anxieties, such as affordability, onto racialized immigrants. This dynamic resonates with Winter’s (2018) argument, again, about “invisible borders,” where immigrants remain marked as outsiders regardless of their actual contributions, and with Polanco and Zell’s (2017) findings that immigrants’ economic presence is often reframed as disruptive rather than beneficial. Similar scapegoating logics have also been observed in other national contexts (Hagelund, 2020), showing how structural problems are displaced onto migrant groups through racialized narratives of blame. In the Canadian case, Chinese immigrants’ economic capital was reframed not as a resource but as a social threat, reinforcing symbolic boundaries of belonging.

This was also an example of a broader feeling of conditional belonging: even after passing language tests and possibly secured permanent residency, many Chinese immigrants continued to feel like provisional citizens and are often being judged not only by their languages, but also how they behave, spend money, or navigate public life. Such perceptions suggest that immigrants' integration is often judged against normative expectations, and when public anxieties arise, immigrants may become convenient targets to be judged or blamed. This finding aligns with what Li (2003) argues, where racialized immigrants are often cast as "others" in public discourse, particularly in moments of economic or social tension, regardless of their formal status or demonstrated efforts to integrate. These stereotypes do not arise solely from economic fears but are deeply tied to symbolic boundaries of nationhood. Although some other participants expressed cautious positive opinions toward Canada's multicultural policies, and acknowledged the government effort to promote diversity, they also noted a clear gap between these official values and their day-to-day experiences. Multiculturalism may be celebrated at the institutional level, but in everyday interactions, symbolic exclusion persists. As Chouliaraki and Georgiou (2022) argue, such exclusions are often subtle, and are maintained not through laws but through soft ideological forces such as the public expectations about who belongs, what behaviors are acceptable, and whose presence is subject to scrutiny, etc. These findings therefore extended earlier critiques of Canadian multiculturalism (Dauvergne, 2016; Root et al., 2014; Winter, 2018) by showing how, in practice, symbolic inclusion is conditional and fragile, and immigrants' economic or linguistic contributions do not necessarily guarantee their acceptance.

Theme 9 (The discussion of the experiences and attitudes with other immigrants/refugees groups) revealed how participants themselves reproduced ideological hierarchies by drawing distinctions between "skilled" immigrants and other groups, particularly refugees. Some framed

refugee recipients as undeserving, and advocate concerns about welfare dependency and safety. For instance, one participant who works as a volunteer in an NGO in Canada that is responsible for refugee settlement said: “...他们都不工作的, 是用我们交的税养着他们。这不公平啊!” “...*They don't work but we are paying taxes for them. This is not fair.*” Another contrasted their own struggles with what they perceived as unearned benefits for others “...你自己很努力去拿到这样的时候, 那凭什么别人就这么容易就进来, 而且还拿着你的税金在那逍遥快活...” (“*You've worked so hard to earn your way in, and then you wonder—why should someone else get in so easily and even live comfortably off your tax money?*”) These views reflected the internalized neoliberal meritocratic values. They are positioning themselves as morally deserving by virtue of effort and sacrifice, while casting others as passive recipients of an overly generous system. In reproducing these distinctions, participants engaged in the same symbolic logic that had evaluated themselves through test scores and policy filters. Ideology, in this context, is not only something imposed from above, but it is sustained through consent as well as coercion, which fosters divisions based on perceived legitimacy and deservingness (Song et al., 2024).

Together, these themes show how participants were not merely shaped by dominant discourses but actively participated in negotiating them. Some gently questioned the fairness of the policy, others distanced themselves from less “deserving” groups, and many expressed contradictory feelings about Canada’s promises of inclusivity comparing to their real experiences. For them, language testing was not just a technical gate. It was embedded in broader ideological structures that defined who counts, what counts, and how people should be judged. Through their reflections, the often-invisible power became overt: how it legitimizes some forms of belonging while marginalizing others, all under the guise of fairness and merit.

6.3.3 Capital: from inherited assets to recognized value

The third dimension of the model of investment is capital. Capital refers to the various resources such as economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms of value that individuals bring with them (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Language learners, particularly immigrants, enter new social fields equipped with varying forms of capital, such as degrees, professional experience, linguistic proficiency, and networks, etc. Whether these assets are recognized and valued in the new context is determined by the local value system, which is shaped by dominant ideologies and institutional structures. Capital, especially symbolic capital, is therefore fluid and dynamic. It can be transformed, devalued, or made invisible depending on the expectations and constraints of the host society (Bourdieu, 1991). In the context of Canadian immigration, participants' experiences reflected how their existing capital, rather than being treated as affordances, was often subjected to institutional judgement, selective recognition, or symbolic erasure. In the case of Chinese immigrants navigating Canadian language testing policies, participants' narratives reveal how various forms of capital, including knowledge, money, effort, and strategic awareness, must be constantly reconfigured to meet the narrow definitions of merit. In this section, I draw on themes 2, 6, 10, and 12 to discuss how immigrants' capital was not only unevenly recognized, but also subjected to intense emotional, financial, and institutional pressure as it was converted into standardized, test-based indicators of value.

Theme 2 (Strategic decision-making in the immigration process) reveals how participants engaged in highly tactical decision-making when navigating the language testing and immigration system. Many of them adopted a probabilistic strategy to maximize their chances, including adjusting test dates, cancelling registrations, or entering the immigration pool before achieving ideal scores, so that they will not miss any possible policy changes. As one participant

put it “你就先把自己扔进池子，再慢慢更新（语言成绩）嘛！” (“*You just throw yourself into the pool first, and then slowly update your language scores later!*”). These practices demonstrate not just individual flexibility but also an implicit understanding of the system’s shifting thresholds and opaque logic.

Participants’ ability to engage in these strategies relied on multiple forms of capital. Access to informational capital from online forums, social networks, or consultants can help them read and predict system behavior. Their repeated test registrations, schedule coordination, and application planning were only made possible with their economic capital. The applicants with more financial capital could absorb financial risks that less resources applicants could not. In this sense, participants were not merely applicants complying with policy, but they acted as *de facto* policy interpreters and risk managers. They actively work to convert their existing capital into institutionally recognized forms. However, such strategic engagement is rarely acknowledged in official evaluations of immigrant “merit.” The system continues to reduce their value to numerical scores, overlooking the complex ways in which immigrants mobilize, adapt, and repackage their capital in response to structural constraints. As Anwar (2014) and Hawthorne (2011) argue, the points system disadvantages many applicants from non-Anglophone backgrounds. These findings deepen this critique by showing how even those with resources are forced into repetitive calculations and tactical practices, which demonstrate that the problem may not due to a lack of capital but in its narrow institutional recognition. As Darwin and Norton (2015) argue, the worth of one’s capital is always contingent on its worth and meaning within the logic and recognition structures of the receiving institution.

Theme 6 (Participants' testing history and feelings taking the test) captures the emotional and psychological influence of standardized language testing on participants. Many described the

process of preparing for and repeatedly taking high-stakes tests like IELTS or CELPIP as exhausting, demoralizing, and financially burdensome. These reflections reveal that language testing, far from being a technical procedure, is experienced as a deeply affective and symbolic process that shapes how participants view themselves and their future possibilities. Several participants shared their prolonged and repeated efforts to achieve the required “8777” benchmark on the IELTS. One participant reported taking the test 13 times and added that “... 我们群很多人考二三十次...” (“...a lot of people in the group had taken the test 20 or 30 times...”), highlighting how frequent retesting became normalized in some circles. The emotional strain of repeated failure was described by another participant, “每次就是单项就总会有一项... 会在听力上出现一点点问题... 最后就刷的就也没有信心...” (“Every time, there's always one part—usually listening—where I struggle a bit... After retaking it over and over, I just end up losing motivation.”) The mental and emotional fatigue of chasing a narrow score range was also reflected in comments like “你考得越多，就越沮丧。你会开始怀疑这个东西到底是在考你的语言能力，还是别的什么鬼。” (“The more you try, the more frustrated you get. You start to wonder if the test is about your real ability or something else.”) These reflections illustrate how immigrants’ capital conversion was not just economic but also emotional, with may produce fatigue, doubt, and resignation. The testing experience therefore becomes not only a measurement of proficiency, but a perceived judgement on one’s worth, competency, and legitimacy as a future immigrant.

Beyond personal frustration, participants also raised questions about the credibility and fairness of the testing system itself. Rather than viewing test scores as stable indicators of ability, many believed that outcomes were unpredictable and could be influenced by luck, test location,

or examiner leniency. As one participant noted, “反正我就多考几次, 总会考到想要的分数吧。” (“I’ll just take the test a few more times; I’ll eventually get the score I want.”). This suggests again, a probabilistic orientation toward test outcomes. Other participants shared specific stories of their friends receiving higher scores by taking the test outside Mainland China or after switching to a different test center. These stories, though largely anecdotal, were widely circulated in online forums and WeChat groups, which shapes a shared sense that standardized tests are not entirely objective. These participants reveal two interrelated facts. First, they suggest a lack of language testing literacy. Participants often did not fully understand the constructs, validity principles, or scoring mechanisms underlying the tests they were taking (Fulcher, 2010). Their engagement with the tests was primarily outcome driven, and only a few viewed the scores as representative of actual communicative needs in Canadian society. Second, participants have a growing skepticism and distrust toward the legitimacy of the testing system itself. The belief that repeated test attempts or location changes can change their scores reflects a deeper suspicion that the system is neither neutral nor consistent. As Shohamy (2001) notes, tests carry ideological power. They not only assess ability but also define access and legitimacy. In this context, participants’ sense of uncertainty and disbelief undermines the perceived authority of language tests and revealed the fragility of symbolic capital under a supposedly standardized regime.

Language testing is therefore part of a larger emotional dynamic of migration. It is intertwined with hope, exhaustion, agency, and vulnerability. Applicants continued to invest in test-taking because the stakes were extraordinarily high, even when the system felt unreliable or unfair. Their experiences demonstrate that the affective dimensions of testing, such as frustration, distrust, resignation, can probably project how immigrants interact with the broader immigration apparatus.

Theme 10 (Micro strategies for test preparation) further illustrates the coping mechanisms participants developed to navigate these demands. Many of them enrolled in cram courses designed to teach test taking strategies rather than improve language skills. As one participant put it “...他告诉我，你不需要去读阅读题，你直接把那个答案找出来，我告诉你怎么找...我纯粹是混的。” (“He told me, “You don’t need to read the passage—just find the answers directly. I’ll show you how to do it...” Honestly, I was just winging it.”) These reflections reveal the distinction between capital as lived experience and capital as measured credential. Participants were forced to perform value in a specific institutional requirement. The system rewards standardization, repetition, and familiarity of the test genre over real world communicative competence (Roever & McNamara, 2006; Shohamy, 2001).

Beyond the pressure of testing, participants also point to a broader pattern of capital devaluation in the post-migration context. As discussed in theme 12, several participants, such as media professionals or corporate managers, had prestigious or well-compensated positions in China, who found themselves in much lower-paying roles in Canada: “我觉得我现在我可以跟你透露，我现在的工资也没有达到离开北京时候的那个年薪的水平。” (“I think I can tell you now—my current salary still hasn’t reached the level of my annual income back when I left Beijing.”) Despite their considerable cultural and social capital, their prior accomplishments were often unrecognized, which requires them to start over in unfamiliar labor markets. This symbolic loss of status shows the difficulty of converting capital across national and linguistic boundaries.

In the Canadian context, institutional and professional recognition often requires Canadian credentials such as local degrees, native-like language proficiency, and local work

experience. when immigrants' prior capital does not align with these expectations, it is either devalued or dismissed. This process reveals that the symbolic capital of the immigrants is not only unrecognized, but actively constrained. For participants, their past success does not translate into future opportunity, despite their continued effort and adaptability (Piller, 2016; Creese & Wiebe, 2012). This illustrates what Joppke (2021) describes as "courting the top and fending off the bottom" (p. 79), where immigration regimes seek skills but then limit their transferability, which creates a clear mismatch between policy promises and lived realities.

These findings reinforce the previous critiques of language testing and immigration policy as systems that prioritize quantifiable, decontextualized indicators of merit, while linguistic, professional, and emotional capital became largely invisible (McNamara, 2005; Blommaert, 2010). These findings add to the evidence of how immigrants actively repackage, gamble, and exhaust their capital within an opaque and shifting system. This shows that the issue is not simply about a lack of ability but about systemic misrecognition, where capital is only valued when it can be standardized into test scores or other factors in the point system.

6.3.4 Beyond the framework: language, testing, and everyday tensions.

While the previous sections discussed participants' experiences through the three dimensions of the model of investment, several themes emerged that did not fit neatly into these categories. Themes 1, 3, and 5 reflect participants' broader reflections on the role of language in daily life, the disconnections between test language and communicative needs, and their evolving understanding of the tests themselves. These themes offer insight into how language is experienced not only as a symbolic or strategic resource, but also as a practical, embodied, and sometimes contradictory element of everyday life.

Theme 1 (English or French necessity for survival or advancement in Canada) reflects the uneven necessity of official language proficiency. While many participants agreed that language competence is crucial for long-term success and professional development, others emphasized that survival is possible with only basic language skills, especially within dense ethnic landscapes. One participant mentioned that even in cities like Ottawa, where the Chinese community is smaller, it is still possible to “live well” without extensive English use. These reflections complicate the policy narrative that language is a universal requirement for integration. Instead, language necessity appears highly context dependent. It is shaped by geographic, social, and occupational factors. This perspective aligns with critiques of “one-size-fits-all” approaches to language policy (Shohamy, 2006; Piller, 2016).

Theme 3 (English on test vs. English in daily life) expands this tension by drawing attention to the gap between what participants were required to master for immigration purposes and what they actually needed to navigate life in Canada. Some participants described testing English as irrelevant to their everyday communicative demands. For example, small talk, workplace banter, and culturally embedded expressions were frequently cited as more challenging than structured test prompts. As one participant pointed out, instead of vocabulary or grammar, cultural familiarity was more essential for participating in casual or professional conversations. This disconnection reflects the distinction between language knowledge and language use. For many participants, the realization that passing a language test did not guarantee communicative confidence became another source of frustration and insecurity.

Theme 5 (Perceptions towards English language tests) offers a window into participants’ evolving attitudes toward the tests themselves. Initially regarded as a necessary hurdle, the tests were gradually reframed by participants as arbitrary, biased, or commercially driven. Some of

them believe that test formats, especially the speaking component, was scored inconsistently across regions or testing centers. Others noted that the validity period of test scores felt artificially short, which leads to suspicions that repeated test-taking was financially motivated. These perceptions are in line with what Hamp-Lyons (2000) called the “test industry” dynamic, where standardized exams function both as gatekeepers and as commercial products. A striking example of this growing skepticism is a recent policy change: as of November 1, 2024, the Canadian government began requiring all applicants for the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) to submit additional proof of English language proficiency. Previously, full time graduates from Canadian institutions including undergraduate, master’s and doctoral programs, could apply for this work permit without language testing, as their degree completion in English environments was assumed to demonstrate sufficient proficiency. Under the new rule, however, graduates must achieve at least CLB 7 (equivalent to IELTS General 6.0), even though many had already submitted IELTS Academic scores of 6.0, 6.5 or above when applying for school admission. The irony lies in the fact that after studying full-time in an English language academic environment for several years, students are asked to retake a lower level, easier format test. For many newcomers, especially immigrants and international students who had to navigate these requirements directly, the new rule was widely perceived as redundant and profit driven. Although this policy change does not directly link to immigration, this perception also reinforced the sense that sometimes testing is less about communicative readiness and more about bureaucratic compliance and institutional profit. Even for those who have lived and studied in Canada for years, linguistic legitimacy must be repeatedly proven. It suggests that language tests serve more as instruments of control than as genuine assessment of ability (Shohamy, 2001, 2006). Participants’ attitudes toward such policies reflect a broader frustration and distrust, in

which immigrants and international students are never fully recognized as competent, regardless of their lived experience.

Together, these themes point to a core finding: language, as experienced by immigrants, is not just a resource to be acquired, nor a barrier to be overcome. It is a dynamic and often contradictory part of life in a new society. Standardized testing policies tend to frame language as something that can be measured, certified, and converted into points. Yet participants' reflections show that language is also relational, social, and contingent. It enables access but also marks differences; it is required, but not always relevant; it is a ticket to entry, but not a guarantee of belonging. These contradictions challenge the dominant discourse that treat language as a simple policy variable, and calls for a more nuanced, context sensitive approach to both language policy and language assessment.

6.3.5 Summary

This section discussed how Chinese immigrants' lived experiences with language testing and policy can be interpreted through the three dimensions of the model of investment: identity, ideology, and capital (Darvin & Nordon, 2015). Themes such as 7, 12, and 13 reflected how immigrants imagined themselves, recalibrated their self-worth, and located their belonging. Themes 4, 8, 9 and 11 addressed ideological tensions, including meritocratic discourses, racialized perceptions, and implicit hierarchies embedded in policy and public culture. Themes 2, 6, 10, and 12 captured how various forms of capitals were unevenly recognized and sometimes devalued. Theme 12, notably, intersected both identity and capital, which highlighted the entanglement of self-positioning and resource negotiation in migration experiences.

The relationship among the 13 themes and the model of investment is visualized in Figure 8 below. While the figure maps the 13 themes onto the model of investment based on overlapping conceptual domains, I do believe that some themes, such as Theme 9 and 11, could reasonably be placed under multiple dimensions depending on whether the focus is on discourse, perception, or identity construction. For example, they reflect both ideological distinctions and identity positioning vis-à-vis other immigrant groups. Beyond the three main dimensions of the model, Themes 1, 3, and 5 captured tensions that are not easily categorized. Rather than fitting neatly into a theoretical model, these themes shed light on everyday contradictions and frustrations, which are instances where policy logic clashes with lived logic. For readability, the theme labels in Figure 8 are abbreviated; their full names are provided in the text.

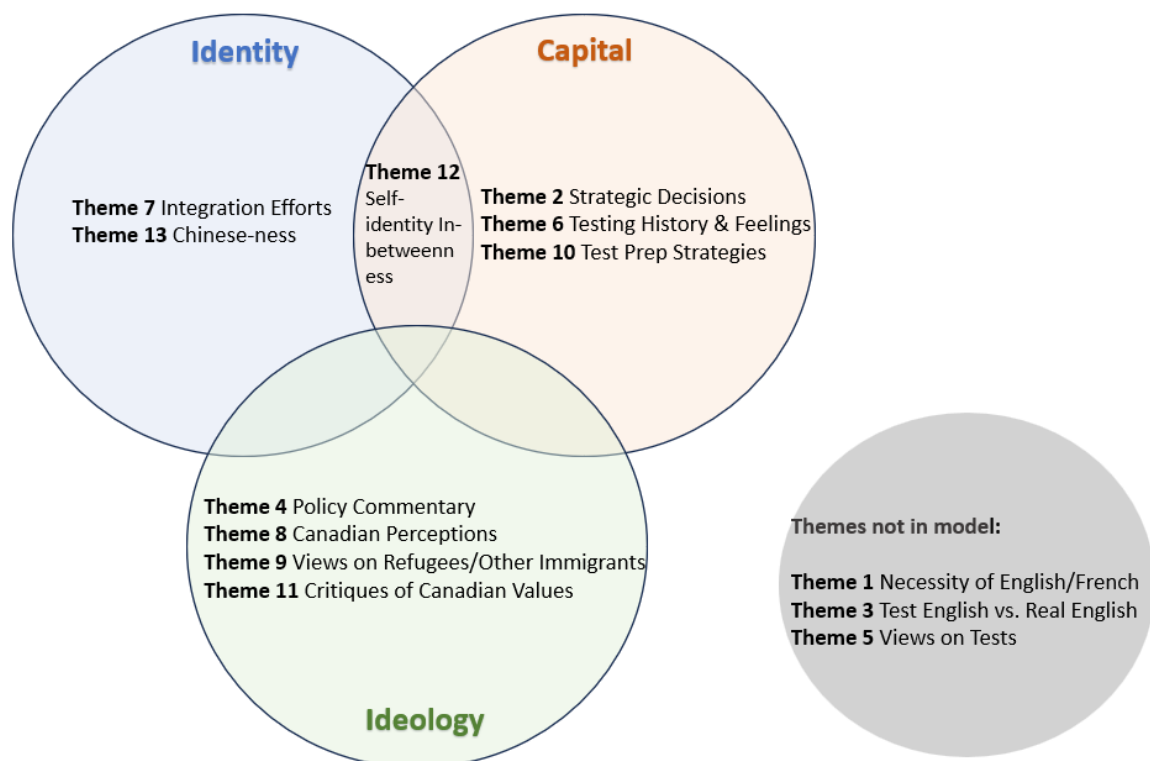


Figure 8 Themes positioned within the Model of Investment (adapted from Darwin & Norton, 2015)

Rather than a rigid coding scheme, this model and mapping should be considered a relational framework that helps illustrate how identity, ideology, and capital interact dynamically in immigration experiences. In complex lived realities, alternate mappings should be equally valid and expected. At the same time, the themes that fall outside of the model serve as an important reminder: immigrants' engagement with language are not only shaped by symbolic forces, but also by practical limitations, institutional inconsistencies, and the unpredictable realities of everyday life.

While the process of mapping themes onto the model of investment was conducted by me as the researcher, it is also important to acknowledge that the data themselves were shaped to some extent by the dynamics of the focus group discussions. As described in Chapter 5, participants did not only provide individual opinions but also engaged in dialogue with one another. They at times reinforce, question, or revise perspectives in interaction. These group dynamics did not determine the analytical mapping presented here, but they enriched the substance of the themes by revealing how immigrant subjectivities were voiced, negotiated, and co-constructed in collective settings. Taken together, these findings provide a direct response to RQ2. They show that Chinese immigrants were not simply passive recipients of dominant discourses, but active agents who perceived, negotiated, and at times challenged the values embedded in English language assessment. Through their reflections, integration emerges not as a straightforward outcome but as an uneven process shaped by policy demands, cultural dispositions, and public perceptions. Language testing, in this sense, functions not only as a technical requirement but as a recurring site where questions of legitimacy, fairness, and value are worked out in daily life.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presents the discussions of the key findings of the study through two interconnected dimensions: an initial policy-level construction of language testing, which informed an investigation into the lived experiences of Chinese immigrants navigating that system. Drawing on a policy archaeology framework, the first section highlighted how language ability has been framed as a policy problem in Canadian immigration discourse. It revealed that the legitimacy of language testing is not self-evident but emerges from broader policy logics—particularly those emphasizing efficiency, economic contribution, and symbolic inclusion. The second section shifted to the voices of immigrants themselves, using the model of investment to explore how identity, ideology, and capital shape and are shaped by their engagement with language assessments. Participants’ experiences reflected not only strategic adaptation and emotional negotiation, but also revealed how language tests operate as instruments of symbolic judgment. Their insights show that language assessment is not simply a gateway to immigration status—it is a site where integration is negotiated, legitimacy is performed, and power is contested.

Across both phases of analysis, one conclusion is clear: language testing for immigration, often presented as a neutral practice, is in fact embedded within political, ideological, and institutional structures that produce uneven access and symbolic hierarchies. Immigrants must navigate not only the technical demands of the test, but also the unspoken expectations of integration and the shifting boundaries of legitimacy. Understanding this complexity is essential for rethinking what it means to assess language “ability” in a context where the stakes are so high.

The next and final chapter brings together the threads of this study. It begins by summarizing the key findings, then reflects on their implications for both research, practice, and policy. The methodological and conceptual challenges encountered throughout the study were also addressed, which outline the directions for future inquiry. A personal reflection was also included on the emotional and political stakes of researching language, migration, and belonging.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary of key findings

This dissertation set out to answer two research questions:

RQ1. How do Canadian immigration policy and media discourses construct immigrant language ability as a social and political issue?

a) What discourses frame immigrant language proficiency as a problem requiring regulation?

b) How is language assessment used to legitimize and operationalize these discourses?

RQ2. What do discussions with Chinese immigrants about their immigration journeys reveal about how they perceive, negotiate, or challenge dominant discourses of language, identity, and integration embedded in English language assessment?

In response to RQ1, the findings show that immigrant language ability is framed as a policy “problem” through four recurring discourses: economic justification, national identity, deficit framing, and cultural othering. These discourses legitimize the use of language testing as a gatekeeping mechanism, embedding it in broader neoliberal logics of productivity and loyalty.

In response to RQ2, the findings show that Chinese immigrants do not simply receive these discourses passively. Instead, they interpret, resist, and negotiate them in everyday ways, from strategic test-taking and investment of resources to critical reflections on multiculturalism, fairness, and legitimacy. Their narratives illustrate how identity, ideology, and capital interact in shaping their sense of integration and legitimacy.

In this dissertation, I argue that the use of language testing for immigration, often presented as a neutral practice, is in fact shaped by political choices and ideological agendas.

Through a policy archaeology analysis of policy documents and media discourses, it shows that immigrants' language ability has been constructed as a political problem through economic justification, national identity discourse, deficit framing, and cultural othering. This framing does not arise from evidence that newcomers lack communicative competence, but rather from shifting governmental goals related to economic productivity, social control, and symbolic inclusion. The way standardized language tests are used as a gatekeeping tool for immigration deserves to be re-examined. What has been treated as common sense may in fact reflect ideological assumptions and/or administrative convenience.

Five key findings are presented in this study. First, language tests have evolved from tools of linguistic and communication assessment for settlement into symbolic instruments of selection. It reflects a broader neoliberal logic. Language becomes a proxy for potential value, cultural fit, future productivity and adaptability.

Second, immigrants are not passive subjects in this system. My participants in this study demonstrated their agency, adaptability, and strategic thinking. They interpreted shifting policies, consulted informal networks, and took calculated risks in taking the test. However, this agency was accompanied by uncertainty, frustration, and deep distrust toward the legitimacy of the testing process.

Third, existing capital of the immigrants seems to be often devalued. Immigrants' educational backgrounds, professional experience, cultural capital and networking, and even prior language achievements often fail to be recognized. What counts as valid proof of competence is narrowly defined by institutional logics and test design, which leads to repeated demands of evidence, and a sense that legitimacy must be continually re-earned and re-evaluated.

Fourth, the study reveals the ideological contradictions embedded in the Canadian immigration system. While multiculturalism is promoted as a national value, the realities of repeated testing and evaluation reflect a deeper hesitation to include a diversity of newcomers. A striking example is the recent policy change requiring postsecondary graduates in Canada to take another language test to obtain a Post-Graduate Work Permit, even after years of full time English medium study. Such measures reveal not only institutional distrust, but also a policy logic that feels increasingly misaligned with lived realities.

Finally, these findings also shed light on the ways immigrant identity is shaped through testing, categorization, and expectations of performance. Participants did not describe themselves as simply “Chinese” or “Canadian,” but often negotiated their sense of belonging through references to how they were seen, judged, or expected to behave, including language-related expectations around proficiency and performance. Although accent and pronunciation have been shown in previous studies to be markers of belonging (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2009), participants in this study did not explicitly frame their experiences in relation to accent, focusing instead on test performance and broader linguistic expectations of integration. Through this process, identity itself emerged as a site of tension between internal self-understanding and external structures of recognition.

These findings suggest that the use of language testing in Canadian immigration policy has shifted over time. Initially, language assessments were introduced to ensure that newcomers possessed a basic level of communicative competence deemed necessary for settlement and participation. In recent years, however, their role has increasingly been tied to managing application volumes through progressively higher cut-off scores. However, raising cut-off scores to manage application volumes operates as a shortcut, one that bypasses more complex but

essential questions about fairness, systemic recognition, and the broader goals of immigrant integration.

7.2 Implications for research, policy, and practice

This study offers several implications for ongoing conversations in the field of language assessment, particularly in contexts where testing intersects with immigration policy and social inclusion.

First, by adopting a poststructuralist lens and drawing on the model of investment, this research builds on the work of scholars who have demonstrated that language testing is not neutral but operates with hidden political and ideological agendas. It adds further support to the view that language assessments are not simply technical tools but are embedded in broader discourses of legitimacy, worth, and belonging (e.g., Blackledge, 2009; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; McNamara, 2005; Shohamy, 2001, 2006; Spolsky, 1997; etc.). It may be helpful for future research to continue attending not only to test design and performance, but also to how tests are used to shape access, identity, and opportunity within migration systems.

Second, new methodological possibilities for greater participant involvement in qualitative research are explored. While practices such as member checking and feedback sessions are common, they often leave the interpretative authority firmly with the researcher. In this study, I have piloted a co-analysis protocol in the follow up co-analysis sessions by inviting participants to engage directly with coded transcripts and contribute to theme development. This process is both enriching and challenging, but ultimately it allowed more culturally situated insights to emerge. This kind of shared interpretive process can be especially valuable in research involving immigrant or other minorized communities. Many participants expressed that they felt

genuinely involved and heard, which in turn fostered richer dialogue and greater analytical clarity. The experience also raised important questions about trust, researcher reflexivity, and what it means to share authority in knowledge production and co-construction, which has been an issue increasingly relevant in critical language assessment research.

Third, although I have highlighted in this study many limitations of language testing, it is also important to recognize why governments continue to rely on them. Standardized tests appear to offer efficiency, transparency, and fairness by providing clear benchmarks and a scalable way to manage large application volumes. From a policy perspective, these features make tests an attractive tool for immigration systems under pressure to be both selective and defensible to the public. However, the findings of this study show that in practice, such claims of neutrality and transparency are often undermined. Tests may control volume, but they do so in ways that may obscure structural inequities and reduce immigrant value to a narrow metric. They may present themselves as transparent, yet applicants experience the process as unpredictable and opaque. In this sense, the issue is not the existence of language testing per se, but the way it has been instrumentalized within immigration policy. A more constructive approach would retain the potential benefits of standardized benchmarks while embedding them in a broader, more flexible, and context-sensitive framework.

Finally, the findings of this study may offer practical implications for policy development. They point to a need for a more transparent, responsive, and culturally informed approaches to language testing for immigration. When language tests are used to determine people's futures, it becomes much more important to recognize whose language, whose norms, and whose definitions of "proficiency" are privileged. Although grammatical accuracy and formal writing are important, many participants in this study pointed to the need for real-life

communicative skills, cultural confidence, and situated knowledge to navigate daily life in Canada, and it is also important that immigration language policies should be informed not only by institutional goals but also by immigrant experiences.

I do not intend to claim to resolve these tensions through this study, but I hope to contribute to the broader effort to make language assessment more equitable, dialogic, and socially responsible. Based on these findings, I encourage policymakers to move beyond one-size-fits-all benchmarks and consider more flexible, context-sensitive approaches to evaluating language proficiency—ones that reflect the diverse ways immigrants engage with language, community, and work in their new environments. For instance, the current points system could be revised by adopting a threshold model, where applicants who meet a functional level of proficiency (e.g., CLB 7 or 9) receive full language-related points, without additional rewards for higher scores. This could reduce the pressure of applicants to repeatedly retake tests to chase higher scores when their language proficiency is sufficient already. In addition, policymakers could also consider establishing a supplementary mechanism that allows applicants to submit contextual evidence of their language use such as employer statements, community engagement, or relevant coursework, especially when standardized test scores do not fully capture their communicative competence. Finally, it is important that the purpose and role of language testing in immigration policy be communicated clearly to the public. When language tests are perceived as instruments of cultural gatekeeping or population control, they can produce anxiety, confusion, and feelings of exclusion. A more transparent explanation of policy objectives may foster a fairer and more inclusive process. High-stake decisions involving language assessment should be grounded not only in validity but also in ethical responsibility and social fairness.

7.3 Reflections on challenges, limitations, and insider positioning

This section includes an honest reflection on the conceptual, emotional, and logistic challenges I faced throughout this study. Much of this research took place under conditions that were uncertain and difficult to plan for, which I believe is the reality for many qualitative researchers but rarely discussed in academic writing.

One of the most difficult parts of the research was recruiting participants. The topic of immigration, particularly the emotional weight of language testing, often brought up frustration, shame, or exhaustion. Some people I contacted were hesitant to revisit their experiences, and I fully respected that. Others worried about being recorded, even anonymously. Although I contacted many Chinese organizations in Canada hoping to recruit participants more easily, only a few of them responded to my email. To access more participants, and to build trust, I relied heavily on personal networks and multiple informal conversations. In addition, as already discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the focus group format made people comfortable in revealing their thoughts as an individual in a group, it also added another layer of group dynamics which I had to navigate carefully. For example, some participants were more vocal than others and tended to dominate the discussion, while others were more reserved and needed encouragement to speak. In some groups, pre-existing social relationships among participants also shaped how openly they shared, which required me to balance inclusion, respect, and flow of conversation.

A more unexpected challenge emerged in applying Scheurich's (1994) policy archaeology framework to the document analysis. While I initially engaged with multiple dimensions of the framework, it became evident that the first two dimensions, identifying how immigrant language ability is constructed as a policy problem and tracing the rules and regularities that sustain this construction, generated the findings most directly aligned with the

research question and the empirical focus of this dissertation. The remaining dimensions offered valuable theoretical insight but led the analysis in directions less central to the present aims. For this reason, the presentation of results concentrates on Dimensions 1 and 2, while Dimensions 3 and 4 were considered during analysis but are not reported in detail. Recognizing this was not easy. I worried that abandoning parts of a framework might be seen as incomplete or insufficient. But in the end, I chose to reshape the chapter and focus only on what the data called for and what my particular research question required. It was a reminder to me that frameworks should serve the research, not the other way around.

The co-analysis sessions were especially rewarding, but also incredibly demanding. They required scheduling long follow-up sessions, preparing annotated transcripts, and creating an environment where participants felt safe offering alternative interpretations. During the early sessions, I sometimes worried whether my co-researchers were just being polite, or whether I had guided their interpretations too much. But over time, several participants shared their appreciation for being genuinely involved in the analysis, which gave me confidence that the effort had been worthwhile. Still, it was time-and energy-intensive in ways I had not anticipated, and there were moments when I seriously questioned whether I could finish data collection in time.

Another challenge lay in the gap between what I hoped to understand from my participants and what could ultimately be represented in academic writing. I entered this project wanting to center participants' lived experiences, including their everyday strategies, frustrations, insights, etc. But those experiences rarely came in the form of neat theoretical statements or policy critiques. Their stories were emotional, layered, sometimes contradictory, and deeply embedded in localized realities. More importantly, as a Chinese international student myself,

many of these stories resonate with my feelings deeply. As a researcher, I had to make difficult decisions about how to translate these into something legible to an academic audience. I often found myself choosing between preserving the messy, full-bodied texture of their narratives and presenting something thematically coherent, analytical, and publishable. This tension was never fully resolved. But through the co-analysis process, I tried to stay as close as possible to participants' meanings, even when the language I used to express them had to shift.

Translation was also a source of anxiety. All of the focus groups and co-analysis sessions were conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese with occasional English expressions in them. However, the initial coding process with my supervisor was in English, and of course the dissertation is written in English. I constantly struggled to represent participants' words in a way that felt truly faithful. I wanted the translations to capture not only their literal meaning, but also the emotional tone and cultural nuances behind them. There were moments where no English word felt adequate. Some phrases lost their humor, their edge, or their ambiguity when translated. I realized that something is always lost when ideas cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. In a way, this mirrors the experience of many Chinese immigrants in Canada, whose identities and expressions are often reshaped or muted as they navigate between languages and cultural worlds.

Finally, it was emotionally difficult at times to carry the weight of my own role in the research. As someone who has taken these same tests and walked through similar immigration procedures, I felt both close to and distant from my participants. I understood their pain, but I was also analyzing it. Writing with care, without romanticizing or exploiting anyone's story, was a constant concern on my mind.

There are of course some limitations in the structure of the research. Although the co-analysis sessions produced rich insights, not all participants were involved in this stage, and some of the most nuanced themes came from the co-analysis sessions that were not part of the original design. The choice to organize findings under the model of investment may have also constrained the representation of certain experiences that did not fit neatly within its categories. I believe these are reminders that qualitative research is always partial, situated, and in motion.

Another limitation of this study lies in the evolving nature of immigration policy itself. Since the data collection and analysis took place over an extended period, several relevant policy shifts have occurred. For example, the Pearson Test of English (PTE) was introduced as a new accepted language test, Canada launched additional initiatives to attract francophone immigrants outside Quebec, and the total number of new permanent residents is expected to gradually decline starting in 2025. These changes may reshape the discursive landscape of language testing in immigration, as well as influence the kinds of strategic decisions applicants make. While the study covers the policy landscape at the time of data collection, it does not account for how participants might respond to or be affected by more recent developments. If I were to conduct this study again, I would consider a more longitudinal design or an adaptive framework for tracking ongoing policy changes that could have enhanced the study's timeliness and applicability.

While the challenges above shaped and constrained aspects of this study, at the same time, this study was made possible precisely because of my position as an insider—someone who shares cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the participants and understands the complexities of navigating language, policy, and identity from lived experience, which allowed me to gain trust, access, and depth of reflection that many researchers might not be able to reach.

I was able to hear not only what participants said, but also how they said it, and why it mattered. I believe these relational and contextual advantages are part of what made the co-analysis process especially meaningful.

I hope that by being honest about these challenges, limitations, and affordances, I've not only contextualized my findings, but also offered a more transparent account of what it means to do research with, and not just about, immigrant communities.

7.4 Future directions

There are several possible directions for future research. One promising direction is to expand the population to include immigrants from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly those classified under different immigration streams (e.g., refugees, caregivers, international students outside mainstream universities, etc.). Another is to investigate the longer-term consequences of language test policies, not only on individuals' economic outcomes, but also on their evolving sense of identity, belonging, and social integration over time.

There is also a need for more interdisciplinary work bridging language testing, migration studies, and policy sociology. Many questions about legitimacy, fairness, and symbolic exclusion cannot be fully addressed within the traditional test validation paradigms.

At the same time, as Canadian immigration policies continue to evolve, such as the new requirement for PGWP applicants to submit language test scores as of November 2024, research must stay attuned to how these changes reshape expectations of language, belonging, and value.

Finally, beyond academic inquiry, broader engagement with immigration policy and public discourse is needed. As language testing continues to function as a gatekeeping mechanism in immigration, it is crucial that researchers, educators, and community advocates

move beyond critique and begin mobilizing research findings toward action. One approach is through policy engagement: researchers like me can and will seek opportunities to present findings to policymakers in accessible formats such as policy briefs, public talks, or consultations with government agencies like IRCC or the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. These spaces will offer opportunities to advocate for more culturally responsive testing frameworks and to question the assumptions embedded in current score requirements.

Community-based organizations and immigrant-serving agencies can also be our key partners by co-hosting workshops that share findings with immigrant communities, or information sessions for language instructors and settlement workers that incorporate the insights from this study. These forms of dissemination can help bridge the gap between research and practice, especially in making visible the hidden emotional and social consequences of standardized testing.

There are also possibilities in engaging with test developers and assessment companies to raise awareness of how language proficiency is currently defined, and whose language practices are being privileged or excluded. Even small changes, such as including more diverse test prompts, recognizing multiple varieties of English, or offering test preparation resources that reflect real-life communicative needs, could begin to challenge the deficit narratives that often underlie test design. In addition, there may also be a need to critically examine the rationale behind the commonly imposed two-year validity period of language test scores. Testing companies could be encouraged to conduct empirical studies on whether language proficiency meaningfully decreases within that timeframe in the context of immigration, and whether this practice places unnecessary burdens on test-takers without sufficient justification.

The key to this kind of engagement is that it must center the lived experiences and voices of immigrants themselves. Future projects might involve participatory action research or longitudinal dialogue with those most impacted by these policies. In this sense, research will become not only a mode of representation, but also a platform for solidarity-building. When findings are shared beyond academic journals and used to support structural change, research can then become a form of activism, one that demands a more equitable and humane approach to language, migration, and belonging.

7.5 Final reflections

I have asked myself countless times if this research is valuable. If it is a story worth telling, and if told, would anyone care. For Chinese immigrants, they have lived the stories already. They know intimately the pain, the struggles, the helplessness, the occasional sweetness, and the rare moments of happiness. I used to think happiness would be the end of this journey, but I have come to realize that no place is as perfect as one might imagine. Instead, I thought, perhaps peacefulness would come with time and that eventually, life would settle, and every emotion would float, linger, and finally land, like dust after a storm. But through this study, I have learned that life for immigrants never truly settles. Every choice, every night spent in hesitation, and every step onto unfamiliar land lingers, stirred up again whenever the smallest breeze—a memory, a feeling, a question of belonging—blows, pulling them back to the days when those first steps were taken.

If my readers are mostly local Canadians (whatever that means), or those who have never felt like outsiders, will they care? Can they understand what it means to always feel on the margins, and constantly be an “outsider” in a place that defines “insider” by a standard we may

never reach? The question of who belongs is not just a personal struggle. It lies at the heart of this study.

And so, again, I'm left wondering: is this study worth telling? For those who have lived it, understanding is not always enough to create change. And for others, caring can feel like a big leap when it's not personal. But I am not expecting change immediately from either group. I humbly hope that my research plants a seed that grows slowly. When immigrants read it, they may feel seen, validated, even empowered to voice their experiences or advocate differently. And for others, even if they do not immediately connect, I hope my study can be a reference, can be something they look back to, and can be a tool that returns when decisions are made about language assessment or immigration. Articulating the distance and striving to bridge it is part of my purpose, however difficult it might be.

Perhaps this study ends not with certainty, but with clarity, that the questions we ask about language are never just about language:

- If the language score is the only flexible factor, are we really selecting for integration or for test taking privilege?
- If immigration is meant to serve both the country and the newcomer, who decides what counts as “sufficient language ability?” The government? The employer? The test designer? The newcomer?

Maybe this is not a language question, maybe not even a policy question. It's a power question. And the work should not stop here. The work actually begins with rethinking the assumptions we test, the borders we draw, and the voices we choose to trust.

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Appendix A Certificate of Ethics Approval

07/01/2025

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-09-22-8419

Titre du projet / Project Title

The Role of Language
Assessment for Immigration
Purposes: The Case of Chinese
Immigrants in Canada

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Fermé / Closed

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

11/01/2023

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

10/01/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

**Chercheur /
Researcher**

Affiliation

Role

Yiwei QIN

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Chercheur Principal / Principal
Investigator

Beverly BAKER

Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme / Official Languages
and Bilingualism Institute

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Coordonateur / COORDINATOR

Coordonnateur de l'éthique / Ethics Coordinator

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix B Full Scale of CLB Levels⁹

Stage I - Basic Language Ability

Benchmark and Ability Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
CLB 1: Initial CLB 2: Developing CLB 3: Adequate CLB 4: Fluent	Interpreting simple spoken communication in routine, non-demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating simple spoken communication in routine, non-demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Interpreting simple written communication in routine, non-demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating simple written communication in routine, non-demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.

Stage II - Intermediate Language Ability

Benchmark and Ability Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
CLB 5: Initial CLB 6: Developing CLB 7: Adequate CLB 8: Fluent	Interpreting moderately complex spoken communication in moderately demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating moderately complex spoken communication in moderately demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Interpreting moderately complex written communication in moderately demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating moderately complex written communication in moderately demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.

Stage III - Advanced Language Ability

Benchmark and Ability Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
CLB 9: Initial CLB 10: Developing CLB 11: Adequate CLB 12: Fluent	Interpreting complex spoken communication in demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating complex spoken communication in demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Interpreting complex written communication in demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.	Creating complex written communication in demanding contexts of language use within the four Competency Areas.

⁹ Taken from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. (2012). *Canadian Language Benchmarks: English as a Second Language for Adults*. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Page XI.

Appendix C The Full List of Documents Analyzed

No.	Government	Author/Department	Year
1	Explaining self-reported language proficiency gains of immigrant women	Paul Anisef, Robert Sweet, Maria Adamuti-Trache, and Sarah V. Wayland	2012
2	Results from the 2016 Census: education and labour market successes and challenges for children of immigrant parents	Martin Turcotte	2019
3	Educational and labour market outcomes of childhood immigrants by admission class	Feng Hou and Aneta Bonikowska	2016
4	International students as a source of labour supply: Pre-immigration study in Canada and post immigration earnings	Eden Crossman and Feng Hou	2022
5	Linguistic integration of immigrants and official language populations in Canada	Statistics Canada	2017
6	Evaluation of language training services	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	2022
7	Language instruction for newcomers to Canada: Client profile and performance indicators	Colleen Dempsey, Li Xue, Stan kustec	2019
8	Official languages annual report 2015–2016	Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	2017
9	Roadmap for Canada's official languages 2013–2018: Education, immigration, communities	Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	2013
10	Education and labour market outcomes of children with an immigrant background by their region of origin	Martin Turcotte	2019
11	Refugees and Canadian Post-Secondary education: Characteristics and economic outcomes in comparison	Elena Prokopenko	2018
12	Settlement patterns and social integration of the population with an immigrant background in the montreal toronto and vancouver metropolitan areas	"Vézina, Mireille and	2017
13	Official Languages Tracking Survey 2021	Houle, René"	2022
14	"Official language proficiency and immigrant labour market outcomes: Evidence from test-based multidimensional	Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages	2022
15	measures of language skills"	Li Xu and Feng Hou	2019
16	Understanding the Canadian Language Benchmarks	Government of Canada	2022
17	Immigrate through the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot: Language requirements	Government of Canada	2022
18	Self-employed person: Selection criteria	Government of Canada	2021
19	English and French_ Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada	Canadian Heritage	2020

20	Additional points in Express Entry to help increase Francophone immigration outside Quebec	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	n.d.
21	I am a native English or French speaker, why do I need to take a language test for Express Entry (from IRCC Help Centre)	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	n.d.
22	Express Entry: Rounds of invitations	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	2022
23	Concept video: introduction to place of birth, citizenship and immigration concepts	Statistics Canada	2013
24	Immigration and ethnocultural diversity data: 2011 national household survey	Statistics Canada	2022
25	Concept video: knowledge of official languages	Statistics Canada	2022
26	Concept video: mother tongue	Statistics Canada	2022
27	Concept video: age	Statistics Canada	2013
28	Canada's immigration minister Jason Kenney on Canada's new startup visa program at Rock Center for corporate governance	Government of Canada	2022
No.	The National Post		
1	Syrians in Calgary have 'long' wait to take English	N/A	2016
2	No residency for deaf man with trouble speaking; Sign language not accepted in immigration test	Humphreys, Adrian	2013
3	Immigrant investors lost	Singer, Colin R	2015
4	Chinese group teaches Canadian values, rights; New Immigrants	Blackwell, Tom	2019
5	A City's search for 'Cultural Harmony'	Quan, Douglas	2018
6	Welcome to Canada	Cohen, Tobi	2013
7	Buying into Canada	Darren Francey	2016
8	Canada can't be a blank slate	Jonas, George	2014
9	Ruling on job testing reversed	Cotter, John	2016
10	Road to citizenship toughened; Immigrants must live here longer, pay more	Bell, Stewart	2014
11	They're not lining up anymore'; Policy must respond to need for skilled immigrants	Walberg, Rebecca	2012
12	Birth tourism 'legal, but sparking a controversy; B.C. A Favoured haven for 'unscrupulous 'practice	Bilefsky, Dan	2019
13	Politicians without values	Watson, William	2016
14	Court upholds immigration backlog purge; Government in right	Cohen, Tobi	2013
15	Focusing on values an 'empty exercise'	Iverson, John	2017
No.	The Globe & Mail		
16	The pandemic exposed Canada's inefficient immigration system	Saunders, Doug	2021

17	'Canadian experience' hurdle kills too many newcomers' jobs hopes	Rana, Uday	2021
18	Put to the test	Adams, Michael	2021
19	Businesses need to help immigrants prosper	Rees, Dan	2021
20	International student recruiting machine	Dakshana Bascaramurty; Bhatt, Neha; Rana, Uday	2021
21	The gratitude gap	Mouallem, Omar	2021
22	Who is Gary Ng, really?	McArthur, Greg; Rendell, Mark; O'Hara, Clare; Kiladze, Tim	2021
23	Immigration Minister addresses migrant concerns	Bailey, Ian	2021
24	Should we have a 'Canadian values' test for films and TV shows?	Houpt, Simon	2017
25	The fight to open Canada's doors	Bird, Michael	2014
26	Harry and Meghan have no idea: Immigrating to Canada is hard	Dixon, Robert	2020
27	Family Ties	Saunders, Doug	2018
28	How much diversity do Canadians want?	Wente, Margaret	2016
29	Queenie Choo: 'If we continue to do the same thing we do every day, we only get the same result - or less'	Bouw, Brenda	2017
30	In Cape Breton, international students transform a campus	Friesen, Joe	2019
31	Eleven months later, Syrians right at home	Lopes, Luiz	2016
32	What are 'Canadian values'? Even if it were practical to screen the customs of every visa applicant, coming up with university ideas would be impossible	Satzewich, Vic	2016
33	The virtual reality of border crossing	Jones, Alan	2018
34	Liberals to repeal controversial citizenship bill, McCallum says	Zilio, Michelle	2016
35	Immigration policy key for Tories	Ibbitson, John	2017
36	The refugee issue is dangerous politics	Ibbitson, John	2018
37	Barbaric' is the wrong tone	GAGNON, LYSIANE	2013
38	New Canadians reflect and offer advice for those who come after	Marotta, Stefanie	2020
39	Once barred from school in Afghanistan, teen wins prestigious Canadian scholarship	Geselbracht, David	2015
40	True Patriot Love	Hawa, Kaleem	2018
No.	Maclean's		
41	The flap over the fluency gap	MacQueen, Ken	2013
42	How Syrian refugees to Canada have fared since 2015	Taylor, Peter Shawn	2019
43	When politicians want to Make Canada Great Again, what are we supposed to say?	Domise, Andray	2018
44	The rise of an uncaring Canada	Domise, Andray	2019

45	Not for turning, it turns out	Wells, Paul	2015
46	The Battle of the Wonder Boys	Geddes, John	2015

Appendix D List of contact points for Chinese immigrants in Toronto and Ottawa

1. Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre (OCCSC)	
Contact: Rupert Yeung	(613) 235-4875/ https://www.occsc.org/zh/home-2/
2. University of Ottawa Chinese Students Association (UOCSA)	
Contact: Tongda Li	uo.csa@hotmail.com
3. Toronto Chinese Baptist Church	
Contact: Rev. Nolan Lee	416-596-8376/ nlee@tcbc.on.ca
4. Chinese Gospel Church (Toronto)	
Contact: Rev. Kevin Houser	toronto@chinesegospelchurch.net
5. Toronto Community Alliance Church	
Contact:	416-461-2907
6. Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice (Toronto)	
Contact:	647-613-0435/ national@ccncsj.ca
7. Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter	
Contact:	416-596-0833/ info@ccnctoronto.ca
8. University of Toronto Chinese Students and Scholars Association	
Contact: Zewei Tang	vpcampus@utcssa.ca
9. Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto	
Contact:	416-292-9293/ info@cccgt.org
10. The Toronto Chinese Meetup Group	
Contact: Lindai	via Meetup
11. Hong-Kongers in Toronto	
Contact: Tiffany Cheung	via Facebook

Appendix E Initial Contact Email to the Contact People (English version)

Dear XXX ,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is [name of researcher]. I am PhD candidate of Societies, Cultures, and Languages in Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, currently under the supervision of [name of supervisor]. I am contacting you because we are conducting a study that aims to understand how English language test (IELTS and/or CELPIP) in the immigration process has influenced Chinese immigrants in terms of their and their family's decision-making, their attitudes and conceptions of the immigration process, as well as their place within Canada. We are currently inviting people to participate in this study.

Enclosed please find the recruitment letter for participation with details of the project. I kindly invite you to share this information and forward the recruitment letter to the members of your organization.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. And the project is conducted independently from the organizations and agencies from which participants may be recruited. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [email of researcher].

Your support is greatly appreciated and will definitely help us to understand more about the role that language assessment plays in the immigration context.

Best,

[name of researcher].

Ph. D. Candidate in Societies, Cultures, and Languages

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

Initial Contact Email to the Contact People (Chinese version)

尊敬的 xxx,

您好。

我的名字是[name of researcher]。我是渥太华大学教育学院社会、文化和语言专业的博士生，目前由[name of supervisor]教授指导。我们目前正在进行一项研究，旨在了解移民过程中的英语测试（雅思和/或 CELPIP）对中国移民的影响，包括他们及其家人的决策，他们对移民过程的态度和思考，以及他们在加拿大的地位與個人定位等。我们目前正在邀请受访者参加这项研究。

随信附上参与研究的招募信，其中包括项目的细节。我诚挚地邀请您分享这一信息并将招募信转发给您的组织成员。

本研究已通过渥太华大学研究伦理委员会的审查并获得伦理许可。本项目是独立于参与者的组织和机构进行的。

如果您有任何问题，请通过 [email of researcher] 联系我。

我们非常感谢您的支持，这必将有助于我们进一步了解语言评估在移民方面所发挥的作用。

顺颂台安。

[name of researcher]

Ph. D. Candidate in Societies, Cultures, and Languages

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

Appendix F Recruitment letter (English version)

Hello,

My name is [name of researcher]. I am a PhD candidate in Societies, Cultures, and Languages at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, currently under the supervision of [name of supervisor]. I am contacting you because we are conducting a study that aims to understand how English language test (IELTS and/or CELPIP) in the immigration process has influenced Chinese immigrants in terms of their and their family's decision-making, their attitudes and conceptions of the immigration process, as well as their place within Canada. You are cordially invited to participate in the study and share with us your views on this matter.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following four conditions: 1) you are 18 years old or above; 2) you are a permanent resident or citizen in Canada from China; 3) you have taken English tests (IELTS and/or CELPIP) as part of your immigration process; and 4) you are available for an in-person focus group discussion in Toronto or Ottawa.

Participation in this study involves filling in a short online questionnaire of your demographic information, and a focus group discussion with no more than five people. The questionnaire will take approximately 2 minutes to complete, the group discussion about 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded in a quiet location (in a school, college, café, or other public space). During the discussion, you will be invited to share your thoughts, feelings, and actions toward the English language tests you took for immigration to Canada. You may choose to skip any topics that emerge during discussion that you are not comfortable with.

I'd like to mention that your participation is completely voluntary. The recruitment process is first-come, first-served. We are offering an Amazon gift card worth \$15 CAD as a token of our appreciation for your participation in the focus group.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. And the project is conducted independently from the organizations and agencies from which participants may be recruited.

If you are interested in participating, or have any questions, please contact me at [email of researcher]. As the recruitment is on a first-come, first-served basis, if you are accepted, I will then

send a confirmation email with a consent form for your signature. The time and location of the discussion will be negotiated afterwards. If you have to cancel your appointment, please also email me.

Sincerely,

[name of researcher]

Ph. D. Candidate in Societies, Cultures, and Languages

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

Recruitment letter (Chinese version)

您好,

我的名字是[name of researcher]。我是渥太华大学教育学院社会、文化和语言专业的博士生，目前由[name of supervisor]教授指导。我们目前正在进行一项研究，旨在了解移民过程中的英语测试（雅思和/或 CELPIP）对中国移民的影响，包括您及家人的决策，您对移民过程的态度和思考，以及您在加拿大的地位与个人定位等。我们目前正在邀请受访者参加这项研究。我们诚挚地邀请您参与这项研究，并与我们分享您对此事的看法。

受访者须满足以下四个条件。1) 您已年满十八岁；2) 您是来自中国的加拿大永久居民或加拿大公民；3) 您在移民过程中参与过移民英语测试（雅思和/或思培）；4) 您可以在多伦多或渥太华亲自参加焦点小组讨论。

参与这项研究需要填写一份简短的关于您的基本信息的问卷，以及不超过 5 人的焦点小组讨论。问卷大约需要 2 分钟完成，小组讨论大约需要 60 至 90 分钟。焦点小组讨论将在一个安静的地方（在学校、大学、咖啡馆或其他公共场所）进行录音。在讨论中，您将被邀请分享你对你为移民加拿大而参加的英语语言测试的想法、感受和行动。您可以选择跳过任何在讨论中出现的话题或您不愿意接受的后续访谈。

您的此次参与将是完全自愿的，招聘过程是以先到先得的方式进行的。为了感谢您贡献的宝贵时间和信息，我们将提供一份价值 15 加元的亚马逊礼品卡作为答谢。

这项研究已经通过渥太华大学研究伦理委员会的审查并获得伦理许可。本项目是独立于参与者的组织和机构进行的。

如果您有兴趣参加，或有任何问题，请与我联系，[email of researcher]。由于招募是以先到先得的方式进行的，如果您被选中，您将会收到一封确认邮件，附上一份需要您签名的同意书。小组讨论的具体时间和地点将在您签署同意书之后进行商议。如果您要取消预约，也请发邮件给我。

顺颂台安!

[name of researcher]

Ph. D. Candidate in Societies, Cultures, and Languages

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

Appendix G Consent Form for Focus Group (English version)

Title of Project: The Role of Language Assessment for Immigration Purposes: The Case of Chinese Immigrants in Canada

Principle Investigator: [name of researcher]

Affiliation: Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Email: [email of researcher]

Telephone: [telephone of researcher]

Supervisor: [name of supervisor]

Affiliation: Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI), University of Ottawa

Email: [email of supervisor]

Telephone: [telephone of supervisor]

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the research, The Role of Language Assessment for Immigration Purposes: The Case of Chinese Immigrants in Canada. It is being conducted by [name of researcher] and [name of supervisor]. This project is conducted independently from the organizations and agencies from which I am recruited.

Purpose of study: to understand how English language test (IELTS and/or CELPIP) in the immigration process has influenced Chinese immigrants in terms of their and their family's decision-making, their attitudes and conceptions of the immigration process, as well as their place within Canada.

Participation: My participation will consist of completing an online questionnaire and participating in a focus group discussion. I will be asked to complete the three-minute questionnaire and conduct a 60-90 minute focus group discussion with no more than 5 people. The discussion will be audio recorded. If I wish, I can also share additional thoughts by email after the focus group.

Risks: I understand that since my participation in this research involves me giving personal information, discussing sensitive topics, giving my views, etc. It is possible that it will create emotional discomfort. I have been assured by the researcher that steps are being taken to minimize these risks, I have the option to refuse to respond, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Benefits: My participation in this research will result in rich data to advance the knowledge in the field of language assessment for immigration purposes. My perspective and my first-hand experience could also contribute to this body of work with more comprehensiveness in terms of understanding the actual impact of language testing on individuals and to the broader society. Immigrants' voice may be brought to the attention of policy makers, stakeholders, and other researchers in this area.

Confidentiality and privacy: The researcher has assured me that she will treat the information I share with her in strict confidence. I expect that the content will only be used for understanding the influence of language assessment in Canadian immigration policy on Chinese immigrants and in accordance with confidentiality. All personal data will be anonymized and contextual information (e.g., the names of family members, job titles, etc.) will be modified. The data will be secured and concealed. Access to the data will be restricted to the researcher and her supervisor. I am aware of the confidentiality limitations associated with participating in a group activity. While the researchers will respect confidentiality, I understand that they cannot guarantee that other members of the group will respect the confidentiality of the information I share. My identity or affiliation will not be revealed in any publications.

Data retention: The data collected (questionnaires, audio recordings, transcripts, researcher's notes, consent form, etc.) will be kept secure with a password protected computer indefinitely. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to it.

Compensation: An Amazon gift card worth \$15 CAD will be provided by the researcher. Once the study has begun, if I choose to withdraw from the study any time, I will be allowed to keep the gift card.

Voluntary participation: My participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, to refuse to answer any question I do not wish to answer without suffering negative consequences. Since focus group data is highly dependent on the group discussion as a

whole, if I choose to withdraw, my data may still be used given the collective nature of the group discussion. I will not be asked to return any gift card I received.

For any additional information regarding this study, I can contact the researcher or her supervisor.

For information about the ethical aspects of this research, I may contact the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity at (613) 562-5387 or ethique@uottawa.ca.

The researcher recommends that I (keep/print/save) a copy of the consent form.

Acceptance: By signing my name, I agree to participate in this research.

Name of participant: _____
Signature of participant _____ Date : _____

Name of researcher: _____
Signature of researcher: _____ Date : _____

(You can sign using an electronic signature or print it out and send me a photo of the signed consent form if it is more convenient for you)

Consent Form for Focus Group (Chinese version)

項目名稱: 語言測評對移民的影響 -- 在加拿大的中國移民案例

主要研究者: [name of researcher]

工作單位: 渥太華大學教育學院

電子郵件: [email of researcher]

電話: [telephone of researcher]

這是一個由[name of supervisor]博士指導的博士研究項目。

參與邀請：本人被邀請參加“語言測評對移民的影響 -- 在加拿大的中國移民案例”相關研究。該研究由[email of researcher]和[email of supervisor]博士主持。該項目獨立於我被招錄的組織。

研究目的：瞭解移民過程中的英語測試（雅思和/或 CELPIP 思培）是如何影響中國移民的決策，他們對移民過程的態度和思考，以及他們在加拿大的地位與個人定位等。

參與：本人的參與將包括完成一份線上調查問卷和參加一個焦點小組討論。我將被要求完成三分鐘的調查問卷，並與不超過 5 個人進行 60-90 分鐘的焦點小組討論。討論將被錄音。如果我有其他想法想要分享，我也可以選擇在焦點小組討論之後以郵件傳送給研究員。

風險：本人參與這項研究會被要求提供部分個人資訊，討論敏感話題，發表觀點等。本人明白這有可能會造成情緒上的不適。研究人員已向我保證，將採取措施儘量減少這些風險，我可以選擇拒絕回答，或在任何時候退出這項研究。

收益：我的參與將提供豐富的數據材料，以推進以移民為目的的語言評估領域的知識。我的觀點和我的第一手經驗也可以在理解語言測試對個人和更廣泛的社會的實際影響方面有更全面的推進。移民的聲音將會被政策制定者、利益相關者和該領域其他研究人員的聽見，並產生影響。

保密性和隱私：研究員向我保證，她將嚴格保密我與她分享的資訊。本人明白這些內容只用於瞭解加拿大移民政策中的語言評估對中國移民的影響，並遵守保密規定。所有的個人數據將被匿名化，背景信息（例如，家庭成員的名字，工作職位等）將被修改。所有的個人資料都將被保密。對資料的訪問將僅限於研究者和她的導師。所有後續訪談的資料也將被保密。我的身份或工作關係將不會在任何出版物中被透露。

數據保留：所收集的資料（問卷、錄音、筆錄、研究者的筆記、同意書等）將用受密碼保護的電腦安全永久保存。只有研究者和她的導師可以訪問資料。

酬勞：在完成小組討論後，研究人員將提供一張價值 15 加元的亞馬遜禮品卡。訪談開始後，如果我在任何時候選擇推出該研究，我將被允許保留禮品卡。

自願參與：本人對這項研究的參與是自願的，我可以隨時退出，拒絕回答任何我不願意回答的問題，而不會受到負面的影響。由於小組討論的數據高度依賴於小組的整體，如果我選擇退出，鑒於小組討論的整體性質，我的數據仍可能被使用。我將不需歸還我收到的任何禮品卡。

關於這項研究的任何其他資訊，本人可以聯繫研究者或她的導師。

關於本研究的倫理方面的資訊，我可以聯繫渥太華大學的研究倫理和誠信辦公室，電話是
(613) 562-5387 或 ethique@uottawa.ca。

研究者建議我（保留/列印/保存）一份同意書的副本。

同意參與：通過簽署我的名字，我同意參與這項研究。

參與者的姓名：_____

參與者簽名：_____ 日期：_____

研究者的姓名：_____

研究人員的簽名：_____ 日期：_____

（你可以選擇使用電子簽名後直接回傳，或將本表列印出來手寫簽名，並將有手寫簽名的同意書拍照回傳。）

Appendix H Short questionnaire for demographic information (English version)

Please answer below questions openly and truthfully.

Q1 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ I identify as (please specify) _____

Q2 What is your age?

- ☐ Below 18
- ☐ 18 – 25
- ☐ 26 – 35
- ☐ 36 – 45
- ☐ 46 – 55
- ☐ 56 and above
- ☐ Other _____

Q3 What is your first language (mother tongue)? [Check all that apply]

- ☐ Cantonese
- ☐ Mandarin
- ☐ English
- ☐ Others _____

Q4 In what language you would like to participate in the discussion?

- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- English
- Cantonese and English
- Mandarin and English
- Cantonese and Mandarin
- Mandarin and Cantonese and English

Q5 When would you prefer to have the group discussion? (The discussion will last approximately 60-90 minutes, please check all available times).

Weekdays	Weekends	Time of the day
☐ Monday	☐ Saturday	☐ Morning
☐ Tuesday	☐ Sunday	☐ Afternoon
☐ Wednesday		☐ Evening
☐ Thursday		
☐ Friday		

How do you like us to address you?

How do you like us to contact you?

Email _____

Phone _____

- Phone calls
- Message

Thank you for your time!

Short questionnaire for demographic information (Chinese version)

请真实地回答以下问题。

Q1 您的性别是什么？

- ☐ 男性
- ☐ 女性
- ☐ 不便透露
- ☐ 您的自我認同性別為 _____

Q2 您的年龄是？

- ☐ 18 歲以下
- ☐ 18 – 25
- ☐ 26 – 35
- ☐ 36 – 45
- ☐ 46 – 55
- ☐ 56 歲或以上

Q3 您的第一语言（母语）是什么？[可多選]

- ☐ 广东话
- ☐ 普通话
- ☐ 英文
- ☐ 其他 _____

Q4 您希望用哪种语言参与讨论？

- 普通话
- 广东话
- 英文
- 普通話和英文
- 廣東話和英文
- 普通話和廣東話
- 普通話, 廣東話, 和英文

Q5 您希望什么時間进行小组讨论? (讨论将持续约 60-90 分钟, 请检查所有可用的时间)。

工作日	周末	一日時間
☐ 星期一	☐ 星期六	☐ 上午
☐ 星期二	☐ 星期日	☐ 下午
☐ 星期三		☐ 晚上
☐ 星期四		
☐ 星期五		

* 您希望我们如何称呼您?

*您希望我们如何与您联系?

电邮 _____

电话 _____

- 电话通话
- 短信

感谢您的参与和时间!

Appendix I Focus group protocol

Focus group protocol¹⁰

(1) Welcome, (2) Overview of the topic (3) Ground rules (4) First question (5) Guiding questions (6) Ending question

Welcome

Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about language assessment for immigration to Canada. My name is [name of researcher], and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa and my supervisor is [name of supervisor]

Overview of the topic

We are interested to know your immigration experience, your opinions on the language tests, and how tests have influenced you and your family's decision making in the whole immigration process. We are having discussions like this with several groups in Ottawa and Toronto. You were invited because you are all Chinese immigrants to Canada, some of you are permanent residents and some of you are citizens now. And you have all taken language tests in your immigration process, so your experience and opinions are very valuable to us.

Ground rules

There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said, but please do not dominate the discussion floor so that everybody has a chance to express themselves.

You've probably noticed the microphone. We're audio recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be using our real names today/tonight, but after our discussion today, I will only use the recording to make a transcript and I will change your names into fake ones for the analysis and the final reports. And I do request you to keep the identity of your fellow participants confidential.

First question

We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name, how many years you've been living in Canada, and a fun fact about yourself.

¹⁰ Adapted from Krueger, R. A. (2002). Designing and conducting focus group interviews. Retrieved from <http://www.eiu/~ihcc/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>

Guiding questions:

My script:

- *Before we start, I thought you may want to know more about me too. As you already know, my name is [name of researcher], and I'm studying at Uottawa. I was born in mainland China, but I've studied in mainland, Macau, the US and now Canada. As an international student in these places, I cannot tell you how many times I've been asked to take language tests for different purposes, for school admission, visa application, and immigration. So I got curious about how immigration works, how the decisions were made, especially, what role does language assessment play in this process. That's why I'm working on this project now.*
- *What I did was, I collected different types of documents, such as newspapers, magazines, and government documents on language and immigration policies, and I studied them, looking for their attitude about immigration and the stories they told about immigrants. These are the politicians and journalists' voices, but they may not go through the process as Chinese immigrants did. So, I'm interested to know how you approach, what you think about the language test that you took in this process, in fact, no one has asked the immigrants' perspectives and our voices have not been heard. There have been people talking about you and your experience, so I think it makes sense to talk to **you** about **your** experience and see if **you** agree or disagree with them.*

Q1. Belonging, integration, and responsibility

- What does “integration” mean to you?
- Do you see language as a key factor in being accepted as part of Canadian society?
- Do you feel responsible integrating, and if so, how is that responsibility defined?

Q2. Canadian identity and values

- What does “Canadian identity” mean to you?

- Who gets to be considered “Canadian”? Is language a defining factor?
- Do you feel that Canadian values align with your own experiences?

Q3. Standardized testing as gatekeeping

- How many times did you take the test?
- What scores were you aiming for? And did you achieve them?
- How did testing affect your immigration process and decision?

Q4. Language and everyday life:

- How does language proficiency affect your daily experiences in work, education, and/or social life?
- Do language test scores reflect your actual language needs in Canada?

Q5. The broader impact of language policies

- How has language testing affected your family members and social circles?
- Has it influenced decisions about work, schooling, or where to live?

Ending questions:

1. Thank you for the (heated) discussion! Of all the things we’ve covered, what to you is the most important one? Is there anything else that you think is important, but we haven’t covered yet?
2. If there are any further thoughts that you would like to share with me, please feel free to send me an email.

Appendix J Consent Form for Co-Analysis (English version)

Title of Project: The Role of Language Assessment for Immigration Purposes: The Case of Chinese Immigrants in Canada

Principle Investigator: [name of researcher]

Affiliation: Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Email: [email of researcher]

Telephone: [telephone of researcher]

Supervisor: [name of supervisor]

Affiliation: Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI), University of Ottawa

Email: [email of supervisor]

Telephone: [telephone of supervisor]

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the research, The Role of Language Assessment for Immigration Purposes: The Case of Chinese Immigrants in Canada. It is being conducted by [name of researcher] and [name of supervisor]. This project is conducted independently from the organizations and agencies from which I am recruited.

Purpose of study: to understand how English language test (IELTS and/or CELPIP) in the immigration process has influenced Chinese immigrants in terms of their and their family's decision-making, their attitudes and conceptions of the immigration process, as well as their place within Canada.

Participation: My participation will consist of an in person/online co-analysis session that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. During the session, I will be required to read through the focus group data that I participated in and confirm the accuracy of the data. Then, I will go through the transcript again with the researcher and finish some tasks together such as looking for all the places that talked about culture differences. I understand the session will be audio recorded and I will be able to review the session transcript if requested.

Risks: I understand that since my participation in this research involves me giving personal information, discussing sensitive topics, giving my views, etc. It is possible that it will create emotional discomfort such as mild embarrassment. I have been assured by the researcher that steps are being taken to minimize these risks, I have the option to refuse to respond, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Benefits: My participation in this research will result in rich data to advance the knowledge in the field of language assessment for immigration purposes. My perspective and my first-hand experience could also contribute to this body of work with more comprehensiveness in terms of understanding the actual impact of language testing on individuals and to the broader society. Immigrants' voice may be brought to the attention of policy makers, stakeholders, and other researchers in this area.

Confidentiality and privacy: The researcher has assured me that she will treat the information I share with her in strict confidence. I expect that the content will only be used for understanding the influence of language assessment in Canadian immigration policy on Chinese immigrants and in accordance with confidentiality. All personal data will be anonymized and contextual information (e.g., the names of family members, job titles, etc.) will be modified. The data will be secured and concealed. Access to the data will be restricted to the researcher and her supervisor. I am aware of the confidentiality limitations associated with participating in a group activity. While the researchers will respect confidentiality, I understand that they cannot guarantee that other members of the group will respect the confidentiality of the information I share. My identity or affiliation will not be revealed in any publications.

Data retention: The data collected (audio recordings, transcripts, researcher's notes, consent form, etc.) will be kept secure with a password protected computer indefinitely. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to it.

Compensation: An Amazon gift card worth \$15 CAD will be provided by the researcher. Once the study has begun, if I choose to withdraw from the study any time, I will be allowed to keep the gift card.

Voluntary participation: My participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, to refuse to answer any question I do not wish to answer without suffering

negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from me up to that point will not be used. I will not be asked to return any gift card I received.

For any additional information regarding this study, I can contact the researcher or her supervisor.

For information about the ethical aspects of this research, I may contact the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity at (613) 562-5387 or ethique@uottawa.ca.

The researcher recommends that I (keep/print/save) a copy of the consent form.

Acceptance: By signing my name, I agree to participate in this research.

Name of participant: _____
Signature of participant _____ Date : _____

Name of researcher: _____
Signature of researcher: _____ Date : _____

(You will be asked to sign this consent form on site)

Consent Form for Co-analysis (Chinese version)

項目名稱: 語言測評對移民的影響 -- 在加拿大的中國移民案例

主要研究者: [name of researcher]

工作單位: 渥太華大學教育學院

電子郵件: [email of researcher]

電話: [telephone of researcher]

這是一個由[name of supervisor]博士指導的博士研究項目。

參與邀請：本人被邀請參加“語言測評對移民的影響 -- 在加拿大的中國移民案例”相關研究。該研究由[email of researcher]和[email of supervisor]博士主持。該項目獨立於我被招錄的組織。

研究目的：瞭解移民過程中的英語測試（雅思和/或 CELPIP 思培）是如何影響中國移民的決策，他們對移民過程的態度和思考，以及他們在加拿大的地位與個人定位等。

參與：本人的參與將包括一次面對面或线上的討論會，時間約為 60 至 90 分鐘。在此過程中，我將被要求通讀我參與的焦點小組數據，並確認數據的準確性。然後，我將與研究人員再次翻閱數據，並一起完成一些任務，如尋找所有談到文化差異的地方。我知道討論會將被錄音，如有需要，我將可以查看討論會記錄。

風險：本人參與這項研究會被要求提供部分個人資訊，討論敏感話題，發表觀點等。本人明白這有可能會造成情緒上的不適。研究人員已向我保證，將採取措施儘量減少這些風險，我可以選擇拒絕回答，或在任何時候退出這項研究。

收益：我的參與將產生豐富的資料，以推進以移民為目的的語言評估領域的知識。我的觀點和我的第一手經驗也可以在理解語言測試對個人和更廣泛的社會的實際影響方面有更全面的推進。移民的聲音將會被政策制定者、利益相關者和該領域其他研究人員的聽見，並產生影響。

保密性和隱私：研究員向我保證，她將嚴格保密我與她分享的資訊。本人明白這些內容只用于瞭解加拿大移民政策中的語言評估對中國移民的影響，並遵守保密規定。所有的個人数据将被匿名化，背景信息（例如，家庭成员的名字，工作职位等）将被修改。所有的個人資料都將被安全地隱藏起來。對資料的訪問將僅限於研究者和她的導師。所有後續的討論會資料將被保密。我的身份或工作關係將不會在任何出版物中被透露。

數據保留：所收集的資料（錄音、文字記錄、研究者的筆記、同意書等）將用受密碼保護的電腦進行永久保存。只有研究者和她的主管能接觸到它。

酬勞：在完成討論後，研究人員將提供一張價值 15 加元的亞馬遜禮品卡。討論開始後，如果我選擇撤回資料，我將被允許保留禮品卡。

自願參與：本人對這項研究的參與是自願的，我可以隨時退出，拒絕回答任何我不願意回答的問題，而不會受到負面的影響。如果我選擇退出研究，我的資料將不會被使用。如果我在任務完成後選擇退出，我將不需歸還我收到的任何禮品卡。

關於這項研究的任何其他資訊，本人可以聯繫研究者或她的導師。

關於本研究的倫理方面的資訊，我可以聯繫渥太華大學的研究倫理和誠信辦公室，電話是
(613) 562-5387 或 ethique@uottawa.ca。

研究者建議我（保留/列印/保存）一份同意書的副本。

同意參與：通過簽署我的名字，我同意參與這項研究。

參與者的姓名：_____

參與者簽名：_____ 日期：_____

研究者的姓名：_____

研究人員的簽名：_____ 日期：_____

（您會被要求在訪談現場簽署這份同意書。）

Appendix K Co-analysis protocol

Co-analysis protocol

- (1) Greetings, (2) Overview of the topic (3) Procedure (4) Sample task (5) Two to three analysis tasks and (6) Ending questions

Greetings

Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our session. Thank you for meeting me again online for the co-analysis session.

Overview of the topic

I have sent you partial of the transcript of the focus group that you participated; I hope you had time to read it through. In today's session, we have only two things to cover. 1, you will share with me if you think the transcript is accurate; 2, we will go through the transcript again and finish some tasks together. Similar to the focus group, our conversation will be audio recorded.

Procedure

1. Ask the co-researcher to confirm the accuracy of the transcript.
2. Go through the transcript again with the co-researcher, and complete below tasks together.
3. Ask the if there are other points they want to make.
4. Ending

Sample task

Sample (30 mins). Let's read through all the yellow tags and see what you think they are talking about.

- a) Do you think all the yellow tags have something in common?
 - Yes → what do you think that is?/ how would you summarize them?
 - No→ how many themes do you think are there? What are they?
- b) Compare my theme
 - This is my understanding, do you agree? Why or why not?

Initial theme:

英语在加拿大生存或成功的必要性 English necessity for survival or advancement in Canada

Explanation: To what extent do Chinese immigrants need English to survive, or to be successful (career, social, etc.) in Canada. This theme includes codes below,

- ☐ *English vs. daily life (basic survival, connections), English vs. advancement (earn more money, better job)*
- ☐ *Depending on personal choice: who the immigrants want to interact with (Chinese community only or bigger group)*
- ☐ *Life quality*
- ☐ *Others*
- ☐ *i*
- ☐ *ii*
- ☐ *iii*
- ☐ *iv*

Two to three analysis tasks

Task 1 (30 mins).

Let's read through all the green tags and see what you think they are talking about.

- c) Do you think all the yellow tags have something in common?
 - Yes → what do you think that is?/ how would you summarize them?
 - No → how many themes do you think are there? What are they?
- d) Compare my theme
 - This is my understanding, do you agree? Why or why not?

Task 2 (30 mins).

Let's read through all the light blue tags and see what you think they are talking about.

- e) Do you think all the yellow tags have something in common?
 - Yes → what do you think that is?/ how would you summarize them?
 - No → how many themes do you think are there? What are they?
- f) Compare my theme
 - This is my understanding, do you agree? Why or why not?

Ending questions

1. Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?
2. Have we missed anything?