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Mosaics and Melting Pots: Recruiting and Advising Multilingual and Multicultural Students

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Excerpts from Madeleine Hyde's Study: *Employability in a Second Language – Recruiting Anglophone Legal Stagiaires in Montreal and Suggested Readings (Academic and Media)*

Excerpts from Madeleine Hyde's study *Employability in a Second Language: Recruiting Anglophone Legal Stagiaires in Montreal:*

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Entire study may be found at: <http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/980340/>

Problem Statement

Job-seekers who are applying for employment opportunities in a second language should be aware of whether their accents may affect their chances of gaining employment. If their accents do affect their chances, they should understand the individual characteristics or experiences which might mitigate the effect of a recognizable nonstandard accent. In job interview settings, personal presentation, including speech, is crucial. Employers often provide little time for a first interview, and first impressions can take mere seconds to form (Dougherty, Turban, & Callender, 1994). A second language accent may be perceived within moments, and can be interpreted many different ways. A review of past and contemporary research shows that while employability and language usage have been researched before in many different ways, there is no published study that considers employability of Anglophones when trying to gain employment in another language. This is unsurprising, as a great many L2 job-seekers worldwide try to find employment in English, which is the lingua franca for many disciplines. However, considering the number of students who come to study at universities in the officially French-language province of Quebec from other, English-speaking, provinces, (not to mention the United States and other countries), this gap in the research should be filled, as conducting research for this demographic could be useful for students when assessing their employment prospects in Quebec. This data could also be used by Montreal universities in presentations to prospective students who wish to come not only to study, but to stay and make a life in the city.

Students in professional university programs in English-medium universities in Quebec typically receive training which meets professional standards for employment in Quebec or in other provinces; however, this may not include language training for the workplace. For example, students entering the Bachelor of Civil and Common Laws program in the Law Faculty of McGill University must be at least “passively bilingual.” For the Faculty, this means being able to attend lectures and read in both languages (English and French), but not necessarily to produce language by speaking or writing. Anglophone law students who seek entry-level “articling” positions (*stages*) in Quebec are sometimes concerned that, during the recruitment process, potential employers may be negatively affected by students' demonstrably non-native use of French. Although there is anecdotal evidence that Anglophone students have been successful in the annual *Course aux stages* recruitment process, no existing research has examined whether or how students' non-native use of French affects the decisions of potential employers.

The Current Study

Making use of specialized raters in an authentic assessment context, my goal in this study is to determine how L2 Anglophone accents in French which are perceptible to recruiters might affect employment decisions. The participants in this study are legal recruiters from the Montreal area who make hiring recommendations and decisions regarding an annual *Course aux Stages, stagiaire* (“articling” student) recruitment process. Since the dominant language of legal employment in Montreal is French, this study investigates whether and how candidates' non-native French accents may affect the perceptions of possible employers in terms of candidates' suitability. This study creates realistic candidate profiles by combining different strengths of curriculum vitae (CVs) with speech samples from female candidates with native or non-native French accents, answering a common interview question in French. The ways in which raters perceive these combinations of CVs and speech samples provides insight into whether and how candidates' accents affect perceptions of their employability.

Conclusions for the students of McGill University, Faculty of Law.

I was inspired to design this study to help McGill Law students better self-assess their own employment profiles, in order for them to make a decision about whether or not to apply for the annual *Course aux stages* Montreal recruitment process. In my capacity as Career Development Officer at McGill University, I was periodically asked by Anglophone students if they should go through the effort of applying to a Montreal firm or organization, given that their native language is not French. The results of this study should serve to reassure McGill Law students that an Anglophone language background, as shown by having a detectable non-native accent in French, does not appear to be a significant factor in a candidate's profile, with the exception of perhaps appearing less confident.

Based on the results, I have additional recommendations for McGill law students. There are not just one or two factors in a candidacy that can affect employment decisions, as the recruiter said earlier in the manuscript, “It's not just the CV and it's not just the voice... it's really the combination of things.” I have seen students erroneously self-exclude from employment opportunities because of one self-assessed weakness. It is important for students to remember that their *entire* candidacy is scrutinized. For example, while grades are a major aspect of the employment profile for an entry-level legal position, each experience on a

candidate's CV can give the employer an indication of employability and potential "fit" (Rivera, 2015). Something that may seem not directly related to a legal job, such as working as a bank teller (as on the Average CV), can indeed be seen as relevant experience. In the case of the bank teller job, many of the study's participants, who work in corporate firms, noted the strength of the CV's client-based experience in a for-profit business environment.

Even something as seemingly pedestrian as working as a waitress or in retail can add to an entry-level employee's skillset. Students should think about what they have developed in the past that can serve the interests of their future employer. To do this, students will need to reflect on the skills they've acquired *beyond* the surface of a particular experience. For example, working with children at a sleep-away camp can demonstrate to a potential employer that the candidate has skills handling difficult clients in an intensive, around-the-clock environment. Finally, students should do extensive research and networking when seeking to apply to an organization, so that they accurately emphasize the aspects of their own experiences that align with the organization's particular culture and needs.

In Montreal, the ability to speak more than one language – especially English and French – is an important facet society, from daily life, to school, to gaining employment. The voices in this study all spoke the same content, which, regardless of accent, signifies that all three of the candidates could accurately articulate a response to an interview question that is the same level of complexity. A candidate without this level of language ability may have a different experience in an interview that is conducted in their second language. That being said, the participant recruiters seemed aware and interested in bilingual McGill students. The recruiters themselves are all L2 speakers of one of the official Canadian languages, and are likely more understanding and conscious employers, in regards to language, than elsewhere in Canada. Employers from across the world could benefit from reading this study and seeing how tolerant these recruiters are, in order to emulate such tolerance in their own practice. As globalization becomes more prevalent, multilingual employees can add a great deal to an organization.

Many of the comments the participants made was more about the perceived personality behind the voice (confidence, warmth, tone, etc.) instead of the language background or accent. As well, confidence is an important factor in a legal recruiting interview and, therefore, I would advise students to practice answering questions about themselves and their CVs in their L2, to enhance others' perceptions of students' confidence when speaking another language. In summary, if a student possesses the level of a French where he or she can accurately articulate the answers to interview questions, then he or she should feel qualified, from a linguistic standpoint, to participate in the *Course aux stages* process.

Suggested Readings on Recruitment Practices– From Academic Journals

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Suggested Readings on Recruitment Practices – Media

- S. Khilay: [Speaking my Language: How Accent Impacts Our Opinions of Others](http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/speaking-my-language-how-accent-impacts-our-opinion-of-others/)
<http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/speaking-my-language-how-accent-impacts-our-opinion-of-others/>
- L. Rivera: [Recruitment, Resumes and Interviews: How the Hiring Process Favors Elites](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/05/recruitment-resumes-interviews-how-the-hiring-process-favors-elites/394166/)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/05/recruitment-resumes-interviews-how-the-hiring-process-favors-elites/394166/>