Scaffolding Spoken Workplace Communication: A Genre-Based Unit on Job Interviews for Adult Migrant Learners in Australia

Executive Summary

This report outlines a genre-based unit of study designed for adult migrant learners enrolled in the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program at MTC Australia. These learners, from Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds, possess beginner to low-intermediate English proficiency and are actively seeking to enter the Australian workforce. Given the pressing need for employment readiness and oral fluency, the unit focuses on the spoken genre of job interviews, a high-stakes, goal-oriented communicative event that is both institutionally powerful and socially consequential.

The job interview genre requires learners to master not only specific lexico-grammatical structures but also discourse conventions, pragmatic norms, and cultural expectations. Adult learners often experience anxiety in such settings, struggling with turn-taking, formal register, and the ability to present themselves positively. This aligns with Eggins and Slade's (1997) observations on spoken discourse, where unfamiliarity with turn-taking and repair strategies can heighten communicative stress in high-stakes contexts. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and genre-based pedagogy (Martin & Rose, 2008), this unit scaffolds learners through a structured sequence of tasks: from building background knowledge and analysing genre models, to practicing and performing mock interviews. As Martin and Dreyfus (2015) argue, such task scaffolding supports

"semogenesis" — helping learners construct meaning over time through explicit modelling and guided interaction. The aim is to develop fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence while aligning with real-world employability goals.

The report is structured in three parts. First, it presents an overview of the LSP teaching context, identifying learner needs, sociocultural factors, and curriculum constraints. Second, it justifies the choice of genre and outlines the theoretical and methodological framework for instruction. Third, it provides a practical guide to classroom implementation, including sequenced lessons, sample materials, and assessment tools aligned with the genre's communicative purpose. The proposed unit is adaptable, outcomes-driven, and responsive to the challenges faced by SEE learners. It serves as both a teaching tool and a bridge toward professional integration and social inclusion in Australia.

LSP Teaching Context

The teaching context for this unit is the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program operated by MTC Australia. With teaching centres across various Australian cities, MTC Australia delivers this federally funded program to support adult migrants and humanitarian entrants with limited English proficiency. The program aims to help learners improve their language, literacy, and numeracy skills, thereby enhancing their access to employment and vocational training opportunities.

The learners in this context are primarily adults aged 20 – 60 from Vietnamese, Cantonese,

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and Mandarin-speaking backgrounds, although smaller groups of learners come from Khmer, Arabic, and Samoan-speaking communities. Most are long-term residents or permanent visa holders who have settled in Australia for a period of time, yet they continue to face systemic barriers to workplace participation. English proficiency ranges from ACSF Level 1 to Level 3, approximately CEFR A1 to B1. Literacy levels in the learners' first languages vary widely, with some learners never having completed formal education in their home countries.

Their motivations for learning English are majorly instrumental: securing employment, communicating effectively with service providers, or enrolling in vocational courses in areas such as aged care, childcare, or hospitality. Despite this motivation, learners often display low self-efficacy, particularly when engaging in formal spoken tasks such as interviews. Many report anxiety when interacting with native speakers, especially in institutional or employment-related contexts.

A triangulated needs analysis was conducted to inform the design of this unit. First, informal interviews and learner self-assessments were carried out to explore their perceptions of job-seeking challenges. Second, teachers observed classroom interactions and analysed learner output, such as oral responses to mock interviews. Third, local job services consultants provided insights into actual employer expectations for entry-level roles. Findings across all sources revealed consistent patterns. Learners were unfamiliar with behavioural interview questions, often gave overly brief or indirect responses, and rarely

used vocabulary associated with soft skills.

From a pedagogical perspective, these issues highlight the need for explicit genre instruction that clearly explains the structure and function of job interviews. Drawing on Hyon (2017) and Cheng (2008), job interviews can be seen as gatekeeping genres, meaning they control access to important social goods such as employment. These genres require not only general language proficiency but also an understanding of interactional patterns, pragmatic strategies, and culturally specific expectations in discourse.

The challenges these learners face are not purely linguistic. Cultural differences also affect interaction. For example, learners from collectivist cultures may find it uncomfortable to engage in self-promotion, which is often expected in Australian job interviews. Similarly, indirect communication styles may lead to misunderstandings when clear, direct answers are preferred. Therefore, a genre-based approach grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin & Rose, 2008) is well-suited to this context. It enables teachers to scaffold both the ideational and interpersonal meanings necessary for success in this genre.

In my view, this unit goes beyond teaching language forms. It's about preparing learners for one of the most important interactions they may face when entering the workforce. By focusing on the job interview genre, the unit aligns with the broader policy goals of the SEE program, including the aim to improve employability and support learners in becoming

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more independent. It also strengthens their ability to integrate into the workforce, build confidence in professional settings, and achieve long-term success.

Unit of Study: Instructional Guide

Overview and Rationale

The goal of this unit is to prepare SEE learners to participate confidently and competently in Australian job interviews. Drawing on SFL-based genre pedagogy (Martin & Rose, 2008), the unit is structured around the genre teaching cycle: building field knowledge, modelling/deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. This structure enables learners to progressively develop control over both language form and function. The unit is designed to run over three lessons. Each less will be 90 minutes long.

The unit is designed for multimodal delivery. While classroom delivery is face-to-face, digital tools such as audio recordings, Google Forms, and interview simulations are incorporated to scaffold listening, reflection, and practice beyond the classroom. Materials and tasks are differentiated to suit the range of proficiency levels in SEE classes, particularly between learners at ACSF Level 1 and those at Level 3.

Lesson 1: Building Field Knowledge

Lesson Focus: Raising awareness of job interview structure, expectations, and relevant vocabulary.

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Teacher Activities:

1. Warm-up Discussion: Teacher shares his own interview preparations and experiences and writes down key words on boards such as CV, resume, on time, punctual, smart-casual, body language. Teacher asks learners to share their own or imagined interview experiences and discuss feelings around interviews in small groups.

2. Vocabulary Pre-teaching: Teacher teaches high-frequency terms (e.g., CV, resume, cover letter, on time, punctual, smart-casual, body language, reliable, team-player) introduced with bilingual glossaries and picture cards. Pronunciation teaching would be added if students were unable to pronounce words.

3. Job Ad Breakdown: Teacher break downs a job ad with students identifying the job title, company information, job summary, duties, requirements, key skills and how to apply. In groups, students highlight the job structures and key-points found in actual job advertisements from SEEK.

4. Video Analysis: Students watch a sample job interview and complete a worksheet focused on key phrases, tone, and body language. The teacher pauses at key moments to highlight effective and ineffective responses. After viewing, students discuss in pairs what the interviewee did well and what could be improved, focusing on both language and non-verbal communication.

Lesson 2: Modelling and Deconstruction

Lesson Focus: Analysing the stages and discourse features of a job interview.

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Teacher Activities:

1. Annotated Interview Script: Teacher distributes a sample job interview script with clearly labelled stages such as greeting, experience sharing, strengths and weaknesses, and closing. The teacher reads aloud with students, pausing to explain the purpose of each stage and the type of language typically used.

2. Language Features Teaching: Teacher highlights key grammar and vocabulary used in interviews, including modal verbs like would and could, past tense verbs for discussing experience, and linking phrases to support fluency. Students complete guided gap-fill and sentence transformation exercises.

3. Pronunciation Practice: Teacher models key expressions using polite intonation and stress. In pairs, students practise shadowing these expressions after the teacher, focusing on rhythm and clarity.

4. Stage Matching Task: Teacher provides a set of sample interview questions. Students work in groups to match each question to the correct stage of an interview. The class reviews answers together, discussing the function of each question and appropriate responses.

Lesson 3: Joint & Independent Construction

Lesson Focus: Practising and performing interviews through structured role-plays.

Teacher Activities:

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1. Role-play Rehearsal: Teacher models a short interview with a student, then distributes role-play cue cards with common interview questions and answers. In pairs, learners take turns being the interviewer and interviewee while the teacher circulates, offering real-time support and feedback on language use and delivery.

2. Peer Feedback: Teacher introduces a simple evaluation checklist with criteria such as use of full sentences, appropriate vocabulary, and clear pronunciation. Students observe each other's role-plays in small groups and provide constructive feedback using the checklist.

3. Recorded Interview Simulation: Teacher sets up a more formal simulation where students take part in a one-on-one interview with the teacher or a volunteer. With consent, interviews are recorded for later reflection. Teacher provides personalised feedback based on a simplified rubric.

4. Self-Reflection: Teacher distributes a language learning log with prompts to guide reflection (e.g., "What did I do well?", "What can I improve next time?"). Learners complete the log independently and set personal goals for future interviews or real-life applications.

Exemplar Genre Analysis

The lesson stages are informed by Wiersma's (2016) breakdown of job interviews into four key phases: introduction, experience sharing, strengths/weaknesses discussion, and closing. To support learners' mastery of the job interview genre, a set of carefully selected model sentences and stages were used for explicit genre analysis. These examples help

students clearly see how interviews are structured and what kind of language works best in each stage including polite openings, experience sharing, and closing statements. Each teaching point reinforces grammar and discourse features relevant to job interview success, such as tense use, modality, and pragmatic clarity.

Assessment Plan

Assessment is integrated throughout the unit. Formative strategies include classroom observation, vocabulary quizzes, and peer evaluations using scaffolded checklists. The summative assessment involves a structured one-on-one mock interview. Following Bachman and Palmer's (1996) framework, the assessment focuses on authenticity, interaction, and task validity to ensure learners are evaluated in contexts mirroring real-life communication.

Integration with Curriculum

The unit is fully aligned with the SEE curriculum, which emphasises practical language for employment and training contexts. By focusing on job interviews, the unit complements other modules on resumes, workplace safety, and customer service. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the unit by incorporating guest speakers, excursions, or employer feedback sessions to extend its relevance and engagement.

Supplementary Scaffolding Strategies

Differentiation is a core design feature. For lower-level learners, sentence frames, visuals,

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and substitution tables provide essential scaffolding. More advanced learners are supported to personalise their responses using soft skills vocabulary and real-life examples. Listening gap-fills, intonation-matching tasks, and group role-plays enable learners across ACSF levels to participate meaningfully.

Teacher Talk and Classroom Management

Teacher talk is planned and strategic throughout the unit. Instructions are clear and supported by visuals. Teachers model pronunciation, reformulate learner responses, and use targeted questions to prompt elaboration. During role-plays, the teacher monitors output, offering feedback or support depending on each learner's proficiency level.

Example Extension Tasks

To deepen learner engagement and promote retention, the unit includes optional extension tasks. These include mock interview days, follow-up thank-you emails, and learner portfolios featuring resumes and reflection logs. These activities strengthen workplace readiness and support the development of digital literacy and self-confidence.

Teacher Reflection

After delivering the unit, teachers are encouraged to reflect using prompts such as: Which stages were most challenging for learners? Did student confidence improve? What adjustments are needed for different cohorts? From my own experience, I found that some learners struggled with fluency under time pressure. In future iterations, I would build in

more speaking rehearsal time. I also found peer feedback highly engaging, especially for

mid-level learners.

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