Translating global experience into institutional models of competency: linguistic inequalities in the job interview

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Abstract

The job interview is a key gatekeeping site where the tension between institutional standards and diversity is most evident. Despite equal opportunity policies, the linguistic demands of the interview are more likely to exclude migrants from work in the higher tier labour market. The selection interview creates a linguistic penalty against certain migrant groups and this is well illustrated in the problem of foreign work experience (FWE), its recognition or not, the limitations of its use and the additional communicative demands it creates. Using examples taken from a data base of 61 video- recorded UK interviews for low-paid jobs, this paper shows the discursive regimes that position migrant applicants as less capable within the competence-based interview. FWE can be dismissed by interviewers or, where it is accepted, requires additional linguistic and interactional work to manage the extra contextual and equivalences burden. The unfamiliarity or assumed irrelevance of FWE is brought into the interview, and its power to distance and 'other' candidates of migrant background is brought about interactionally as candidates' linguistic resources in defending it are made vulnerable under the interviewers' gaze. By contrast, British born candidates, whatever their social identity, can use their local work experience to tell stories that fit with the competency framework. The language of job interviews contributes to the production of inequality and also masks the contradiction between apparent fairness and unequal outcomes.

Keywords: job interview, competency, foreign work experience, linguistic penalty, discursive regimes.

Introduction

A central contradiction in the way institutions manage and defend themselves is that between standardisation and responding to diversity. On the one hand, they are expected to regulate their procedures so that they can be defended as objective and consistent but, on the other, they are required to acknowledge, be responsive to and even celebrate the fact of difference in their workforces. The job interview is a key gatekeeping site where this contradiction has to be managed and its outcomes defended as fair. The role of foreign work experience (FWE) within the interview is a telling case of how these tensions are played out as candidates from migrant groups present their past. FWE is problematic in the British job interview in three different ways: firstly, the unfamiliarity and assumed lack of fit of FWE, secondly, the central role of stories of past experience in the current discursive regimes of the interview, and thirdly, the additional linguistic capital required to deal with both of these.

This paper will a) discuss the *linguistic penalty* that the current discursive regimes of selection interviewing have produced; b)consider how competency frameworks require convincing stories of past work experience and how these imply a blend of institutional and personal discourses and are underpinned by current discourses of diversity; c) examine how FWE is either dismissed or, in its negotiation, puts additional contextual and equivalences burdens on candidates

from migrant groups; d) contrast the negotiation of FWE with the valuing of local work experience; and e) in conclusion, suggest that the linguistic regulation of the job interview masks the tensions it creates.[1]

First, we will look at an example of a candidate, Suhil, originally from India, who is applying for a job as a receptionist in a hospital department where he will be dealing with patients and their records. He is typical of candidates born abroad applying for low-paid work in that most of his work experience was not in the UK and he is a graduate (with an MA):

Example 1

(See below for transcription conventions. These examples show not only the words of the interview but also how both sides interact together ie how they take turns, interrupt or overlap each other's talk etc. since these are aspects of behaviour crucial to the judgement of candidates and to the production of comfortable or uncomfortable moments.)

1.	I:	If you werent successful would you (.) um (.) like to be considered for .h a
2.		position behind the scenes
3.	S:	well [f-
4.	I:	or] are you [specifically
5.	S:	For me] its not [very important]
6.	I:	patient ok]
7.	S:	whether Im working behind the scene or in front of the scene hh actually
8.		speaking because I worked as a ward clerk Ive handled the reception Ive got
9.		two years working=
10.	I:	=Yeah I [understand that
11.	S:	experience also] so Im not afraid of anything
12.	I:	But thats obviously [in India
13.	S:	right]
14.	I:	not here ((laughs loudly))
15.	S:	((nods)) thats in India yeah
16.	All:	(laughter)
17.	S:	But patients are patients
18.	I:	((Clears throat loudly)) ((looks at interviewer 2 still laughing)) [debatable
19.	I2:	well ( )]
20.	S:	Im not here to debate because you are more experienced
21.	I:	Yeah
22.	S:	So I dont because (.) obviously I mean I-I'm here to give my best=
23.	I2:	=mhmm=
24.	I:	=[yeah I appreciate that
25.	S:	and Im here to convince you] if I if Im able to convince you
26.		Im fortunate if Im (.) I cannot convince you Im [unfortunate
27.	I:	Yeah]=
28.	I2:	=mhmm=

Suhil is being assessed on his competence in dealing with people, one of a set of typical competences which currently regulate the British job interview. These competency frameworks are designed around past experience but in this case, Suhil's foreign work experience is dismissed at lines 12 and 18, despite his attempts to show its relevance. The interviewer response 'debatable' appears to leave Suhil with nowhere to go within the competency framework. Instead, he grasps at the apparent cue to 'debate' the issue, which leads to a sequence where he shifts from the conventional display of relevant past experience to a commentary on his role in the interview. This has no place within the discursive regimes of the job interview since it does not conform to its rules of evidence.

Discursive regimes and the *Linguistic penalty*

In order to comply with equal opportunities legislation, organisations are expected to produce rational, accountable and standard bureaucratic procedures along Weberian lines (du Gay 2000) aimed at ensuring equality in the judgement of individuals. Weber's arguments for objective and rational forms of work were in part designed to cater for what were already perceived in the mid-twentieth century as increasingly diverse societies, helping to create, for example, fair and objective procedures in selection processes. However, these modernist goals of objectivity and accountability have produced their own inequalities since they require competence in institutional talk and text, the special reasoning and inferencing that goes with understanding how institutions work and the modes of talk to display this. Such knowledge is, of course, not equally distributed among all groups and those with least access to it are most disadvantaged.

The gatekeeping interview is a product of these standardised procedures and its formal processes are an example of increasingly *textualised* (Iedema and Scheeres 2003) and language-mediated gatekeeping encounters (Erickson and Shultz 1982, Gumperz 1982b), each one producing its own discursive regimes. This is starkly illustrated in the regulation of migrant groups through gatekeeping encounters for the right

to asylum (Jacquemet 2005, Blommaert 2001, Maryns 2006), the offer of a work permit (Codó 2008), and the selection for internship (Tranraeker forthcoming).

The selection interview is no exception to this trend. Two contrasting tropes used in the prevailing discourses of job selection in the UK sum up the language loading that these processes now bear. In the 1960s it was commonplace to hear recruiters talking of 'a pair of hands' to fill a job, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the 'language of talent' with its celebratory image of the successful communicator had superseded it. Discourses of mission statements, the regulation of human resources through competency frameworks, guidelines for the structuring and managing of job interviews, and the length of such interviews even for low-paid work, are all evidence of this languaging work.[2] So, for example, 'How does an organisation manage change?' asked at an interview for a low-paid job, puts a large inferencing load on the candidate to get from this huge and complex question to the key competence of 'flexibility' and whether the candidate can show that she or he is flexible. There is then the question of whether candidates can attune to this notion of flexibility as highly significant and how it can be demonstrated in their response, using work experience that is familiar enough to the interviewer to provide evidence of this competence.

While the discursive regimes of any selection process put linguistic demands on all candidates, access to these regimes is differentially distributed. These regimes can serve to reproduce inequalities of class as well as linguistic and ethnic inequality. Some research in selection interviewing and assessment has explored class inequality in selection at professional levels where ethnicity was either irrelevant or not attended to (Silverman and Jones 1975, Adlesward 1988, Komter 1991, Scheuer 2001) and has shown that, at professional levels, the interview/assessment can disadvantage on the

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[2] It is common place for low-paid routine work to involve lengthy interviews. In our data, interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

grounds of social class. However, ethnic minority and migrant candidates fare even less well than their white British counterparts in applying for professional level jobs (Auer and Kern 2000, Roberts, Campbell and Robinson 2008). In addition, research on interviews for low-paid, routine jobs and low-level vocational training shows that migrants experience inequalities even at this 'entry level' where no qualifications are required (Gumperz 1992, Roberts, Davies and Jupp 1992, Sarangi 1994, Roberts and Campbell 2006), and suggest that the job interview is a key site of linguistic gatekeeping and produces for candidates from certain migrant groups a *linguistic penalty*.

Linguistic penalty

The idea of a *linguistic penalty* focuses on the role of language in producing inequality in employment. It is drawn from two different sources. The first is a concept from the sociology of ethnic relations, the 'ethnic penalty' (Heath and Cheung 2006). The 'ethnic penalty' is a term used to describe the processes in the labour market which lead to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) job-seekers being less likely than their white counterparts to gain employment. The second draws on notions of the capitalisation of language and the valuing and (re)production of certain types of symbolic, and specifically linguistic, capital (Bourdieu 1991).

A 'linguistic penalty' is a combination of all the sources of disadvantage that might lead a linguistic minority group to fare less well in the selection/evaluation process generally and specifically in the labour market. This penalty derives from both the largely hidden demands on candidates to talk in institutionally credible ways, drawing on taken for granted socio-cultural resources on how to perform the institutional self (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 2002) and from any other disadvantage related to linguistic minority status. In the case of the job interview, the erasure or, if it is mentioned, the recognition, presentation and receipt of foreign work experience (FWE) is one area where this penalty is produced. Those who experience a linguistic penalty are doubly disadvantaged, since their minority ethnic social identity, embodied in their FWE, may already

penalise them, and the language-mediated gatekeeping interview adds to this penalty.

Competency frameworks

Competence-based selection developed as a response to social change brought about by globalisation and the new capitalism (Wood and Payne 1998). It is perceived as something of a silver bullet, solving the problems of how to select the flexible, self-managing candidate and also provide equality of opportunity in an increasingly diverse labour market. A competency framework, it is argued, selects for broad capabilities that can be tuned to changing situations and also provides a strong element of structure and regulation to meet equality requirements (Kandola 1996). No tension is seen between the standardisation and consistency required of equal opportunities legislation and bureaucracy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the impact of the neo-liberal ideology of the new capitalism and the requirements of the dynamic, flexible 'enterprising self' (du Gay 2000).

Competency and diversity discourses

The recent discourses of diversity contribute to, in Bourdieu's term, the misrecognition of any tension or conflict between standardisation and equality in ethnically stratified societies. Discourses of equal opportunities and affirmative action of the 80s and 90s have shifted to discourses of 'diversity'. These new discourses are about judging everyone as individuals on the basis of their competencies within a new discourse of unity, and the 'common culture' of an organisation (Gagnon and Cornelius 2000, Zane 2002).[3] Diversity discourses no longer speak of discrimination but of individual competence, which includes, unsurprisingly, fitting into the cultural categories of the ideal employee. So, whatever your background, if you present yourself as a culturally appropriate team-worker and your experiences are invoked in linguistically accept-

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[3] The notion of a shared or common culture clearly resonates with wider societal discourses of cultural nationalism (Gilroy 1993) and linguistic nationism (Billig 1995), in which a common culture and language are seen as the cohesive elements of the nation-state.

able ways, then you are likely to be successful at selection. The fact that these judgements are determined by the taken for granted linguistic and cultural norms of institutional life is hidden by the very discourses that realise them. Asking each candidate the same competency questions gives a veneer of standardisation and thus fairness, but making the appropriate inferences about these questions assumes shared conditions for negotiating understanding (Gumperz 1982a). Diversity and competency discourses thus blend into a single discursive regime that further reinforces the competence-based interview (Scheepers 2007).[4] In contrast to the earlier period, where equal opportunity concerns could challenge institutional conventions, diversity discourses support them. While the rhetoric of variety and difference remains, in the actual practices of the job interview it is routinely suppressed, as the role of FWE shows.

Competencies and the new capitalism

The 'new managerialism' and 'fast capitalism' of the global market (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996) requires companies to be ready to change product lines over night and this in turn has an effect on how people are managed. Traditional, hierarchical management has given way to a more flexible structure in which workers are expected to be more self-managing and no longer wait for decisions from a long command chain. As new responsibilities are pushed down to workers and hierarchies are flattened, shopfloor staff are expected to understand more of the organisation's goals and strategies. Workers are expected to develop an 'entrepreneurial self' (du Gay 2000), responsible, self-aware and self-managing. So, although 'personality' is rarely mentioned in the discourses of competency, the ideology of the new capitalism focuses on per-

sonality and character (Grugulis and Vincent 2009) and the importance of individuals buying into the core organisational values in the 'enterprise' culture (du Gay 2000).

Typical competences at all levels of jobs are: teamwork, the ability to self-manage and self-organise, flexibility, and the ability to cope with change. These in turn are derived from competence clusters such as 'drive', 'reasoning' and 'interpersonal' qualities and are set out in human resources policy statements and guidelines. In promotion and junior management selection interviews, these competences are re-worked to give explicit focus to managing people and tasks in teams, innovation and self-development, and learning from experience, particularly from failures. Frequently, competences are presented in verb/object phrase form in some habitual, open space, particularly, as in: 'juggles priorities', 'takes ownership', 'manages change', 'inspires people', 'drives results', 'seeks improvement', 'focuses action'. Implied in these abstract formulations are notions of agency, trustworthiness, communicative ability and the value of reflection, and laminated over all of them a sense of the 'entrepreneurial self'. In other words, these competences stretch far beyond any narrowly defined set of skills or abilities, to engage with the identity of the ideal candidate as a particular type of person within the organisation (Roberts 2011). These widely used competences are made up of the so-called soft skills (Urcioli 2008) rather than particular manual, craft or technical skills that were the basis for selection for low-paid and technical jobs until the latter part of the twentieth century (Grugulis and Vincent 2009, Payne 2000).

These under-defined and yet elastic competences can only be realised in relatively abstract terms that place a heavy inferential load on candidates. Only intense participation in this abstract semiotic world of constructed objectivity can make it accessible (Iedema 2003), and for many candidates such participation is not available. In some competence-based interviews, these competency phrases are explicitly referred to (see examples 4, 5, 11, 12), while in others they are only implied. However, because they are rela-

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[4]   Scheepers in her study of Belgian discourses of diversity quotes from a Flemish action plan: 'the at first sight heterogeneous composition of the personnel (men, women, emigrants, older workers, starters, disabled people,…) will become one homogeneous unity because we all work for one goal. The organization has to be characterized by one common culture, in which there is room for valuing differences.'

tively open categories, even their more explicit use still requires some of the special inferences of the job interview and its associated social and cultural knowledge.

Narratives and blended discourses

There is a further routine component, associated with the competency framework of these interviews, that creates a linguistic penalty for candidates from migrant backgrounds. This is the requirement to produce narrative answers to competency, and other more analytically framed questions. While the competency framework is relatively abstract, requiring candidates to infer what the interviewer is looking for, the narratives are expected to be structured in prototypical anglo ways (Labov and Waletzsky 1967). The STAR structure widely used in North American and British job interviews: Situation, Task, Action and Result, assumes that candidates will give particular examples of their work experience relevant to the competence-framed question and

based on stories structured in this way. Indeed, some organisations use the STAR structure to fit such stories into the boxes on the interview forms (Roberts and Cambell 2005). These forms are designed with a box for each element of the STAR structure so that interviewers can fill them in as the story unfolds. In our research, while most white and British minority ethnic candidates produced acceptably structured stories, candidates from migrant backgrounds were less likely to tell stories or to structure them according to the STAR formula. This led to empty boxes on the interviewers' forms or negative comments since, in institutional terms, the story appeared unstructured. Within this structure, candidates are expected to produce what the social psychologist Micheal Bamberg calls a *storied self* (Bamberg 1997). This self is a particular take on the speaker that emerges through the details of the story. For example, one candidate, Trenton (also see examples 11 and 12) describes how he reacted when a customer lost her purse:

> Example 2
>
> 1   C: e:r (1) a customer lost their (.) purse (.) in the actual club you know
> 2   obviously they had to fill out a crime reports
> 3   and obviously I I came forward (.) to help them do that
> 4   otherwise I would have stayed behind a little bit after work
> 5   wait for the police to arrive and everything (.)

This storied self is presented, as the story unfolds, as responsible, helpful, and with initiative. Trenton only stands outside the story as a narrator of it when they reach the 'R', the result or evaluation stage:

> 24:   so I just took it upon my own initiative (.)
> 25:   you know to just do as much as I could ((8 seconds of interviewer writing))

While candidates are expected to reveal themselves through detailed and vivid stories, the 'R' element is crucial in showing how they can analyse and evaluate themselves in institutionally appropriate ways to show that they are self-reflexive and can use this to be entrepreneurial. In job interview training, it is also common to train interviewers to 'drill down' further by asking more evaluative questions about candidates' thoughts and reactions. In other words, candi-

dates have to blend elements of the more personal modes of talk in the action of the story with more analytic or institutional ones. This more institutional discourse is characterised by abstract formulations (Iedema 2003), such as the competency categorisations described above, by discretion, balance and euphemisation (Bourdieu 1991), and the more analytic framing of talk, as Trenton does at line 24.

The STAR structure is constructed for candidates to show their competence first through stories and only then make more general claims after their experience has spoken for itself. Bold, unmitigated claims about your ability, e.g. 'I am not frightened of anything' (in example 1), in the early stages of an answer are routinely sanctioned on two counts: First, they replace the vivid showing of the self, and second, they are not sufficiently euphemised. Similarly, deontic modes of talking, e.g. 'You should be always alert', which are more frequent among candidates born abroad than other groups, are not well enough anchored in individual experience and appear too distancing. Indeed, any presentation of the self that does not align with both the organisation's vision of the entrepreneurial, self-reflexive individual and with the grounded, modest self who shows but does not show off, can fuel a negative evaluation, even for the type of low-paid, routine jobs discussed here.

So, the standardised competency framework calls for and calls up a blending of institutional and personal discourses in a managed form of familiarity that we might call, as something of an oxymoron, *bureaucratic intimacy.* The tightly scripted design of the late twentieth century equal opportunities interview has given way to a hybrid of regulation and improvisation in which institutional and personal discourses are interwoven (Campbell and Roberts 2007). The distancing of institutional discourses is held in check by the familiarisation of the candidate through 'experientially grounded' (Edwards 1991) stories and the interviewers' engrossment in them. As Edwards suggests in his discussion of the Watergate accounts, detailed and lively accounts are perceived as convincing and are rapidly transformed into judgements of trustworthiness (also see Kerekes 2003 on trust in the job interview). In turn, these stories are distanced from their telling and made 'bureaucratically processible' (IedEma 2003) by more institutional modes of talk that are more abstract, analytic and euphemised.

Competences are routinely assessed through narratives of past experience, on the assumption that what candidates say they have done and how they reflect on this past experience is more useful and fairer than asking hypothetical questions (Huffcutt and Roth 1998). These narratives of previous work experience provide the core evidence on which assessments are formally made. In most cases, for candidates born abroad, this means foreign work experience.

Foreign Work Experience (FWE)

FWE is problematic in the British job interview in three different ways: the fact of its unfamiliarity and assumed lack of fit, the central role of stories of past experience in the interview, and the additional linguistic capital required to deal with both of these within the discursive regimes of the job interview. Firstly, FWE may be erased all together, dismissed early on or, in organisations where equality issues in selection are taken seriously, be accepted but require protracted sequences to make the strange familiar. By contrast, candidates born and educated in the UK bring experience that is imaginable by the interviewers, who collaborate with candidates in producing this shared world, as is discussed below.

Secondly, in our data, candidates spend more time telling stories of past experience elicited from competence questions than on any other sub-genre of the selection interview. The occupational psychology research, although not entirely consistent, suggests that so-called 'behavioural' questions (about past experience) are fairer than 'situational' ones (that ask about hypothetical cases) (Huffcutt and Roth 1998). Most competence-designed interviews, therefore, elicit past experience answers in the form of stories (see narrative structure above). The widespread use of such a structure suggests that organisations assume that it is institutionally acceptable. And most of the discourse-based studies of job interviews do not focus on the elicitation of past work experience as being inherently problematic, but rather on its display and receipt.[5]

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[5] An exception is Scheuer's suggestive study that subtle class-based differences related to relative success in interviews for managerial and professional posts stem from different topoi about how work is experienced: the extent to which candidates identify themselves and their sense of fulfilment through work or not (Scheuer 2001).

Thirdly, for candidates whose work experience has been wholly or substantially overseas, translating global experience into institutional models of competency requires additional linguistic capital to manage the discursive regimes of the interview, where FWE has to be explained and defended and where its display can produce new interactional difficulties. With the exception of Auer and his colleagues (Auer 1998, Auer and Kern 2000, Birkner and Kern 2000, Birkner 2004), discussed below, there has been little attention paid to the role of foreign work experience, the gap in socio-cultural knowledge between interviewer and candidate in negotiating its acceptance, and how this interacts with other linguistic penalties. Drawing on Hinnenkamp (1987:144) the problematics of FWE are both *brought into* the interview and *brought about* in it.

FWE brought into the interview and its potential for dismissal

Both candidates and interviewers bring to the interview experiences and stances that make FWE problematic. Most of the candidates in our data who were born abroad, both from the EU and elsewhere, brought to the interview qualifications and experience incommensurate with the job. Only two of the 19 had any substantial work experience in the UK and all of them came from professional backgrounds and/or had higher education, often to MA level. For this group of candidates, their insertion into the labour market has led to a loss of symbolic capital in terms of unrecognised qualifications and work experience that has no easy fit with the job on offer (GLA 2005). Fitting into available job slots leads to deprofessionalisation and decapitalisation. Unlike other groups of migrants such as elite cosmopolitan groups (Block 2007) or bilingual professionals (Day and Wagner 2007), this group were not only applying for routine, low-paid jobs for which they were overqualified, but were also much less likely to be offered them. However, and this is a further disadvantage, they were similar to other non-elite migrant groups in that the embodied competences of flexibility, self-management, and managing change (evidenced by the experience of migration itself) are trumped

in the job interview by the linguistic competence to talk about such capabilities in institutionally acceptable ways.

FWE is presented as interactionally problematic by candidates through hesitation and other markers of doubt, with comments that frame the experience as possibly inappropriate (e.g. 'but that was a bit different') or explicit checks with interviewers that they are allowed to include it. This suggests that it is brought into the interview by candidates as already tagged of questionable validity within the discursive regimes of the institution.

There is also plenty of evidence that interviewers also treat FWE as problematic. It may not be referred to at all either in interviewer forms or training and its mention is treated differently by different interviewers, accepted by some (examples 4 and 5) and dismissed by others (examples 1 and 3). Where no space is made in the interview for FWE to be included at all, some candidates insert it without mitigation, where they can, even if its sequential location at that point in the interview structure is problematic, as in this next example.

Jaswinder has applied for an upgrade from his present job in a food processing company which would involve moving from food preparation to a cooking job in the kitchen. Towards the end of the interview during which no reference has been made to any FWE, the question of tests is raised. At this point, the elicitation of the past experience phase is clearly over and so Jaswinder's insertion is not taken up and only minimally responded to for both structural reasons (the wrong time to give this information) and for substantive reasons (the experience is responded to as irrelevant).

At line 8, Jaswinder interrupts the interviewer, latching onto what he may anticipate is a negative outcome, that he may not pass, to interpolate new information: He was a maths teacher in India. The interviewer's apparent positive evaluation at line 11 is minimal and is rapidly followed by a reformulation of her turn at line 5 and by a twice repeated assertion that 'everybody' will take the test. The new candidate information is now treated as irrelevant, since

Example 3

1.	I:	I also need to tell you that all A (.)
2.		this is an A grade job okay
3.		with A grade jobs now
4.		everybody will be put forward for a (.) for a literacy and a numeracy test
5.		so English and maths test
6.	J:	yeah
7.	I:	okay if you shouldnt shouldnt =
8.	J:	= I was a mathematician in the India [maths master
9.	I:	oh was you]
10.	J:	yeah=
11.	I:	= okay good (.) good
12.		so everybody will be put forward for this test
13.		if you if you dont pass this test
14.		then unfortunately we wont be able to offer you the job [okay
15.	J:	[alright
16.	I:	but but everybody will go through the same test
17.	J:	alright
18.	I:	er:m and that is the next stage of the interview stage [so
19.	J:	alright]
20.	I:	if you get through this stage
21.		well then put you forward for your English and Maths test (.)
22.		if thats okay then well well call you back

whatever his experience and competence, he will be treated the same as all other candidates. There is no extended token of acknowledgement of Jaswinder's experience as a teacher, nor any comment during the interview or in the wash-up session afterwards that he might have skills more relevant to office work than cooking sauces.

FWE brought about in the interview
The struggles around FWE are not only brought into the interview but are brought about in it. The talk becomes problematic since FWE requires more negotiation if it is to be accepted. Candidates born in the UK can use their work experience to claim some solidarity and familiarity with interviewers, but FWE distances candidates from interviewers as they try to fit their stories into boxes (Roberts and Campbell 2005). This affects the relative intimacy or mutuality of the encounter as it becomes interactionally asynchronous (Erickson and Shultz 1982) and less bureaucratically processable (Iedema 2003). Candidates face two specific problems: the contextual bur-

den and the equivalences burden. Managing this additional load requires candidates to work harder with less linguistic capital and in doing so the narrative structure can be disrupted (see example 5 lines 15- 16).

In their studies of East and West German styles of interviewing, Auer, Kern and Birkner discuss the work of making FWE relevant and the highlighting of socio-cultural differences in the different discursive regimes of East and West selection interviews and the presentation of self within them. The 19 candidates in our research who were born abroad are from 15 different countries, so it is not possible to talk about contrastive communicative styles nor to assume that interviewers are familiar with the 'foreignness' of candidates' FWE as they were in the German studies. Rather, we look for a blend of plausible explanations based on differences and difficulties with linguistic resources, communicative styles, asymmetries of knowledge and socio-political differences, as the examples below illustrate. These can be usefully divided into the contextual burden and the equivalences burden.

The contextual burden

While candidates may have to design carefully how they introduce FWE (through explicit comments and requests as described above), the hard interactional work to connect it to the competences required in a convincing way has only just begun. Considerably more contextual explanation is required to make the fit. The more different the experiences and resources of institutional interviewer and interviewee, the more discursive effort is required of the latter, as studies of asylum seeker stories in elegibility determination interviews have shown in an acute form (Maryns 2006). The candidates' task is to contextualise their individual stories well enough for interviewers to make appropriate inferences for purposes of evaluation and selection. The problem for the candidate lies in knowledge asymmetries – what does the interviewer need to know? – and in the time and structural constraints of the interview.[6]

In example four, Renard, a Polish sports teacher who has also worked in a distance learning organisation, is applying for a job in a delivery company. The interviewer introduces the second of five competences to be covered in the interview.

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[6] In our data, successful candidates talked between 50-70% of the time, mostly at the lower end. Candidates from migrant backgrounds averaged 74% , suggesting that they had to spend more time contextualising their FWE.

Example 4

1. I: okay (.) the second one is satisfying customers
2.   u::rm again in any business
3.   customers is the most important thing (.) yeah
4. R: yeah
5. I: so (name of delivery company) is not any different (.)
6.   we are (.) also trying our best
7.   to sort of always satisfying the customers um (.)
8.   so under this heading
9.   what I am looking for is a instance- specific instance
10.   where you have gone out of your way to um help a customer
11.   or (.) a- solve a customers problem or something like that
12. R: yep (.) err I was err- like I wrote in my application form
13.   I was err sales representative (.) err I was selling err books for err
14.   children (.) preparing for err exams to A-level
15. I: mmhm
16. R: and err (.) I err had to contact err face-to-face with customer and err
17.   we err was a lot of customers very demanding (.) and err (.) firstly I
18.   always listened them (.) what they have to err say what they want
19.   what err they err what they err looking for (.)
20.   er which price range (.) which book (.)
21.   and err after I was err explain them
22.   what er we've got what er we offer them (.)
23.   what for example book is the best for the- for the children or
24.   err (.) mm:m for the price=
25. I: =yeah=
26. R: =what they can offer me (.) and err (2)
27. I: yeah
28. R: if they for example needed something else what I didnt have
29.   I said always e::rr(.) I err mm:m (8) err I always err (.) like err said to them err I give them my name
30.   my telephone number and I say (.)
31.   I- if find something I call you and I- I- I give you this err
32.   if w-we have for example in the future (.)
33.   I give you- I will (.) come back to you

Example 4

This is the beginning of a protracted sequence of nearly three minutes in which Renard explains the procedures used in trying to sell school text books. As in Auer's and his associates' research, there is some explicit knowledge compensation in Renard's translation of the Polish exam system into the English school systems (at line 14 'A level') and also considerably more context setting than in the narratives of British born candidates. Renard describes the procedures in selling the textbooks and his habitual activities but has not selected a specific example. In terms of the narrative STAR structure, he has given the situation and the general task but has not reached the A for action stage.

After the interviewer has probed about how customers react, he asks if what Rafael has described is normal policy in this company:

Example 5

1.	I:	right (.) the- the company you were
2.		working for Distill (.) Distentil
3.	R:	Distance Learning
4.	I:	Distance Lear- Learning Limited (.) do they normally sort of
5.		as- as a policy tells everyone urm (.)
6.		if (.) the (.) programme is not available
7.		leave the (.) message with um (.)
8.	R:	a]
9.	I:	an]d contact them later (.) o r=
10.	R:	= err they can but urm it is not always (.)
11.		sometimes it is for example
12.		new products this coming (.) something very similar [what they
13.	I:	ok]
14.	R:	want and its err I can ring them and err explain them
15.		er::rr its err (.) .hhh similar book or something like that
16.	I:	(.) okay (.) no what I am trying to err [find out
17.	R:	err right] (.) [sorry
18.	I:	here is](.)
19.		no no no thats alright
20.	R:	((laughs))
21.	I:	whether it is like (.)
22.		company policy to urm follow [that procedure
23.	R:	yeah yes] yes [yes
24.	I:	or] whether-
25.		whether you are taking u::rm err decisions
26.		on your own to help a customer
27.	R:	err no it is like this err errr company (.) it's like err (.)
28.		this company working with e::rr m:mm (0.1)
29.		ministr- (.) ministry of education in [Poland
30.	I:	right ok] yeah yeah
31.	R:	and is together and there is like for help for child[ren
32.	I:	okay]
33.	R:	to get better err lots of err (0.1) err treats [and
34.	I:	ok]
35.	R:	get better in-
34.	I:	so
35.	R:	in education
36.	I:	so all the sales (.) err reps (.) um who go out ummm (.) selling
37.		these err books or (.) programmes [yes
38.	R:	yes]

39. I: so will they be all doing the same as (.) as what as what you do
40. R: err (.) yeah
41. I: [if
42. R: [yes
43. I: if] the programme is not available they'll take the contact (.)
44. R: yes
45. I: err [details of
46. R: yes yes]
47. I: the [person
48. R: [yes   [yes
49. I: and] then come and phone
50. R: yes
51. I: okay(0.3) right (.0.2) the ne:xt one in there is managing yourself

At lines 16-18, the interviewer tries to shift the customer focus topic onto a different gear, by setting up a contrast between routine company policy and the possibility (unspoken because Renard intervenes) that sales representatives can take their own initiative; in terms of the STAR narrative structure, get to the A for action. This is an attempt to steer Renard back to the crucial element in the opening turn of the competency question (lines 9-10 in example 4) where he is asked for a specific instance when he has 'gone out of his way to help a customer'. The conundrum for both interviewer and candidate is that the company is controlled by the state and the ministry of education lays down the procedures that have to be followed so that Renard cannot stand out as behaving exceptionally well, as this would not be following official policy (Kulesza 2002). Again this has echoes in the German research where East German candidates orientate to and try to compensate for the relative lack of individual decision-making in the former communist Eastern block. A further problem is that Renard gives no evidence in his replies that he has picked up the cues in the opening question. These cues are designed to call up a local context and set of inferences (Gumperz 1982a; 1982b; 1996) that should channel his response into a story about how he showed individual agency and commitment in relation to a particular customer – in other words the *Action* of the story. At line 16, the interviewer halts Renard's continued outline of the task to clarify the insti-

tutional intention behind his previous questions, but by line 51, he gives up. The allotted time on each competence (about 5 minutes) has been used up but Renard cannot be marked on his A and R on the STAR structure, and, because of the constraints of the job in Poland, has not been able to display his agency or initiative.

The comments from the interviewer when giving feedback from the interview support this analysis:

Example 6
'In customer service, Renard generalises a lot – he doesn't use the personal pronoun enough, and while he explains the reasons why customers might be upset he doesn't explain what *he* would do about this. I feel that Renard is repeatedly missing the point as he explains about the book company he was working for and their policies, but doesn't realise that I am trying to look at how he has gone *beyond* this.'

A similar pattern also occurred with a candidate from South Kerala, attempting to explain his experience of teamwork based on his job with a national literacy project in this south Indian communist-run state. Again, the interviewer never 'drills down' to the Action and Result after five minutes of Situation and Task.

These difficulties cannot be readily explained by an ethnicised notion of cultural clash. Rather, the negative evaluation of both candidates stems from several factors. First, there are the socio-political discourses and work practices of

states where such competences as 'team playing' or 'customer satisfaction' have no or different resonances. In these two instances, Poland and Kerala, and in the German studies discussed above, the ideological values of communism structure work and workers' relationship to it in contrast to western discourses of individualism. Second, the structuring of accounts and stories with considerable context setting begins to disrupt the institutional narrative structure and prevents its completion. Renard is interrupted at lines 15-16 in example 5 to pull him back to the specific example required where the *Action* (the A of the STAR structure) can be evaluated. And so much time is spent on context setting and clarifying the environment where 'customers could be satisfied' that the action and then crucially the R, result and reflection on the experience, are not elicited. This is a type of collusion between interviewers asking for more detailed accounts to produce something experientially grounded and relevant, and candidates anxious to sell their stories, compensate for interviewers' lack of knowledge, and comply with the requests for details. Lastly, as shown in Interactional Sociolingusitic studies of Chinese and Indian speakers of English and on the German studies discussed above, the structuring of candidate responses may be drawing on communicative styles that elaborate on the con-

text before coming to what in western discourses would be perceived as the main or most relevant point (Young 1994, Gumperz 1996, Auer 1998).

Equivalence burden
Candidates who are aware that they have to make their experience familiar and thereby relevant will attempt, like Renard in example 4 line 14, to translate specific terms used in their FWE into UK equivalences. However, where whole categories of work have no institutional equivalence in the UK, the burden of aligning two such different systems adds to the linguistic penalty since the candidate has to produce an extended comparative explanation. Luis was a type of civil engineer in the Philippines whose job was a combination of engineer, surveyor, draughtsman and tax inspector in the land tax department of the national government. He was also applying for a low-paid job in the same large delivery company as Renard. In this next example, Luis is asked for an example in which he had to deal with a difficult customer. He opts to take his example from his work in the land tax department and begins by contextualising the scope of his work. He then gives an example of an angry woman who considered she had been overtaxed and outlines how he will deal with her anger by explaining the tax system and possible method of payment:

Example 7

1. L: e:r I give him some-some computation and some- some checklist of her
2.   land tax that's it so you're going to- I-I explain him briefly so h- erm so you
3.   going to to know it how
4. I: okay
5. L: i:n a- easy in stage by stage payment yeah [thats it
6. I: okay]   right (.)
7.   okay Im going to ask you the next question
8.   which is managing yourself

After spending four and half minutes on the customer satisfaction question, the interviewer shifts at line 7 to the next question and although Luis has reached the Action stage of the STAR structure, there is no time to press him on the outcomes of the action, the crucial Result element in which candidates' institutional dis-

courses are brought in to show their more analytic, self-reflexive qualities.

The problem for Luis is that his professional work was complex, cut across normative British categories of professional work, and involved him in conflicts of a different order from the imagined irate customer of the competency

question. Since these are low-paid jobs, interviewers expect the irate customer question to elicit relatively straightforward examples of dissatisfied customers in routine service encounters which would reflect experience of the kind of low-paid work that organisations recruiting for low-paid work expect candidates to have. A similar equivalence burden is faced by many migrant candidates from professional backgrounds. Both the categories of their work are often different but also, as professionals, they conceptualise their jobs in terms of general processes and talk about them in the more abstract register of institutional discourses when the question was asking for a specific example, as was the case with Renard (see above). A limited question: 'I want an example where you have worked as part of a team to achieve something' has no easy equivalence in his work of planning and managing the curriculum.

The upshot from such interviews is to disrupt the expected narrative structure, leaving empty boxes on the form, to penalise candidates whose work experience cannot be easily realised as evidence of the competences required, and to raise more general questions about candidates' communicative skills on two counts. First, their ability to make appropriate inferences about the question and the additional linguistic labour

needed to contextualise and find equivalences requires more complex communication than that expected of other candidates. Second, this linguistic labour highlights communicative competence, which is likely to be the most challenging competence for those from migrant backgrounds with little or no experience of the British job interview and its requirements to align with the cultural categories of the ideal employee.

FWE penalties and linguistic penalties

The next example, a revisiting of example 1, has elements of the problematics of FWE described above but also shows where even a fluent speaker of English presents himself in ways that, in Blommaert's (2005) words, do not 'travel well'. Suhil has told the two interviewers about being a ward clerk for two years in India, where he describes the records system he worked with, a one-year post handling students in a college in London, and a temporary job in the same hospital as the job he is now applying to. He is then asked if he prefers working behind the scenes to front-line jobs. While interviews for this post are not designed around explicitly stated competencies, the implied concept here is that of working face to face with the public and so of customer relations and satisfaction.

Example 8

29. I: If you werent successful would you (.) um (.)
30.   like to be considered for .h a position behind the scenes
31. S: well [f-
32. I: or] are you [specifically
33. S: for me]   its not [very important
34. I: patient ok]
35. S: whether Im working behind the scene or in front of the scene hh
36.   actually speaking because I worked as a ward clerk
37.   Ive handled the reception
38.   Ive got two years working=
39. I: =Yeah I [understand that
40. S: experience also] so Im not afraid of anything
41. I: But that's obviously [in India
42. S: right]
43. I: not here ((laughs loudly))
44. S: ((nods)) thats in India yeah
45. All: (laughter)
46. S: But patients are patients

```
47.  I:    ((Clears throat loudly)) ((looks at interviewer 2 still laughing)) [debatable
48.  I2:                                                                 well (       )]
49.  S:    I'm not here to debate because you are more experienced
50.  I:    Yeah
51.  S:    So I dont because (.) obviously I mean I-I'm here to give my best=
52.  I2:   =mhmm=
53.  I:    =[yeah I appreciate that
54.  S:    and I'm here to convince you] if I if Im able to convince you
55.        Im fortunate if Im (.) I cannot convince you I'm [unfortunate
56.  I:                                                    Yeah]=
57.  I2:   =mhmm=
```

It is not clear from the opening question whether the interviewer is pressing Suhil on whether he is more of a backstage than frontstage person or whether the interview is setting up the possibility of Suhil being considered for other jobs. His subsequent turns at lines 33-40 shift the rhetorical grounds of this phase of the interview from grounded stories of competence to what Goffman calls podium talk (Goffman 1981: 137-140), an appropriate dramaturgical footing for the subject of front and backstage, but not one that fits with either the narrative structures and display of self through example, or the euphemised institutional discourse that regulates the job interview. This shift happens gradually until lines 49-54 when Suhil's rhetoric, 'I'm not here to debate… I'm here to convince you', elicits only minimal responses from the interviewers.

The shift occurs between lines 33 and 39 with Suhil's initial formulation and the main interviewer's closing receipt of this information at line 39. Yet, at line 36, Suhil introduces new information about the ward clerk job in India, the fact that he worked in reception. The main interviewer attempts, at line 39, to close down what may be seen as repetition (the fact that he worked for two years as a ward clerk), rather than what it is, an expansion that gives evidence of his front-line experience. Suhil re-captures the floor with an extreme claim: 'so I'm not afraid of anything'. In the interviewer's next turn , at line 41, the FWE is dismissed with laughter, which Suhil attempts to cap with a gnomic saying, at line 46, 'But patients are patients', shifting his stance from the expected storied self with telling

examples, to an aphoristic self, instructing the interviewers on the nature of patients in general. The main interviewer, at line 47, responds with several paralinguistic cues, a shift in gaze and the comment 'debatable', designed to encourage the second interviewer to collude in her rejection of Suhil's attempt to make his FWE skills transferrable. At this point, the rhetorical shift moves Suhil into a general bid to convince the panel of his worth, presenting the 'I' as a commentator on the interview process rather than a contributor to it. In narrative analysis terms, Suhil has shifted the focus from the storied or narrated self to the narrating self (Bamberg 1997, Georgakopoulou 2003), so that neither personal and grounded accounts nor euphemised, analytic talk are produced. The negotiation of FWE has drawn Suhil into a discursive space that is negatively valued.

In the wash-up session afterwards, the interviewers judged him as not telling them enough about his skills and experience and, crucially, not showing how these could be transferred to a London setting. In the interview itself, he was interrupted when he tried to do just this and the rhetorical shift to explicit self-commentary, 'so I'm not here to debate', and his subsequent pronouncements, may have fed into the evaluation of the lack of grounded, transferable skills. Instead of talking about what he had learnt from his experience and its relevance for the current post and evaluating his skills in a grounded way, he spends time evaluating his presence at and the purpose of the interview. While 'But patients are patients' is Suhil's attempt to show that his

skills learnt in India are transferrable to London, the style in which he does this, gnomic and distancing, is not the expected competency based style that is grounded and experiential. So while

Suhil understands that showing transferability is important, the style he uses to do this is not evaluated positively. An unacceptable style is turned into an unacceptable fact:

Example 9

1. I1: Because I didn't feel (.) that he told me enough about his skills and
2.   experience
3. I2: Mm
        ……………………………………………………..
        (7 lines omitted)

4. I1: Apart from the fact that yes he could do it (.) because he worked as a
5.   ward clerk (.) in India (.) but there was no transferable skills abo:ut (.)
6.   what he'd learnt from working as a ward receptionist to what he's
7.   worked as a (.) as a in heal- in um x-ray filing
8. I2: Mhmm
9. I1: There was no transferable [skills
10. I2:   Yep]

Mutually figured worlds

In contrast to the examples given already, candidates with entirely or largely British work experience, whatever their linguistic or ethnic background, are able to present themselves through the familiarity of such experience. It is imaginable to the interviewers. Drawing on Holland's figured worlds (Holland 2001) and Gumperz's scenarios (Gumperz 1996), types of work experiences are envisaged as situated activities learnt over time and recreated in interaction. So, for example, the shop assistant, catering, manufacturing or reception work displayed by candidates is readily called up and aligned to, as candidates tell their stories. A mutually figured world is jointly produced as interviewers share assumptions with candidates: 'I imagine ..', 'so that must have been different from' and see example 11, line 20. Or they reformulate and feed back to candidates the upshot of their story, 'You said about …, so …', partially answer the question themselves, as in example 10, or comment on the candidate's answer in ways that show engrossment in it.

The figured world of the candidate becomes shared with the interviewer to produce more collaborative phases, more joint argumentation or reasoning, and more familiarity and solidarity. Structurally, the stories are not disrupted and the grounded experience displayed is made more vivid by recruiting interviewers' visualisations of it. So, for example, the competence of 'problem solving' under the 'reasoning' cluster is jointly accomplished through the shared telling of a familiar story that is both vivid and made rational by the interviewers' supportive interventions as they make sense of it to themselves and back to the candidates.

The final example is that of Trenton, a black British candidate applying to the same large delivery company from examples 4 and 5 with Renard. The opening competence is about working with people and Trenton describes his work as a part-time coach at a large football club in London. He explains how he helps run a Saturday football club for local schools:

Example 10

1.   C: there was a lot of other coaches involved there
2.   I think there was like something like about eight of us (.)
3.   eight or nine of us (.) e:r down there in (name) Park
4.   right next door to the stadium
5.   matter of fact we (2) and that
6.   was with local kids from the community
7.   I: okay (yeah yeah) ((9 seconds writing))
8.   so how does the system work then (.)
9.   do the er:m schools contact you guys
10.   and say can you come and do some (.) e:[r sessions
11. C: mmm sometimes] er sometimes
12.   we obviously promote ourselves to s- er
13.   certain schools in the borough s- er
14.   even out of the borough
15.   like I do jobs in (name of borough) and like you [know
16. I: okay]
17. C : m like I travel around for them like
18.   so (.) sometimes the schools
19.   approach us sometimes we approach them

At line 8, the interviewer guides Trenton to talk in a somewhat more institutional mode of talk when he asks about the system, but then imagines how it works in answering his own question (lines 9-10). So Trenton has to do less interactional work and is also cued to talk in terms of general procedures (lines 12-13) and not just give the convincing, but not sufficiently institutional, description in lines 1-6.

As in Renard's interview, the second competence question is about customer satisfaction. And like Renard, Trenton is cued to give a specific example when he 'went out of his way'. His first story is drawn from when he worked on the door of a nightclub:

Example 11

6   C: e:r (1) a customer lost their (.) purse (.) in the actual club you know
7   obviously they had to fill out a crime reports
8   and obviously I I came forward (.) to help them do that
9   otherwise I would have stayed behind a little bit after work
10   wait for the police to arrive and everything (.)
11   say that they was in the club (.)
12   did have money (.) they were spending money
13   they was they not just trying to (.) you know (.)
14   pull a fast one there
15   I: so en- do you have to have like a (.)
16   do you have a set procedure that you follow
17   if someone come comes and says [(that erm)
18   C: there wasnt] actually
19   a set procedure for lost property
20   I: okay [(so you just fill in the report)
20. C: er in a in a pl- yeah it was] its a nightclub
21.   I was just doing door work there=
22. I: =mm okay=
23. C: = because I actually I knew the manager (.) at the time
24. I: okay

```
25.  C:   er:m (.) so er (and that) there wasnt a set procedure for lost property
26.       there wasnt like a lost property room or anything like that
27.       so I just took it upon my own initiative (.)
28.       you know to just do as much as I could ((8 seconds of interviewer writing))
29.  I:   okay so I Ill take it that thatll be a s- (.) a section or some-
30.       or whatever it is there er:m
31.       if someone finds er:m a handbag they will hand it over=
32.  C:   = oh yeah yeah=
33.  I:   = right okay then
34.  C:   definitely=
```

Trenton picks up the special inferences in the interviewer's question both at line 8 and lines 27-28. He first positions himself, in practice and metaphorically, as the one who stood out, 'obviously I came forward'. Then when the interviewer asks about set procedures, he interprets this question as less about the company's policy and more about how he went out of his way, 'I just took it upon my own initiative'. This collaborative phase is enhanced by the interviewer's imagining what happens to lost property at lines 20 and 29 so that Trenton only has to agree with him.

The interviewer then asks him for a further example and Trenton returns to his football coach experience:

Example 12

```
1.   I:   I could give you another one for [when
2.   I:                                  (okay)]
3.   C:   I was (like) working for (name) Football Club er
4.        imagine a (the) parents coming late
5.   I:   yeah
6.   C:   for instance and all the other coaches maybe have to do this (.)
7.        maybe have to do that you know (.) maybe I'd wait behind for the
8.        parents to come (.) you know maybe let the the pupil (.) phone home
9.        or (.) phone (mum) if they know their mobile number (.)
10.       Id just help as much as I could you know ((15 seconds writing))
11.  C:   problems with bullying you know I sorted that
12.       I sorted out little problems like that you know
13.       people are like obviously (.) one kid maybe targeting another kid
14.       saying bad things and upsetting that [kid
15.  I:                                       (mm)]
16.  C:   that kids gone home home mom he's always upsetting me (.)
17.       come to me obviously (.) you know [s- yeah
18.  I:                                     keep t-]
19.       keeps an eye on (him and obviously)]
20.  C:   to smooth things out you know (.)
21.       to be tactful in certain situations ((7 seconds writing))
```

At line 4, it is Trenton who draws the interviewer into his figured world, 'imagine parents coming late', and sets up two vivid connecting stories about how he supports the children if their parents are late or they experience bullying. This collaborative phase is sealed by the interviewer, at lines 18-19, showing his engrossment and understanding of the story not only with an imagined action, but also in echoing Trenton's stance, 'obviously'. The experience brought into the interview is immediately familiar and recognisable to the interviewer, so the STAR structure is displayed in full and, collaboratively, Trenton's competence in people-handling skills and his flexibility in dealing with situations as they arise are responded to and institutionally recorded.

Conclusion

Local British candidates like Trenton can make the appropriate inferences, draw on experiences that are readily imaginable to the interviewer, and use their everyday story-telling resources to produce a bureaucratically processible response. By contrast, migrants and other groups educated and with work experience from overseas are penalised in multiple ways. The regulation and management of foreign work experience both provides an additional penalty and serves to reinforce other linguistic penalties brought about in the interview. Dealing with these penalties effectively distances the candidates from the interviewers and the organisational values they represent. They are constructed as the 'other' and more likely than other groups to be excluded from work opportunities.

The process of 'othering' drawn from critical social theory and anthropology and well summed up in Hallam and Street (2000) works in four different ways in the treatment of FWE: (i) the unfamiliarity with the discursive regimes of the British job interview, which value certain styles of presentation, such as the blending of institutional and personal modes of talk and the STAR narrative structure, and not others. (ii) the disruption of the conventional narrative structure to establish equivalences, understand the context, and negotiate the relevance. This means that candidates are less able to produce

vivid, coherent and compelling stories and their experiences are less likely to be bureaucratically processed; they have either told too little or too much. (iii) contextualising their experiences, by attempting to make the strange familiar, manage criticisms of their self-presentations, and negotiate the problems that their FWE has produced, requires harder interactional and linguistic labour from candidates with FWE than that demanded of British candidates with local work experience. (iv) the interactional distancing that stems from this disruption and this labour produces the social distancing that 'others' them and leads to a much higher exclusion rate than that experienced by British candidates.

Competency and diversity discourse and the practice of standardised and equal for all competence-based interviews demonstrate a public rhetoric of equality and fairness and institutions can, therefore, defend themselves as their processes are regulated, scrutinised and legitimated. Yet migrant groups, such as those discussed here, face inequalities based on the implicit linguistic demands and constraints of the interview and the valuing of certain styles of talk. While the language of competences is carefully regimented by institutions, the fact that candidates bring different resources to their interpretation is not attended to. The discursive regimes of the interview exclude those candidates who are not linguistically 'acceptable' (Jenkins 1986) and render invisible the linguistic penalties they face. The job selection interview for low-paid work is therefore a key setting where language masks the contradiction between apparent fairness and unequal outcomes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1991; Duchene and Heller 2011). These discursive regimes require particular ways of talking and interacting while claiming a general fairness. This is one of three tensions, at different levels, that coalesce and are played out in the job interview. There is the tension between, first, standardisation and diversity, second, between regulation in line with equal opportunities and the entrepreneurial self, and third, between institutional distancing and propriety and between conversational involvement and familiarity. These tensions are

masked by the language of interviews. They illustrate the 'co-existence of oppositions' (Bourdieu 1998: 121) and how institutional discourses and language practices gloss over these oppositions and sequester away the inequalities that selection interviews produce. The analysis of such tensions contributes to our understanding of some of the processes of exclusion that migrants face despite the rhetorics of diversity and equal opportunity.

Transcription conventions

Where there is more than one interviewer, the interviewers are labelled I1 and I2.

The report uses the transcription conventions shown below, which are adapted from Psathas 1995

[	**Beginning of overlap** e.g.
	T: I used to smoke[a lot
	B: he thinks he's real tough
]	**End of overlap** e.g.
	T: I used to smoke [a lot
	B: he th] inks he's real tough
=	**Latching** ie. Where the next speaker's turn follows on without any pause
	A: I used to smoke a lot=
	B: =He thinks he's real tough
(.)	**Untimed brief pauses**
(0.5)	**Timed pauses** approx. seconds & tenths of a second e.g. (0.5) / (0.1) / (2.0)
:	**Sounds stretch** e.g. I gue:ss you must be right
-	**Cut-off** prior word or sound e.g. 'I thou- well I thought
<u>Yes</u>	**Emphasis** i.e. Perceived stress indicated by volume and pitch change
(s'pose so/spoke to)	**Unclear talk / possible hearings** in the case of **multiple possibilities**
(xxxxxx)	**Unrecognisable talk**, words replaced by insertion marks to indicate length of talk
((child's name))	**Description of named person anonymised name** e.g. ((interviewer's name))
((laugh))	**Description of vocal sound that interrupts talk** e.g. ((cough))

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