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We Speak English Here: An Exploratory Study of Language Barrier Effects in Agriculture

Camryn Clift
Murray State University

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Murray State University Honors College

HONORS THESIS

Certificate of Approval

We Speak English Here: An Exploratory Study of Language Barrier Effects in Agriculture

Camryn E. Clift
May 2021

Approved to fulfill the
requirements of HON 437

Dr. Michelle Santiago, Professor
Hutson School of Agriculture

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Dr. Warren Edminster, Executive Director
Honors College

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Author: Camryn Clift

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Approval by Examining Committee:

(Dr. Michelle Santiago, Advisor)

(Date)

(Dr. Tanya Romero-González, Committee Member)

(Date)

(Dr. Naveen Musunuru, Committee Member)

(Date)

We Speak English Here: An Exploratory Study of Language Barrier Effects in Agriculture

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for the Murray State University Honors Diploma

Camryn Clift

May 2021

Table of Contents

List of Tables	ii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Methods.....	9
Results.....	13
Descriptive Statistics.....	15
Themes	21
General H-2A Program	22
Agricultural Labor Shortages.....	22
Core Worker Groups.....	23
Program Recruitment Methods	23
Machinery Operation	24
Language Barriers in Health Care.....	24
English Learning Program	28
Monetary Benefit of Program Participation.....	28
Worker Socialization	28
Manager Perspective.....	29
Transactional vs. Relational.....	29
English-Speaking Foremen.....	32
Manager Opportunity Cost	32
Similarity in Challenges.....	33
Discussion.....	34
Limitations	38
Future Research	40
Conclusion	41
Works Cited	43
Appendix A: Non-Spanish-Speaking Manager Interview	46
Appendix B: Spanish-Speaking Manager Interview.....	49
Appendix C: Recruitment Script for Employers.....	53
Appendix D: Pre-Interview Script for Employers	54
Appendix E: Research Participation Consent Form	55
Appendix F: Council of Europe CEFR Language Scale	57

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1: Manager Characteristics	14
Table 2: Communication Methods Beyond Main Communication Type.....	17
Table 3: Type of Attitude by Manager	30

We Speak English Here: An Exploratory Study of Language Barrier Effects in Agriculture

Introduction

While most nations and peoples benefit from the necessary work of the agriculture industry, one of the largest obstacles that agricultural producers in the United States have long faced is obtaining a sufficient workforce to run their operations (“The U.S. Farm Labor Shortage”). From the single-family food production system of the past to the highly technical global agri-food system of today, farm work has always involved physically demanding labor and long hours that make the occupation unappealing to potential employees. The H-2A program, which allows individuals from foreign countries to fill seasonal agricultural positions left vacant by American workers, has helped to satisfy this need for labor since its creation in 1986 (Nigh). Although issues such as fair housing and healthcare have been studied in relation to H-2A workers, a direct investigation into the effects of language barriers between farm employers and H-2A employees has not been conducted.

Trends in the H-2A program show how the program is shifting, how farmers use the program, and different aspects related to the use of the program. Several statistics illustrate the increased use of the H-2A program and the corresponding scarcity of farm labor. Participation in the H-2A program has steadily increased since 2005, with approved visas increasing more than five times in fourteen years. For the year 2019, the average length of an H-2A position certification was 5.3 months (“Farm Labor”). In 2020, substantially more H-2A positions were approved for crop farm laborers than for livestock farmworkers, with 88.1% of certified positions belonging to the “Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop” category. Also of note is that Kentucky is one of the top ten states of employment for approved H-2A positions for the year

2020. However, this only represents 2.5% of all certified positions for fiscal year 2020 (Employment and Training Administration, U.S. DOL).

This thesis investigates the effects of the language barrier between English-speaking H-2A managers and their Spanish-speaking H-2A employees on Kentucky farms with special attention to the insights that can be gleaned from farm managers concerning the intersection of communication, language barriers, and the unique social and cultural environment created by the microcosm of the H-2A program. The project includes a literature review evaluating the currently documented effects of language barriers in various industries as they relate to the language barriers found within agriculture. IRB-approved interviews with farm managers provide original data to evaluate these potential effects, whether positive or negative. Since the study seeks to evaluate a language barrier's influence on communication between employer and employee, both managers who speak Spanish as a second language and those who do not were involved in the study. The primary goal of the study was to investigate the research question of how language barriers affect the relationship between farm managers and their H-2A employees.

Language is a system of communication. This study, while originally intending to be investigative of language barriers, recognizes that language use can be viewed as a signal of nationality, education, cultural identity, etc. In 2018, 57% of hired farm laborers, graders, and sorters were "Hispanic: Mexican Origin." The USDA Economic Research Service publication "Farm Labor" also says that, "Farm laborers have lower levels of educational attainment," than do other occupations in the industry, such as managers/ supervisors. Questions designed for the interviews conducted in this study originate from a place that recognizes the undertone of racism and prejudice that accompanies topics concerning the H-2A program, particularly regarding Spanish-speaking H-2A worker participants in the United States. These considerations carry the

underlying acknowledgement that some of these issues, such as racism and education level, may stem from the inextricably linked aspects of language and culture (Salo).

Literature Review

The H-2A: Temporary Agricultural Employment of Foreign Workers (H-2A) program is a specific type of United States governmental work visa designed for the seasonal, temporary labor needs of the agriculture industry. This program allows for lawful, nonimmigrant workers to work temporarily or seasonally as farm labor in the United States. The modern H-2A program was created by Congress as part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, and first-year visas were issued in 1992 after several years of regulatory establishment (Nigh). The rudimentary predecessor of the H-2A program, the H-2 program, was created as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (Nigh).

There are three fundamental aspects to the intent and regulations of the H-2A program that are essential for comprehensive understanding of the topic. First, the program is not limited to individuals solely from Mexico or Latin American countries. Individuals from 82 different countries and every continent are eligible for the H-2A visa as of January 19, 2021. Second, farmers that apply to employ migrant H-2A workers must prove to the federal government that the job postings have been made available to workers in the United States and that domestic workers have not come forward to fill the positions. These employers are required to advertise available jobs to domestic workers prior to using the H-2A program. This policy is intended to protect jobs for domestic workers and to ensure seasonal, agricultural jobs are not automatically outsourced to migrant workers before workers in the United States have a chance to apply. Even when a position is filled by an H-2A worker, that position can still be granted to a domestic

worker up to and until half of the work period has passed. In this situation, the H-2A worker returns to their home country and can no longer work that position. Third, the work opportunities that are allowed for the H-2A program are required to be temporary work. H-2A workers are only authorized to stay in the United States for a certain period, and there are strict limits to how long they can stay and how often they can return to work. At most, a worker can stay in the United States for three years, after which they must leave the country for at least three months before they can return. Although this is the maximum restriction, a seasonal cycle each year is much more common; where workers come at the beginning of the growing season, when the farmer needs help, and they leave at the end of the growing season, when most of the farm work is done. At most this can be 10 months at a time, but an employer must have a predetermined work period set out in their application when they apply for the H-2A program. That time period cannot be broken after it has been approved (“H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers”).

It is a common misconception that farm operators utilize the H-2A program in order to save on labor costs by hiring unauthorized workers. In reality, the program requires extensive licensure and does not necessarily save on expenses as employers must pay all fees and costs associated with bringing foreign workers to the United States. These costs include certification fees (\$100 application fee, plus \$10 per certified worker but not to exceed \$1000), worker petition fees (\$460); application fees including consulate, border stamp, and agent fees (~\$300/worker); transportation fees to the U.S. and in the country once they arrive (varies by worker), and miscellaneous costs including housing (averaging \$9,000-13,000/worker). At minimum, without including the varying cost of weekly transport to grocery stores and other incidentals, this brings the average cost per H-2A worker to \$10,266. The transportation fee to the U.S. is a substantial differentiator when considering average cost of the individual worker.

For example, paying for a flight from Mexico would most likely be cheaper than paying for a flight from a country that is further away from the U.S., such as South Africa. In addition to these fees, employers also must pay a fair wage. (“H-2A Visa Program”)

This fair wage is governed by an Adverse Effect Wage Rate concept that is designed so that H-2A worker wages do not negatively impact the wages of full-time domestic farmworkers. The Adverse Effect Wage Rate for Kentucky in 2020 was \$12.40. (“Farm Labor”). The Adverse Effect Wage Rate affects the minimum wage for workers in a way that steadily increases the wage. In a publication by the USDA Economic Research Service, the article “Farm Labor” says, “Over the past 30 years, wages for hired farmworkers have gradually risen, both in real terms and in relation to wages for the average nonsupervisory worker in a nonfarm occupation”.

H-2A workers provide a necessary service to the United States agricultural industry, and the need for them is growing steadily. According to the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of H-2A visas applied for and approved increased from 48,000 to 258,000 between 2005 and 2019 (“Farm Labor”). That is more than five times as many additional visas in 14 years.

This growth in demand for H-2A workers is put into perspective when analyzed in relation to totals. In 2019, the number of H-2A workers accounted for 10% of the nearly one million full-time equivalent jobs in crop agriculture (Costa and Martin). Not only that, but of salaried jobs in 2018, Latin American people represented 64% of agricultural workers, qualifiers, and classifiers. In addition, they accounted for 51% of all salaried workers in all agricultural occupations (“Farm Labor”). Although all of these individuals may not be part of the H-2A program, and all of them may not have a language barrier with their employers, these numbers

establish the need for H-2A workers in American agriculture and the potential for a language barrier.

The types of jobs that H-2A workers take part in has been shown to be related to various negative effects. The study designed for this project was designed to discover which of these effects can be found on Kentucky farms and how they affect the employer-employee relationship at the intersection of a language barrier. Work related effects can be physical effects, but more abstract effects have also been documented (Ramos). Examples of physical effects are impacts to health in areas of possible injury from the nature of the work and machine accidents (Dong). Examples of the abstract effects are depression, drowsiness, loneliness, and feelings related to community and acceptance. As mentioned before, evidence of these effects is not always in the agricultural industry, since not all language barrier research is conducted within the agriculture industry. However, each category of effect mentioned here is applicable to the circumstances of H-2A workers, regardless of the industry in which the research was conducted.

Regarding depression specifically, a study published in the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* by Athena K. Ramos, et al. discusses the depression and isolation of Latino farm workers in rural Nebraska. According to this study, almost half of the 200 participants were depressed. Factors that contributed to this depression include economic and logistic factors, level of acculturation and isolation, state of personal health, etc. Economic and logistic factors, such as experiencing discrimination, poor bathroom conditions, difficulty with paperwork, etc. were the most important factors identified. Factors of acculturation and isolation were the second most important. Part of this type of stress involves feelings of isolation and difficulty meeting other people. These negative effects are not only mental, but physical as well. Ramos said that “stress

over acculturation and social isolation is positively associated with poor self-rated health” (“Stress Factors Contributing to Depression Among Latino Migrant Farmworkers in Nebraska”).

In another study of the social isolation of agriculture in Spain and the United States, Izcarra-Palacios said that the problem of social isolation of foreign day laborers comes from three factors: “i. / The remote location of the labor fields; ii./ the need to stay out of the sight of the immigration authorities; iii./ the breakdown of solidarity networks caused by competition for employment ” (101). Although that refers to undocumented workers and not documented H-2A workers, remote location of labor fields and the ties to social isolation remain as an applicable factor in the H-2A program. The study designed for this project, as it focuses on the farm managers’ perspective, asks specifically about community engagement opportunities for H-2A employees as it relates to these effects of social isolation.

One of the industries with the most widely documented language barriers with an abundance of academic literature is that of health care services. In healthcare, most issues related to language barriers arise from not only the difference in language, but also cultural differences demonstrated in things such as standards of pain tolerance, the description of symptoms, linguistic expressions, etc. (Figueroa-Saavedra, 151-152). Without proper communication, health services can turn into inadequate services with fragile interpersonal communication and transfer of accurate health data. Miguel Figueroa-Saavedra said in his 2009 study that “the linguistic problem is also a problem of accessibility and information on rights and services” (155). He argues that language barriers in health lead to "unnecessary surgeries, inadvertent symptoms and overdosed prescriptions" (Figueroa-Saavedra 156).

Jessica Bayner in her thesis “Communication: Exploring Language and Cultural Barriers in Healthcare” discusses the different levels of communication in healthcare for people who

speaking Spanish specifically in an English-speaking healthcare system. There were three levels: One, fluent in English; two, a little bit of English; and three, non-English speaking. She found that individuals in both categories one and three had similar feelings of satisfaction with medical care. But individuals within group two, those with limited but existent English-speaking capability, had language barriers with their healthcare professional, and difficulty with communication (Bayner 33). Individuals in group one were able to properly express their needs with their healthcare provider themselves and individuals in group three were more likely to be provided with language support than those in group two were, since the English language level of group three was non-functional. But group two, those who could speak a little bit of English, were not able to express themselves fully like individuals in group one, nor was their English deemed poor enough to be afforded proper language support like the individuals of group three. This led to their dissatisfaction with communication. Language proficiency or language support were the keys here to communication satisfaction.

On the negative physical effects of language barriers, the construction industry and the worker training process shed a light on the topic. Between 2003 and 2009, Hispanic people accounted for 35.5% of the fatal falls from roofs in the construction industry, even though Hispanics accounted for only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total construction fatalities (Dong). Dong said, “In addition, workers who were younger than 20 years or older than 44 years, racial minorities, Hispanics, and immigrant workers had a higher death rate of falls from roofs than the construction industry overall.” This data found that being young, Hispanic, and not having been employed with a current employer long would contribute to an individual’s likelihood of falling from a roof during construction. It is possible that a training process with a language barrier

combined with inexperience in a hazardous job could contribute to work accidents. This negative effect of language barriers was built into the study to be asked of the farm managers.

On language barriers in the agriculture industry specifically, one last example of the negative effects of language barriers is the issue of power dynamics in relation to women in agriculture. The work environment in agriculture in most cases is dominated by men (Weaver). Coupled with a language barrier between female Spanish-speaking workers and English-speaking employers that creates a dependency on an English-speaking foreman, the door is open for exploitation (Weaver). An English-speaking foreman is a worker who natively speaks Spanish like their other Spanish-speaking coworkers, but who speaks more English than most of the other workers. English-speaking foremen in many cases act as translator and problem-solver for their English-speaking employers. In a 2017 study on power dynamics for women, Nicole Davis Weaver said that “the combination of a male-dominated work environment coupled by language barriers represent dangerous power differentials and place women in vulnerable predicaments” (15). For this reason, the issue of language barriers is very real for these people, and very important in their lives. This idea of reliance on English-speaking foreman was included in the ideology behind a portion of the questions prepared for the farm manager interviews.

Methods

This project was approved by Murray State University’s Institutional Review Board. All materials for the study such as interview questions, recruitment scripts, pre-interview scripts, and consent forms were developed and gathered for the project from August 2020 to November 2020 (appendix A, B, C, D, E, F). Data collection began in March 2021. Synchronous, virtual

interviews were the sole source of data collection. All interviews were conducted in March 2021, with a total of 5 interviews at the end of the data collection period.

The term “farm manager” is used to refer to the individuals who employ Spanish-speaking H-2A workers. In the agriculture industry, a farm manager could be a person employed by an owner to manage the operation of a farm, or a farm manager could be what is known as an owner-operator. These individuals own the farm and its assets and manage the operation of the farm for themselves. Owner-operators are the most common type of farm manager in the US, with just over 60% of U.S. land managed in this way (“Economic Research Service”). For the purposes of this study and this sample, all farm managers were the owner-operators of their farming operations. While that is the case for this sample in particular, the term “farm manager” is still used since the study was not designed exclusively for owner-operators but was open to employed farm managers as well.

Separate sets of interview questions were developed for Spanish-speaking H-2A workers, Spanish-speaking farm managers who employ Spanish-speaking H-2A workers, and non-Spanish-speaking farm managers who employ Spanish-speaking H-2A workers. All three interview sets focused on the same core set of questions, with relevant modifications based upon the classification of the interview. The most drastically different interview was the interview designed for Spanish-speaking H-2A employees. “Spanish-speaking farm manager” refers to a native speaker of English that has also learned to speak Spanish and identifies as an individual who speaks Spanish. Questions were formulated after review of literature on language barriers revealed potential areas of study, such as workers’ social connection with their host community, accidents related to training with a language barrier, power dynamics within the H-2A program, and emotional stress related to working within the H-2A program. Interview questions developed

for the worker interviews focused on a worker's experience and quality of life as an H-2A worker. Topics included their relationship with their employer, social support systems during the program, loneliness, and community reception to their presence. Manager interviews were designed to be a complement to the worker interviews, and the questions focused on the manager's communication methods with their H-2A employees, relationships with their H-2A employees, community interaction available to their workers, and misunderstandings or accidents related to a language barrier. Between the two manager surveys each had the same core set of questions but differed in questions related to language and language learning. The Spanish-speaking classification of a farm manager was determined during the recruitment process before the interview took place so the correct set of questions could be issued during the interview.

Each question developed for the premade interview scripts was either a yes or no question, a question with multiple choice options, or open ended. All questions were designed to have follow up discussion to elaborate on the initial answers so that as much detail and nuance as possible could be gathered. The Spanish Proficiency scale featured in question five of the non-Spanish-speaking manager interview (appendix A) and question two of the Spanish-speaking manager interview (appendix B) was derivative of the Council of Europe CEFR assessment grid (appendix F), which is used to determine the standardized language level proficiency of an individual in European countries. The five language proficiency levels created for the study materials are simplified and condensed levels of the criteria expressed in the CEFR scale.

Originally, the study was designed to interview Spanish-speaking H-2A workers and the farm managers who employ them. After study material development and the Institutional Review Board approval process, however, a decision was made to focus on conducting interviews with farm managers only. As the H-2A agricultural migrant worker program is seasonal by definition,

and most farms require seasonal workers in the warmer spring and summer months when crops are growing, many of the workers that would qualify to participate in the study had returned to their home countries during the data collection period. Interviews were also required to be conducted virtually by the Institutional Review Board to adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines. This also limited worker interview availability due to concerns of undue influence related to unreliable access of workers to privacy, technology, and internet connection.

Participants were recruited by convenience and snowball methods for this small pilot case study. Three of the manager participants were already a part of existing agricultural networks that allowed them to be identified as potential participants and to be contacted for participation. The other two participants were identified through snowball referral methods from managers that had already participated in the study.

All interviews were audio and video recorded. Three interviews were conducted directly via an online meeting platform and two were directed through the online meeting platform while the participants dialed into the platform on their personal cellular devices. Participants were prepped in the online meeting room before the official interview and recording began and were also debriefed after the recording was stopped. This was to ensure the comfort of the participants, go over any questions regarding the informed consent form, reiterate procedures related to confidentiality and the recording of the interviews, and develop rapport before embarking on an interview containing questions that had the potential to be perceived as sensitive material.

After the data collection period ended, interviews were inserted into an auto-transcribing program with 85% accuracy. The auto transcriptions were then manually corrected for spelling

accuracy, punctuation, voice inflection, and speaker labeling. After transcription was complete, digital versions of the documents were used for the data analyses process.

The Emerson Coding process was utilized to conduct a thematic analysis for this qualitative study (Emerson et al. 142-168, ch. 6). A single analyst (C.E.C.) used an open coding method to code interviews and observations taken during data collection to identify themes. The Emerson Coding analysis process involves all phases of the research study, including during the interview, while transcription takes place, and during the transcript coding process. The interview transcripts, field notes taken during the interviews, notes taken during the transcription process, and themes identified during coding are all subject to the identification of patterns and development and themes using this method.

Results

A total of five interviews were conducted during the data collection process. The majority of the managers identified as non-Spanish-speaking managers. The average length of the interviews was 54 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 62 minutes and the shortest interview lasting almost 48 minutes. From these interviews, data was analyzed, and results have been divided into two sections, descriptive statistics and themes. The descriptive statistics pertain strictly to the information directly elicited by the questions asked during the manager interviews that were conducted. Two main themes and twelve total subthemes were identified. The themes section reports the results of the Emerson coding method after the review of interview transcripts, post-interview memos, and notes using open coding. The first theme identified relates to the H-2A program in general and new understandings related to the H-2A program. Eight of the twelve subthemes are part of this first theme. The second theme revolves around

communication methods and relationship attitudes of the managers. The remaining four subthemes belong to this main theme.

Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1. These include the pseudonyms for each respective farm manager participant. For example, “MP1” stands for “Manager Participant 1,” and so on until MP5. The other characteristics included in Table 1 are the Manager Language Classification, whether Spanish-speaking or non-Spanish-speaking, Identified Spanish Proficiency, Main Agriculture Industry, Average Number of H-2A Employees, and Years Using the H-2A Program. These were all derived from questions asked during the interviews.

Table 1: Manager Characteristics

Pseudonym	Manager Language Classification	Self-Identified Spanish Proficiency	Main Industry	Number of H-2A Employees	Years Using the H-2A program
MP1	Non-Spanish-speaking	Level 1	Animal	6	10
MP2	Spanish-speaking	Level 4	Specialty row crop	6-8	25
MP3	Non-Spanish-speaking	Level 3	Specialty row crop, animal	24	15
MP4	Non-Spanish-speaking	Level 3	Specialty row crop, horticulture	100	27
MP5	Non-Spanish-speaking	Level 3	Row crop, specialty row crop, animal	17	15

Themes resulted from systematic, thematic analysis that revealed patterns and connections between data points. These themes appeared repeatedly in the data and were analyzed as significant if they kept coming up in each of the interviews. Some of the themes were not even directly asked about, they were just part of the data offered during the interview that happened to correlate with other data that other managers provided too. The general H-2A program themes represent what was learned about the migrant workers program throughout the process of speaking with the managers. These themes typically go beyond what was directly asked in the interview, but what enough managers felt was important to the topic to have a majority or a certain number of managers mention the same thing without being directly asked. These themes do not necessarily relate to the topic of language barriers themselves but are an integral part of the landscape in which language barriers in agriculture exist. Manager Perspective themes focus on what was found after careful review of the farm managers' responses and what they revealed about underlying philosophies of the managers. If the responses to any particular question led to the overwhelming development of a theme, then those responses are not included in the descriptive statistics section.

Descriptive Statistics

Four out of the five managers said that most of their H-2A workers are the same every season, with only a few workers changing year to year. The single manager who said they do not have the same workers each year still said that they have a small group of workers that remain the same, but most of the others rotate in and out of their operation. This small group of workers is later referred to as the "core group."

While three out of four non-Spanish-speaking managers said that they had considered learning Spanish, one said that they had ultimately decided they would not consider pursuing learning the language. The others alluded to their current willingness to learn, but this particular manager expressed reluctance to ever learn, on account of their age and proximity to retirement. Available time considering the labor-intensive nature of farm work and depleted energy after a long day's work were also a factor for this manager. The Spanish-speaking manager was not asked this question since they have already taken steps to learn Spanish and speak the language at a conversational level.

Every non-Spanish-speaking manager but one said their main form of communication with their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers is through an English-speaking H-2A foreman. This foreman is a native Spanish speaker and is typically "chosen" because the individual has been working on the farm manager's operation for an extended period of time and has a higher proficiency with English than most of the other H-2A workers. The manager and foreman have had the opportunity to form a relationship and build trust. All managers reported using additional methods of communication to supplement their main form of communication as seen in Table 2. The manager that did not use an English-speaking foreman as their main form of communication reported that their main form of communication was "Spanglish." This means the manager uses a mix of English and Spanish to communicate directly with their H-2A workers, without a middleman. The Spanish-speaking manager's main form of communication was speaking Spanish to their workers directly.

Table 2: Communication Methods Beyond Main Communication Type

Type of Supplemental Communication	Managers Reported Using Communication Form
Gestures	2
Basic English	4
Basic Spanish	3
Spanglish	2
Phone Pictures	1
Mobile App Translators	3
Written Examples	1
Demonstrations of Task	4

Three out of the five managers said they have non-H-2A employees in addition to their H-2A employees. Out of these three managers, two said that their non-H-2A employees do not speak Spanish, and one said that at least one of their non-H-2A employees speaks some Spanish and makes an active attempt to learn more of the language. Also out of these three managers, two said that their H-2A and non-H-2A employees interact and get along, while one manager indicated uncertainty about the quality of the relationship between the two groups.

The data collected from the interview question asking the managers to describe their relationship to their H-2A employees serves as the main basis for the Manager Perspective theme. Two of the managers described their H-2A workers as “family” during their response to this question, and two of the managers used the word “friend” in their description of their relationship with the H-2A employees.

On job/safety training methods, there were many methods reported. Managers did not identify one single method used to train their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers but offered a conglomerate of the various methods they use. Those mentioned include printed brochures and literature in Spanish, on the job training, experienced workers teaching new workers, watch and learn style, step-by-step demonstrations, structured trainings with a translator, shadowing, training videos provided by the H-2A program, ride-alongs, etc. Four out of the five managers mentioned experienced H-2A workers that have already been on the farm operation a number of years training the H-2A employees that are new to the farm operation.

Two of the four non-Spanish-speaking managers said that they have experienced interpersonal relationship problems between their H-2A employees that have been difficult to solve because of a language barrier, while the other two said they have not. This question was not asked of the Spanish-speaking manager. Examples of an interpersonal relationship problem are domestic disputes between workers because of shared living conditions, a worker's defiance of the authority of an English-speaking foreman, or even physical fights between workers. One manager reported an incident where a foreman charged money of their H-2A coworkers for a free lunch provided to the whole worker crew by the employer. This issue occurred because the foreman spoke more English than the others and took advantage of their coworkers' inability to communicate fully with the employer.

When asked the question, "Do you feel you effectively communicate with your H-2A employees?" four out of the five non-Spanish-speaking farm managers answered, "Yes." One farm manager responded, "No." This question was not asked of the Spanish-speaking manager.

Each manager was asked, "How long does it take for you to get your point across?" MP1 said it takes two or three different times to get their point across, and they may have to simplify

the communication or solicit the help of one of the H-2A workers who speak English. MP2, the Spanish-speaking manager, said it takes seconds for them to get their point across. MP3, like MP2, said it takes two to three different times to give directions to their H-2A employees. MP4 responded, “Not long! Not long at all.” MP5 responded, “Typically pretty fast,” but acknowledged it takes longer for new workers to understand than veteran workers.

Three out of five managers said that there have been accidents with their H-2A workers because of a language barrier, with the other two saying there have not been accidents because of a language barrier. One of the managers that said there had not been accidents caused by language barriers did say that they thought some of the accidents they had experienced with their H-2A workers were caused by the worker being in too much of a rush. Four out of five farm managers said that misunderstandings have occurred with their H-2A workers because of a language barrier, one of which was the Spanish-speaking farm manager. The remaining manager said they could not think of any misunderstandings caused by language barriers. Examples of accidents include car wrecks, telephone pole collisions, poison ivy exposure, work related injury, etc. Examples of misunderstandings include putting gasoline in a diesel engine, incorrectly applying chemicals, traveling to the wrong farm, arriving for a task at the wrong time, using improper cleaning supplies to clean car windshields, etc. The Spanish-speaking manager only reported one accident, which was an incident from their early days involved in the program, where a worker came into contact with poison ivy. However, that was before the manager had learned Spanish. No other accidents were reported outside of this one.

While all the managers mentioned several different types of opportunities for their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers to learn English, no manager mentioned a main learning opportunity that is currently available to their workers. Previous or tentative learning

opportunities include tutoring programs provided by various churches, structured governmental programs that provide formal lessons to workers, and language books. The most common learning opportunity mentioned by the managers was the “learn-as-you-go style without informal instruction.” Informal instruction refers to the conscious effort on the part of the manager or other native English speaker to teach language throughout the day as the opportunity arises. The “learn-as-you-go” style does not include this structured form of learning, but rather is dependent on the workers’ ability to learn English from day-to-day interaction without guidance.

Community interactions that the H-2A workers experience involve shopping in stores like Wal-Mart, the AT&T store, other grocery stores, and the mall; attending yard sales, county fairs, and community festivals; and attending the family functions of their employer. All other community interaction is contained within the H-2A worker community, whether that be on the farm at which they work or another farm in the area. This nuclear community activity is discussed in more detail in the General H-2A Program theme.

Only one manager indicated that they had heard the phrase, “We speak English here,” used on their operation. Four out of the five employers said they had not heard the phrase spoken on their operation. However, three managers gave examples of community hostility that they had encountered. One manager was informed of a comment from a community member that referred to one of their H-2A workers as a “wetback.” One manager reported disdain from the public in restaurants when the group was speaking Spanish. That manager said, “And I think there are some that look down their noses at us for speaking Spanish.” The final example reported by a manager was having heard the phrase, “If they’re coming here, then they need to learn our language [English],” from the surrounding community. This hostility from the community

harkens back to the previously mentioned idea that while the interviews directly related to language barriers, the underlying tone of the issue links back to prejudice and racism.

Of the four non-Spanish-speaking managers, two said their relationship with their H-2A employees would be different if they both spoke the same language, one said the relationship would possibly be different, and one said the relationship would not be different. The Spanish-speaking manager was not asked this question.

Some questions were specific to the single Spanish-speaking manager interview that was conducted. When asked why MP2 learned Spanish, they replied, “Out of necessity.” MP2 reported that they learned Spanish from speaking with their workers and using Spanish-language books. MP2 has never had a formal Spanish class. MP2 responded, “Yes,” to the question, “Would you be able to effectively communicate with your H-2A workers if you did not speak Spanish?” MP2 said, “It would be a challenge for me, but. I see a lot of other workers and farmers do it, so I think it could probably be done.” They then followed up with the caveat, “It just makes life so much easier if you can communicate.”

Three managers mentioned that they have visited at least one of their H-2A workers in the worker’s home country. This information came up during the interviews without a directly related question and was volunteered by the farm managers. This does not exclude the remaining two farm managers from the possibility that they also have visited the homes of their workers.

Themes

During the data analysis process, two categories of coding became prevalent enough to be identified as themes. These themes presented themselves in multiple interviews, in most cases indirectly related to the question that was directly asked of the participant. The consistent

recurrence of these topics and voluntary nature of the details that led to the subtheme coding demonstrate the significance of the themes and subthemes.

General H-2A Program

The way in which the interview questions were designed naturally promoted discussion about the H-2A program as an institution and a process within the managers' lived experience. The General H-2A Program theme features recurring topics found in information independently volunteered by the farm manager participants during their interviews. General H-2A Program subthemes, while not all directly related to language barrier effects, provide important context to language barriers in agriculture, since the circumstances of the language barriers rely so heavily on the structure of the H-2A program and the unique living experience it creates.

Agricultural Labor Shortages

Consistent with the literature on the topic, every manager expressed that they began using the H-2A program because they needed a stable and reliable workforce and were experiencing a labor shortage. MP1 outlined the traits they valued in the H-2A program workers, calling them hardworking, dependable, loyal, and willing to work. MP2 needed the labor and expressed they could not get it from American workers in the United States. They said, "I chose the program because there wasn't anyone else hardly willing to work in tobacco." MP3 said, "Well, we couldn't find any help here locally." MP4 said, "One simple answer, a lack of available, local labor." MP5 responded that they needed consistent labor in order to handle the workload of the farm, and the available labor in the United States did not adequately meet the needs of the agricultural timeline. Three managers also expressed that they became involved in the H-2A

program because their neighbors had success with the program and the managers were able to view the program as a third-party before choosing to invest in the program themselves.

Core Worker Groups

The idea of a “core group” appeared many times throughout the interviews and quickly became one of the first themes identified. A “core group” represents the individuals that remain at one farming operation under a certain employer year after year. Members of a manager’s core group are most commonly some of those who were part of the original worker group when a manager first began utilizing the H-2A migrant worker program. All managers said they have at least a few workers that come back every year, even if the other workers change year to year. The individuals in a manager’s core group form especially close relationships with their employer and enjoy certain influence as a result. The core group assists the farm manager with training new employees, solving disputes, translating, and even recruiting next year’s workers.

Program Recruitment Methods

Four of the five farm managers reported that, in many cases, their H-2A workers for the next year come completely or partly from the family members or acquaintances of the core group. This recruitment method is convenient for the farm manager, reduces the likelihood that the manager will hire a worker that is a bad fit for their operation, and increases the probability that the returning H-2A workers will get along with the new H-2A workers. Two of the managers specifically mention part of their deference to their core group is linked to their relationship with those individuals. These farm managers value the comfort and quality of life for these workers in particular, since they have known them for many years, and like to give

them the ability to choose the other workers they will be living and working with. MP1 said, “So they’re going to be together pretty much 24/7 for nine months out of the year. So that has to be something that you can get along with and have a good relationship.” MP2 said, “And if they don’t get along with [my main worker], then they won’t be invited back the next year.”

Machinery Operation

While accidents in general were a part of the prepared interview questions, difficulties involving operating machinery, particularly tractors but not exclusively, were mentioned by every single manager. MP3 will not allow H-2A workers to drive certain vehicles and will take years to decide who can drive or begin to learn to drive the tractors. They mentioned an incident where a worker got “the scaffold wagon up on a fender of the tractor and [broke] it off.” MP4 said, “It takes me a year or two to find out if a new one is capable of [operating a tractor] or not.” However, when the Spanish-speaking manager spoke about training H-2A workers to drive tractors, MP2 expressed that it was relatively easy for them to train their workers to operate the tractors. They acknowledged the danger of the task and the importance of proper training, “I mean, there’s some really important things that could lead, if you don’t cover them, that could lead to accidents.” MP2 followed that statement with a simple explanation that they simply cover those topics by speaking to the workers in Spanish.

Language Barriers in Health Care

The main ramification reported by the farm managers directly related to language barriers was the difficulty created by language barriers for their H-2A workers in the medical field. Four out of the five managers reported incidents of having to navigate a language barrier in the

medical field at some point in their time as employers of Spanish-speaking H-2A workers, even if some encountered more difficulty than others. One manager reported having a Spanish-speaking interpreter come and explain COVID-19 regulations at the beginning of the pandemic, to ensure workers understood all that was going to have to be done in order to maintain the safety and health of themselves and the members of the farming operation. Four total managers referenced stories about hospital encounters throughout their time employing H-2A workers. MP1 and MP5 reported significant hardship related to medical situations and language barriers, specifically in situations where their workers were in need of medical health care from American hospitals. MP2 and MP4 spoke of incidents where their workers sought medical care, but these managers specifically mentioned why a language barrier did not affect quality of care or access to care. MP3 did not give an anecdote related to healthcare during their interview.

Those managers that reported hardships involving language barriers and healthcare spoke of two reasons that made the situations difficult, which were a pre-care language barrier and an intra-care language barrier. This first hardship takes place in communication during the process of seeking care, at the point when the ailment arose, in the employer-employee relationship. MP1 reported a case where a worker clearly was experiencing an illness, and MP1 had great difficulty communicating with the worker and other workers involved in the issue to speak about the illness and what was happening to the worker. The sick individual could only express that they were “very sick,” and other workers helping with communication could not elaborate more either. That individual ended up going to the hospital and had emergency gallbladder removal surgery that same day. MP5 offered a story of a similar situation. An H-2A worker was sick for a couple of days and neither the worker nor the manager could figure out why. The worker was unable to communicate their symptoms or severity of pain in a way that MP5 could understand.

The only communication the manager could understand from their worker was, “Monsters in the belly.” The worker was taken to the hospital and the hospital staff performed an appendectomy on the individual that day. On this story, MP5 said, “So he didn’t know himself how to even explain it to me. And then we ended up in the hospital.” A combination of the managers’ low Spanish language proficiency level and the workers’ equally low English language proficiency level prohibited communication in the pre-care stage of the medical situations experienced.

The second hardship reported during medical situations comes from communication during the health care process while undergoing care, typically at the medical facility and with healthcare providers. MP1 and MP5 both said that they have been in situations with doctors and nurses who do not speak Spanish, and where the hospitals in which the managers are seeking medical care for their H-2A employees are not equipped with translators or a Spanish-language service. MP1 reported several separate situations where a language barrier in a healthcare facility made the care process difficult, including asking about allergies and finding out the worker’s medical history. MP1 expressed that while the communication style they normally have in their employer-employee relationship of using a variety of methods to communicate such as simplified English, gestures, and pictures works well for farm-related work tasks, that style is not adequate when precise medical information is required. MP1 said, “So that was a HUGE challenge of trying to find out medical history, past history. You know, just, that was a challenge as far as not being able to communicate the Spanish with him and communicate what I’m trying to say.” MP5 reported the same lack of Spanish-language services, whether with a technological system or Spanish language proficiency in the doctors or nurses at care facilities, in most of their experience with seeking medical care for their workers in hospitals. MP5 reported one instance where none of the medical staff on the floor could speak Spanish, but there was a janitor who

could speak Spanish who the staff knew. They called in the janitor to help interpret the care visit at the hospital since there was no one else available with Spanish language proficiency sufficient to discuss medical topics with specificity. MP5 did also report that Spanish-language support at the hospitals in their area has improved, saying, “The hospital last year was a little better.” The manager described how, during a medical emergency involving an allergy with one of their workers, the hospital had a videocall system with a monitor and a live interpreter that they were able to provide for the care of the Spanish-speaking H-2A worker. MP5 said, “And the interpreter was able to talk to him and help him. Especially... the doctors. The doctors and nurses had no idea how to translate even words.”

The managers who did not report difficulty from a language barrier while seeking care for their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers both had access to Spanish-language support throughout the process. MP2, the Spanish-speaking farm manager, was able to speak Spanish themselves and adequately communicate in medical situations with their worker and with the healthcare provider involved. MP2 said, “If we’ve had a cut or a laceration, which has happened two or three times, or sick... I’ll go and I’ll translate to the doctor.” When asked if they had success in those situations, MP2 replied, “Oh, yeah, you know, it’s not bad.” MP4 reported no concerns with language barriers and their history seeking medical care for their workers because the hospitals in their area have doctors and nurses who speak Spanish. They said, “And so, thank goodness for that, because that’s an example there where I totally wouldn’t understand any Spanish, you know, with a medical condition.” MP4 also described the effect of having bilingual local medical staff. They said, “And so it’s, it makes it easy.”

English Learning Program

Every single manager mentioned a program in the past that offered English-learning services to their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers. It is probable that the managers could have been referencing different programs. When the managers were asked if their workers had opportunities to learn English, this was the main opportunity that was mentioned, and outside of these structured, third-party programs, the workers have limited opportunity to learn English. This program was most likely a governmental program. Some mentioned that workers had to be under a certain age to be eligible for the program, while other programs mentioned were available to all ages.

Monetary Benefit of Program Participation

Three managers mentioned ways in which working in the program monetarily improves the lives of their workers. MP1 said that some of their workers utilize the H-2A program to send their kids to college, and that at least one of those workers currently has children enrolled in college. MP3 acknowledged that one motivation for their workers to participate in the program is to, “try to help their family out at home.” MP4 explained the difference in quality of living in their workers’ home lives between workers who have been working in the H-2A program for several years versus a worker that may be new to the H-2A program. They said, “You know, [their homes are nicer], their children are getting a better education.”

Worker Socialization

Another theme identified was the idea that most socialization the H-2A employees receive outside of the social network of their own farm mainly comes from other members of the

Spanish-speaking H-2A employee community on other farming operations. The literature speaks on negative effects of social isolation that can stem from language barriers and the H-2A program, so community and socialization opportunities are important for individuals participating in the H-2A program. Two managers mentioned that their H-2A employees may choose to drive an hour or an hour and a half to reach a specific community, often one that contains family members or friends that are also working in the United States on a different farm. Two managers reported that their workers participate in a soccer league with other H-2A workers. Other managers mentioned that workers will have H-2A community gatherings for meals and fellowship. MP4 said, “Two or three farmers’ groups...may gather up and have a meal. You know, they do a lot of that.” MP5 said, “Most of times they’re here or they go to another house and eat and socialize.” Although interaction with the host community is mentioned with visits to stores or occasional festivals, it seems that the main form of social interaction outside of the farm unit is with other H-2A communities in the region.

Manager Perspective

Manager Perspective themes stem from the managers’ view on relationships and communication strategies, as well as direct language barrier effects.

Transactional vs. Relational

This theme is directly related to the research question of how language barriers affect the employer-employee relationship. Exact quality of life of Spanish-speaking H-2A workers as related to language barriers could not be determined since interviews with the workers themselves were not conducted, but insights related to the attitudes of the managers were

identified during the interviews. Whether the farm manager spoke Spanish, i.e., the presence of a language barrier, was not the determining factor for positive relational attitudes from the managers towards their workers. Based on the interviews, the determining factor was the managers' perceived personal philosophy and internal worldview.

These personal philosophies were distilled into two attitudes held by the managers, transactional and relational. Transactional managers have a larger focus on the role of H-2A participants as employees, while relational managers are interested in their H-2A employees not only as workers, but also as individuals (see table 3). Several factors were identified from the thematic analysis that distinguished between a transactional or relational manager.

Table 3: Type of Attitude by Manager

Manager	Attitude
MP1	Relational
MP2	Relational
MP3	Transactional
MP4	Semi-transactional
MP5	Relational

A manager was identified as transactional if they mainly viewed their H-2A employees as employees, and nothing more. Transactional managers are more focused on H-2A workers' presence as the means to fulfill a job function and are less concerned with their lived experience throughout the program as individuals. Characteristics of a transactional manager may include: If

a manager acknowledged the fact that the workers were in the United States to do a job; did not express interest in getting to know the workers as individuals, now or in the past; or only described things required by law to be provided to the workers when asked about their relationship to their employees.

The relational attitude was identified through several characteristics as well, expressed throughout the manager interviews. Those who mentioned cultural learning benefits from having H-2A workers, regularly sharing meals with their workers, inviting them to family events, visiting workers in their home countries, etc. were relational managers. While all managers recognize that utilizing the H-2A program and employing migrant workers is a business decision and a monetary investment, relational managers are more concerned with the workers as individuals than transactional managers. They balance the needs of their business, i.e., the labor they need from the workers, and which the workers are contractually obligated to provide them, with the human aspect of the program, i.e. the fact that the workers are not just a means to an end, but individuals in their own right. These managers were interested in learning about the culture of their workers, were understanding about family-related issues that would impact any person's ability to work well (death in the family, marital relationship issues, etc.), as well as empathetic toward unique stresses related to the H-2A program, such as homesickness and social isolation. Expressing empathy for the challenges created by participating in the H-2A program was also a relational characteristic. MP1 said, "Just want to be home with their wives and their children. You know, you can imagine how much their children grow over a year's time, you know, nine months. That's a long time." MP2 said, "It's a hardship to be away from your family, when they come in May and they don't go home until December, and they haven't been with

their wives or their significant others. That's difficult." MP4 said, "They make a lot of sacrifices in their personal life to come up here to work for us."

English-Speaking Foremen

All non-Spanish-speaking managers use an English-speaking foreman, which has already been mentioned as the main form of communication for most non-Spanish-speaking managers. Even the Spanish-speaking manager occasionally uses a foreman so that more complex issues can be communicated in the native language of the workers in a more detailed delivery than the manager's Spanish level allows them to explain a task in.

An English-speaking foreman is an H-2A worker who natively speaks Spanish just like their fellow Spanish-speaking H-2A employees, but who speaks more English than most of the other workers. These foremen are often the individuals who have been at an operation the longest, and there may be anywhere from one to three "foremen." Non-Spanish-speaking managers often rely heavily on these foremen to communicate with the rest of their Spanish-speaking H-2A workers. MP3 said, "We turn to those three people [their foremen] every day to get things orchestrated." When describing how they communicate with their H-2A workers, MP1 said, "So but yeah, that's how we do it. We depend on them [the English-speaking foremen]."

Manager Opportunity Cost

Non-Spanish-speaking managers expressed a consistent theme of opportunity cost when discussing if they had considered learning Spanish and what it would take for them to consider seriously pursuing learning Spanish. Each non-Spanish-speaking manager reported some factor of time, energy, age, or usefulness of available resources as a reason they have not seriously

undertaken learning the language. MP1 said, “Well, I mean, I guess time would be my biggest challenge... So we’d have to be, something that I could access easily and then something that I could work in with, you know, while I’m multitasking.” MP4 said, “There’s just so many hours in the day. And it seems like we devote, we devote most of ‘em to the work side of it.” MP5 did seriously pursue Spanish learning for a time but stopped when the formality of the lessons did not apply to conversational Spanish their workers use and the material was not directly applicable to agriculture.

These things represent the opportunity cost for these managers. For MP5, even though they tried to learn the language, they determined that formal language learning would take too long to reach the level of usefulness in their everyday life that they wanted to achieve, and so they gave it up. Others acknowledged that the agricultural workload oftentimes leaves a person weary at the end of the day and time poor. These opportunity costs are what keep the non-Spanish-speaking managers from learning to speak Spanish.

Similarity in Challenges

Spanish-speaking managers still have some of the same problems as non-Spanish-speaking managers. While a Spanish-speaking manager has a much higher ability to communicate with their workers and is able to get their point across quickly with directions and communication, they still face some of the same challenges as non-Spanish-speaking managers when it comes to detailed communication or instructions. Examples of this detailed communication include chemical applications involving specific measurements, proper communication of times, various vocabulary topics, and communicating other forms of numbers and measurements.

Discussion

The Spanish-language proficiency of each respective manager was not linked to their relational attitude designation. This speaks to the research question posed by this thesis and shows that the language barrier itself is not what affects the employer-employee relationship the most, but rather the attitude of the managers. While language was originally thought to be the indicator of positive employer-employee relationships, this study finds that the personal attitude of the manager is more important than the language that they speak.

Several insights emerged from the intersection of the managers' responses and the descriptive statistics collected on each manager. MP4 was one of the managers who reported having, for the most part, the same workers each season. This manager estimated their turnover rate as low as 3%. This is particularly surprising because MP4 actually employs the highest number of H-2A workers out of all of the managers who participated in the study, with an average of 100 workers every season. The reason for this low turnover rate cannot be known without more data on their operation but could be related very loosely to the manager's classification as a mostly-relational manager. The manager's turnover estimate could also be inaccurate to some degree, and if underestimated, would change the significance of the low rate.

Responses to the question related to interpersonal challenges that were difficult to solve because of a language barrier may be inconsistent or unreliable in some instances. Most managers who mentioned that they did not have difficulties solving an interpersonal issue between their workers because of a language barrier would then go on to tell a story that made it clear that a language barrier was a factor in the problem-solving process. Almost always it was necessary to get an English-speaking foreman to help solve the issue, whether that be with translating or using their personal influence with their coworkers. Additionally, if a manager

responded “No,” that did not mean that interpersonal relationship problems did not exist at all between the workers, just that the manager did not think a language barrier made the issue hard to solve or was a factor in the problem-solving process. One of the managers who responded “Yes” to this question did however mention that language translation apps have recently made solving interpersonal relationship issues a lot easier.

The managers themselves felt they effectively communicate with their workers, but that does not mean that the workers feel the same. Worker interviews would greatly illuminate the similarities and differences between the answers of both demographics and would provide both sides of the story instead of just one. One of the non-Spanish-speaking managers who said they feel they effectively communicate with their workers said that their answer could be related to their workers coming back to their operation every year, and the fact that they have developed a mutual form of communication with gestures, phrases, and words that the returning workers and the manager all understand after years of working together. That manager was classified as a relational manager. It’s interesting to note that the Spanish-speaking manager also mentioned this type of shared language as well, only they talked about new workers who might have a harder time understanding “an American speak[ing] Spanish,” than the workers who have been with their farm operation for many years.

Consistent with the literature on the topic, there was a marked difference in outcomes in health care situations when there was language support present, whether in the form of a live Spanish speaker or a technological Spanish language support system integrated into the hospital. The two managers with language support expressed much less concern and stress related to the hospital-related anecdotes they offered than those that did not have live language support in a health setting. Live language support could be in the form of speaking Spanish themselves, or

having staff within the hospital who spoke Spanish. The managers who did not experience language support in healthcare recognized medical situations as the most difficult scenario they have to face regarding a language barrier between themselves and their workers.

The phrase, “We Speak English Here” was not that significant to the managers themselves. Only one operation out of all the farm managers mentioned that an anti-Spanish sentiment was present on their farm, but even that manager has had open conversations with their employees on the topic of language-learning. One of their workers said, “I’ve been here eight years. Why don’t you speak Spanish yet?” The manager recognized this as a valid point, and that manager in particular expressed the desire to learn Spanish, and the merits of any person learning Spanish. A different outcome on the significance of the phrase may have been found if worker interviews had been conducted. The other main consideration regarding this question is its self-reporting nature. The question and phrase carry a heavy connotation, and managers could be reluctant to admit the presence of the phrase within their operation.

Language learning opportunity questions also yielded results with significance. The managers reported that currently there is not a main structured English-language learning opportunity available for their Spanish-speaking workers, even though there may be small opportunities at times, or there may have been structured programs in the past. While the non-Spanish-speaking managers cited time, energy, and workload as reasons they have not pursued learning Spanish, their Spanish-speaking employees are also subject to those same factors. MP5 recognized that workers might not be able to learn English on their own because of these same reasons, and said, “These boys don’t have time to educate themselves.”

There are two ways for communication across a language barrier to improve in this unique situation. Managers can make efforts to learn Spanish, and workers can make efforts to

learn English. Recommendations for the latter cannot be made without more research into the worker perspective, but a number of recommendations can be developed from the manager perspective.

Based upon the responses of the non-Spanish-speaking managers on what it would take for them to consider learning Spanish, there are several recommendations that could be applied to facilitate the occurrence of the former of the two options. Many managers expressed that they have been unable or unmotivated to learn Spanish on their own. Structured programs or resources could encourage a higher uptake rate of Spanish learning for non-Spanish-speaking managers. An in-person Spanish-learning program for managers would need to be convenient, local, and applicable to agriculture to maximize the possibility that managers would take advantage of the program. Self-paced learning resources also need to be convenient and optimized for multitasking/passive learning, such as podcasts or quick lessons on an application. Many of these self-paced Spanish learning resources already exist, so an initiative to introduce farm managers to these resources could also increase language-learning efforts. However, these preexisting resources may not be immediately applicable to agriculture, and that factor would most likely affect widespread adoption.

While an in-person, local, agriculture-focused learning program poses logistical issues such as funding, convenience, and accessibility, perhaps the most practical alternative would be a database of Spanish learning resources compiled through the state agricultural extension services or state departments of agriculture. Other states such as Idaho and Florida already have resources in Spanish available to farmers that assist in proper training of Spanish-speaking workers (“Grower and Worker Education,” “Produce Safety Training Videos”). The state of Kentucky does not currently have resources such as these available to farmers, but these resources from

other states could be compiled for use in the state of Kentucky. The same style used for resources related to job training could be applied to create resources to teach Spanish to farmers that is specifically applicable to agriculture. These resources could then be made available to farmers, and potentially increase the number of farmers learning Spanish to communicate with their Spanish-speaking workers.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study to be acknowledged, all of which have to do with practical restraints and study design. The largest limitation to the study was the fact that only one half of the planned interviews were able to be conducted. This study, and the interviews and questions that make up the study materials, were specifically designed to involve farm manager participants as well as Spanish-speaking H-2A worker participants. The main focus of the design was aimed toward the H-2A employees, and much of the data on the effects of language barriers was to come from those interviews. However, due to the timing of the project in the yearly calendar, and the incompatibility of the data collection period with the work cycle of most H-2A workers, a decision was made to only conduct farm manager interviews. Data from worker interviews was meant to act as a check system for the data collected from the manager interviews. Collecting data from only farm managers still led to a rich data set with valuable insights, and a shift to themes on relationships and communication styles emerged, while still maintaining the original focus of the project.

The generalizability of the results is limited by the small size of the case study and the fact that all farm operations involved were located in Kentucky. This should be considered when

reviewing the project. However, the study's five participants generated a large and valuable data set to be analyzed.

On study design, there were several things that could be improved about the project. The interview questions were designed after careful review of literature on language barriers, but as an exploratory study, the interviews covered many topics and were not narrowly focused on one area of language barrier effects. Areas such as healthcare, job training, communication effectiveness, and effect of language barriers on work efficiency are all areas briefly covered in this study, but that could be studied in more depth. Additionally, the language scale used in the interviews was a self-identified proficiency tool and allowed for subjectivity from each individual manager. This could potentially skew the true Spanish-language proficiency of each manager. While each participant reviewed the standardized CEFR language scale for reference before the interview (appendix F), and the language scale developed for this study was read to each participant, human subjectivity could allow for inconsistent self-identification. Participants may misinterpret the scale and rank themselves higher or lower than their objective language level. Participants may additionally overestimate or underestimate their Spanish proficiency.

While the reasons for the use of interviews in this study and the merits of interviews have been established, descriptive statistics and some of the other basic questions asked in the interview easily could have been included in a preliminary survey before the interviews actually took place, especially after the project turned completely digital and the consent form was sent out in an online survey. This could have greatly reduced the length of the interviews, aiding the time burden on participants as well as the investigator, or could have allowed for longer and more energized discussion on main topic questions, rather than exhausting energy describing simple yes or no answers. The only consideration for this is that with the questions and

interviews as they are, the data set is much richer for requiring long-form, synchronous answering to even the most basic of questions. Anecdotes, details, and nuance was offered and gathered from all the questions that were asked, regardless of their simplicity. This extra data would not have been gathered if a portion of the questions were asked in an online survey before the interview. The preliminary questions also allowed the participant and investigator to develop a relationship beginning with easy-to-answer questions. Both parties had time to become comfortable with one another and get to know the other better, which subsequently led to more trust and a richer data set.

Future Research

The broad nature of this pilot study has revealed many doors for potential further research in the future. Language barriers are studied particularly in other industries, but there is much to learn about language barriers in agriculture. The H-2A program is an institution in which language barriers naturally occur, and this study only demonstrated the large amount of future opportunities there are to learn about the unique dynamics of language and labor created by the structure of the H-2A agricultural migrant labor program. In this, the study succeeded in its original purpose, since it was designed to explore the possibilities and gather preliminary data to direct research for the future.

Three areas of particular interest would be machinery operation/safety training, the potential for exploitation related to reliance on English-speaking foremen, and word analysis using the research tool “Voyant” to analyze relationship and communication themes.

Tractor safety and operation training could be related to a number of things, such as a language barrier during worker training, education level of the workers, or a gap in knowledge

created by cultural differences. Further investigation could bear results that this study failed to identify. Since four out of five of the farm managers relied on foremen to communicate, train, or recruit other workers, there is much to be learned about that dynamic and the potential for exploitation therein. Word analysis with “Voyant” would be particularly relevant for the data set collected during this study and could be carried out to search for prevalent words and other correlations or associations.

As discussed briefly in the limitations, this study could easily be transformed into a survey, rather than an interview style. This change would allow for a larger sample size and more data points to be gathered. This pilot study only had five participants because of available time, but also because of the labor-intensive nature of collecting qualitative data. If the interviews were converted into surveys, ease of data collection would increase significantly, and quantitative analysis could also be conducted to reveal new insights.

Conclusion

The H-2A program is important to the operation of farm work in the United States and its worker participants provide a necessary service to the agriculture industry. The original intent of the study was to gauge language barriers in the employer-employee relationship and the implementation of the study took the investigation in a manager perspective-focused direction. Interviewing managers provided valuable insight into the communication and managerial methods of employers with Spanish-speaking H-2A employees.

Language barriers and speaking Spanish did not impact the employer-employee relationship as much as the relational attitude of the managers themselves did. While language was originally thought to be the indicator of positive employer-employee relationships, this study

finds that the personal attitude of the manager is more important than the managers' Spanish-language proficiency. Job training, communication efficiency, healthcare, relationship effects, and more were explored to illuminate potential areas of interest regarding language barriers in agriculture.

This exploration has revealed many new opportunities for potential further research, and even the potential for a survey-based quantitative version of this study. Data collected from the manager perspective has been valuable and insightful but conducting worker interviews would greatly increase the range and scope of the exploration of language barriers. The H-2A program creates a unique communication environment that is rich in complexity, nuance, and cultural possibilities that offers a wide range of knowledge to be discovered.

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Appendix A: Non-Spanish-Speaking Manager Interview

Non-Spanish-Speaking Managers

1. When did you start having H-2A workers?
 - a. Within the last year
 - b. 1-5 years ago
 - c. 5-10 years ago
 - d. 10-15 years ago
 - e. More than 15 years ago
2. What made you decide to use the H-2A program?
 - a. What made you choose the demographic of workers that you employ now?
 - i. Did you choose them because they speak Spanish?
3. Do you have the same H-2A workers every season?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. Why?
4. How many H-2A employees do you have?
 - a. Exact number:
 - b. Less than 5
 - c. 5-10
 - d. More than 10
5. On a scale of 1-5, rate your proficiency with the Spanish language.

Provide CEFR scale for general reference.

Level 1: You speak no Spanish and make no attempt to learn even a few words.
(Words such as “Hola” do not count.)

Level 2: You have very basic recognition of a few words in Spanish, those speaking in Spanish may have to speak slowly and/or repeat themselves for you to understand.

Level 3: You know phrases in Spanish, can recognize words and relevant phrases in conversation occasionally.

Level 4: You speak Spanish well and conversationally, interact with your Spanish-speaking employees in Spanish, with little limitation to your language proficiency.

Level 5: You speak/listen/read like a native Spanish speaker.

6. Have you considered learning Spanish?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. If yes, what has kept you from learning?
 - c. If not, what would it take for you to consider it?
7. How do you communicate with your H-2A employees?
 - a. All that apply:
 - i. Speak to them in English
 - ii. Gestures
 - iii. An English-speaking foreman
 - iv. Basic phrases
 - v. Other
8. Do you have other employees besides the H-2A workers?
Yes/No
 - a. Do your other employees speak Spanish?
9. Describe your relationship with your employees.
 - a. H-2A and non-H-2A
10. How do/did you train new H-2A workers (for farm safety, farm procedures, etc.)?
 - a. Ex: An English-speaking foreman, other employees that are already trained, a follow-along style, etc.
11. Have there ever been difficulties between H-2A employees that have been difficult to solve because of a language barrier?
Yes/No
 - a. Examples of conflict between employees.
12. Do you feel you effectively communicate with your H-2A employees?
13. How long does it take to get your point across with the language barrier?
 - a. Can you give me examples of times you haven't been able to get your point across?
14. Have there been any accidents or misunderstandings because of the language barrier?
Yes/No
 - a. Examples?

- b. What caused the accident/s?
 - i. Was this a result of not being able to speak to your workers in Spanish?
 - ii. Was this the result of not being able to train them in Spanish?
15. Have you given them opportunities to learn English?
- Yes/No
- a. Options:
 - i. Tutoring
 - ii. Gradual acclimation with day-to-day informal instruction
 - iii. Access to formal classes
 - iv. Learn-as-you go style without informal instruction
 - v. Other
16. Do your non-H-2A employees speak Spanish?
- Yes/No
17. What are the relations like between the H-2A workers and the other employees?
- a. Do they interact?
 - b. Do they get along?
 - c. Why do you think that is?
18. Do your workers interact with the community?
- a. For example: church, social functions, family gatherings
19. What opportunities do they have for interaction with the community?
- a. With just the other H-2A workers or with the surrounding community?
20. Have you ever heard a member of your operation use the phrase “We speak English here?”
- a. In front of your Spanish-speaking employees?
 - b. Did they understand what was being said?
21. Would your relationship with your H-2A workers be different if you both spoke the same language?
- a. Yes/No
 - b. How would it be different?

Appendix B: Spanish-Speaking Manager Interview

Spanish-Speaking Managers

1. Why did you learn Spanish?
 - a. Options:
 - i. I liked the language
 - ii. I had to learn during formal education
 - iii. I knew I would have Spanish-speaking workers and wanted to learn to communicate with them in their language
 - iv. Other
 - b. How did you learn Spanish?
 - i. Options:
 1. Secondary education (high school)
 2. Post-secondary education (college)
 3. Secondary and post-secondary education
 4. Taught myself
 5. Formal classes outside of secondary and post-secondary education (adult learning)
 6. Free online learning programs such as Duolingo
 7. Paid online learning programs such as Rosetta Stone
 8. By speaking and interacting with speakers of Spanish
 9. Other
 - c. How long have you been learning Spanish?
 - i. Options:
 1. Less than a year
 2. 1-5 years
 3. More than 5 years
 4. Other
2. On a scale of 1-5, rate your proficiency with the Spanish language.

Provide CEFR scale for general reference.

Level 1: You speak no Spanish and make no attempt to learn even a few words.
(Words such as “hola” do not count.)

Level 2: You have very basic recognition of a few words in Spanish, those speaking in Spanish may have to speak slowly and/or repeat themselves for you to understand.

Level 3: You know phrases in Spanish, can recognize words and relevant phrases in conversation occasionally.

Level 4: You speak Spanish well and conversationally, interact with your Spanish-speaking employees in Spanish, with little limitation to your language proficiency.

Level 5: You can communicate like a native speaker of Spanish.

3. When did you start having H-2A workers?
 - a. Within the last year
 - b. 1-5 years ago
 - c. 5-10 years ago
 - d. 10-15 years ago
 - e. More than 15 years ago
4. What made you decide to use the H-2A program?
 - a. What made you choose the demographic of workers that you employ now?
 - i. Did you choose them because they speak Spanish?
5. Do you have the same H-2A workers every season?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. Why?
6. How many H-2A employees do you have?
 - a. Exact number:
 - b. Less than 5
 - c. 5-10
 - d. More than 10
7. Do you have other employees besides the H-2A workers?

Yes/No

 - a. Do your other employees speak Spanish?

8. Describe your relationship with your employees.
 - a. H-2A and non-H-2A
9. Have there ever been difficulties between H-2A employees that have been difficult to solve because of a language barrier?
Yes/No
 - a. Examples of conflict between employees.
10. Would you be able to effectively communicate with your H-2A workers if you did not speak Spanish?
Yes/No
 - a. Why or why not?
11. How do/did you train new H-2A employees?
12. How long does it take to get your point across in Spanish?
 - a. Can you give me examples of times you haven't been able to get your point across?
13. Have there been any accidents with the workers?
Yes/No
 - a. Examples?
 - b. What caused the accident/s?
14. Have you given them opportunities to learn English?
 - a. Options:
 - i. Tutoring
 - ii. Gradual acclimation with day-to-day informal instruction
 - iii. Access to formal classes
 - iv. Learn-as-you go style without informal instruction
 - v. Other
15. Do your non-H-2A employees speak Spanish?
Yes/No
16. What are the relations like between the H-2A workers and the other employees?
 - a. Do they interact?
 - b. Do they get along?
 - c. Why do you think that is?

17. Do your workers interact with the community?
 - a. For example: church, social functions, family gatherings
18. What opportunities do they have for interaction with the community?
 - a. With just the other H-2A workers or with the surrounding community?
19. Have you ever heard a member of your operation use the phrase “We speak English here?”
 - a. In front of your Spanish-speaking employees?
 - b. Did they understand what was being said?

Appendix C: Recruitment Script for Employers

Recruitment Script for Employers

For this research project, I will conduct interviews with those who choose to participate in the study. I am researching language barriers in agriculture, especially the H-2A program. If you choose to participate, we will set up an interview time to have a conversation that involves questions I've prepared beforehand. This will take about 30 minutes, or as long as you would like to talk with me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you can end your participation at any time during the process, with no consequences whatsoever, and no hard feelings from me. You can choose not to answer any of the questions if you don't want to answer them, for any reason.

Our interview will be recorded, and any raw data such as these recordings with direct and/or indirect identifiers will only be accessible to me, the principal investigator. In my research paper, pseudonyms, aka false names, will be used at all times if individual responses are discussed, and responses will be presented in aggregate, aka altogether and unidentifiable, as much as possible.

Appendix D: Pre-Interview Script for EmployersPre-Interview Script for Employers

You can end your participation at any time. If you don't want to answer a question for any reason, all you have to do is tell me you don't want to answer, and we will move on. Although your responses will be recorded, your name will not be a part of the recording and therefore not directly linked to your responses.

Appendix E: Research Participation Consent Form

Research Participation Consent Form

Study Title: *We Speak English Here: A Study of Language Barrier Effects in Agriculture*

Primary Investigator: Camryn Clift

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted through Murray State University. This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

- 1. Nature and Purpose of Project:** The purpose of this study is to learn the effects of language barriers between employers and their Spanish-speaking H-2A employees.
- 2. Explanation of Procedures:** This activity involves research that will be later reproduced in a published paper, either in aggregate or with the use of pseudonyms. The study activities include an interview with the primary investigator. Study duration: The interview will last a minimum of 15 minutes, but the duration is up to you. If you want to talk for two hours, then the interview can last two hours.
- 3. Recordings:** Interviews will be recorded. This is to make sure that all information provided by you in the interview is represented correctly. Being recorded is required for this study and you should not participate if you do not want to be recorded. Recordings will be confidential, and no direct identifiers will be recorded.
- 4. Discomforts and Risks:** The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with being in the study include mild discomfort from some personal questions and a slight risk of being identified within the published research paper. While pseudonyms or aggregate results will be used at all times, and direct identifiers such as your name will not be included in the paper, there is a slight risk that your identity may be revealed inadvertently through indirect identifiers such as anecdotal stories/situations specific to you.
- 5. Benefits:** This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, your participation may help to increase our understanding of language barriers between Spanish-speaking H-2A workers and their employer.
- 6. Confidentiality:** Your identity will be known to the researchers, but the information you provide will be kept confidential.

- 7. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw/stop participating at any time with absolutely no penalty. You are free to skip questions you would prefer not to answer.

The following steps are being taken to address the risk of coronavirus infection:

- 8. **Virtual Protocol:** Researchers and participants will interact virtually only. This may be through phone calls, video calls, or other means of virtual communication.
- 9. **Contact Information:** Any questions about the procedures or conduct of this research should be brought to the attention of Dr. Michelle Santiago at +1 270-809-6932 or msantiago1@murraystate.edu. If you would like to know more about the results of the study, the contact information is the same as above.

By typing your name and hitting submit, you indicate that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, that you agree to take part in this study, and that you agree to be recorded.

The dated approval stamp on this document indicates that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the MSU IRB Coordinator at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent) (Date)

Appendix F: Council of Europe CEFR Language Scale

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structural or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, putting on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.