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Challenging the Myth of Lingua Franca in International Business

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ABSTRACT The proposed paper features a qualitative pilot study that monitored and assessed workplace language use within a U.S. multinational company where English is the official language of business. The qualitative pilot study examined language use by Hispanic immigrant workers employed at a rice mill in a rural northwestern U.S. community. In the week-long needs assessment, the author interviewed 26 nonnative English speaking coworkers, 2 native English speaking coworkers, and 10 mid- and senior-level managers. The author also observed daily operations in all departments of the rice mill, participated in safety training and testing, and shared his findings with senior officials at the company's world headquarters in the U.S. Although English is the lingua franca at this U.S. agribusiness giant, Hispanic mill workers (a majority in most mills in the U.S.) worked almost exclusively in Spanish. Hispanic mill workers used Spanish in everyday work situations from daily team meetings to report writing. Communication with senior mill managers required the use of a translator. Nearly all reports were written in Spanish, requiring an English translation as mandated by OSHA. Senior officials are keenly concerned about (1) addressing safety issues when two languages are intertwined during daily operations in their mills nationwide and (2) finding an effective solution to enforce the use of English as a lingua franca of business.

Introduction

It is a global reality that more and more multinational companies (MNCs) are adopting English as the lingua franca of operations (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Bono & Vey, 2005). The reason is clear: communication between global teams can become an operational Tower of Babel if a multitude of languages are permitted. Among these MNCs are American agribusiness giants like Tyson Foods, Smithfield, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Dole, and ConAgra who run operations in over 150 countries in addition to thousands of facilities in the U.S. Research has focused on the effects of imposing English as the official language of global operations (Sanger, 1992; Grandin & Dehmel, 1997; Crystal, 2003; Beyene, Hinds & Cramton, 2009; Swift & Wallace, 2011; Harzing, Köster & Magner, 2011; Neeley, 2012; Neeley, Hinds & Cramton, 2012; Hinds, Neeley & Cramton, 2013). Much less research has focused on workplace communication within MNC plants, factories, mills, and processing facilities in the United States, especially in the field of global agribusiness.

U.S. agribusiness giants have seen their policy of English as the lingua franca challenged through the hiring of hundreds of thousands of Hispanic immigrants with limited English proficiency. This phenomenon has led to the inclusion of Spanish in the workplace as an unintended consequence. Limited English proficiency (LEP) research, conducted by agribusiness experts, focuses on employers and their assessment of their workers' English. Hispanic migrant workers have little voice in this line of research. LEP research in U.S. agribusiness, however, provides a critical source

of information relevant to the current pilot study: the dangers inherent in working in U.S. agriculture with minimal English skills.

Limited English proficiency is the major obstacle to communication (Opatik & Novak, 2010; Baker & Chappelle, 2012; Douphrate, 2014). Maloney & Grusenmeyer (2005) found that 96% of employers identified English as their top obstacle in working with their Hispanic employees. They also found that 94% of Hispanic workers admitted they either did not speak English well or could only speak some English. Consequently, Spanish, not English, has become the co-lingua franca of business in many of these agribusiness facilities in the U.S.

Limited English proficiency is directly connected to work-related injuries and even death (Opatik & Novak, 2010). Both are nightmares for agribusiness MNCs. In one study featuring the dairy industry managers included safety issues such as . . .

- understanding protocols for warning labels and operating instructions for moving parts of machinery such as power take-offs, hydraulics, pumps, and gears;
- handling chemicals and dangerous materials;
- understanding electrical safety behaviors;
- understanding potential fire hazards and environmental guidelines;
- understanding operating directions for vehicles, tractors, forklifts; and
- handling emergencies

This limited list of safety issues calls attention to the complex skill set a Hispanic coworker must possess to work effectively. (One agribusiness MNC featured a job safety hazard PowerPoint presentation comprising 100 slides identifying 40 safety hazards.)¹ At the top of the skill set hierarchy is what the author calls “Safety English Proficiency.” Safety English proficiency cannot be acquired in the traditional ESL classroom. It demands customized instruction and skill development that reflects the actual tasks a Hispanic worker faces whether on a dairy farm, in a meat-processing plant or in a rice mill. Currently, customized Safety English instruction is a rarity in the U.S. The death of 700 to 900 Hispanic agriculture employees in work-related accidents each year is the tragic consequence of limited English proficiency (Douphrate, 2014) and the lack of customized safety English instruction.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) identified grain handling, which includes rice milling, as one of the most dangerous endeavors in American labor. Workers are exposed to hazards such as “fire and explosions from grain dust accumulation, suffocation from engulfment and entrapment in grain bins, falls from heights and crushing injuries and amputations from grain handling equipment.” Insufficient safety training and limited English proficiency put Hispanic immigrant coworkers at risk of injury or death (Smith & Sacco, 2016).

The present paper describes a pilot study of workplace language conditions within a U.S. rice mill where Spanish speakers make up 80% of the workforce. The study is designed to provide a voice to Hispanic migrant workers through their personal descriptions of workplace conditions and

¹ See Appendix A for examples of safety hazards coupled with technical safety lexicon.

challenges within the context of their background, prior education, and family life. The study also gives voice to other stakeholders—managers, supervisors, safety officials, and Anglo mill workers. It is the first study conducted by an applied linguist in U.S. agribusiness, the first study in LEP research to measure workers' English skills, and the first to provide recommendations for language instruction.

The Study

In 2015, GlobalAgInc (a pseudonym) hired the author's consulting firm to study dual-language use within its operations at mills and processing plants throughout the U.S. and to recommend a practical solution to strengthen English-language skills of its Spanish-speaking employees. GlobalAgInc (GAI) is a global agribusiness leader founded in the early 1900s. Within a decade GAI expanded its operations to other countries and adopted English as its lingua franca. Today, GAI employs over 30,000 workers serving customers in more than 150 countries. The U.S. agribusiness giant operates more than 250 plants and 400 crop procurement facilities worldwide. GAI's domestic operations, spread across 30 states, comprise more than 150 manufacturing facilities and more than 350 crop procurement facilities – including grain elevators, ports and shipping terminals used to store both raw materials and finished products. Like most U.S. agribusinesses, GAI's workforce consists mostly of Hispanic immigrant workers either through full-time employment or part-time employment provided by an employment agency.

For the study, GAI selected a rice mill in a rural community of 3,000 residents located in the northwest U.S. Typical of its mills throughout the U.S. the rice mill employs 160 workers, 80% of whom are native Spanish speakers. GAI requested a one-week organizational and instructional needs assessment to interview all stakeholders (senior managers, supervisors, mill workers), observe operations in the mill and offices, and gather work-related documentation. The needs assessment was guided by principles and best practices delineated in Friedenberget al. (2003). The plant manager provided unprecedented access to all the information needed to complete the needs assessment. Additionally, a senior GAI official, not attached to the site, provided insights into GAI operations nationwide, especially insights into the critical role of safety.

PLEASE PLACE FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1 Needs Assessment Activities²

- Participated in three conference calls with company officials prior to the site visit
- Received on-site orientation of language issues by senior mill managers
- Attended the *Incident Review Meeting* (a worldwide videoconference of mills and plants discussing review of current safety incidents and injury reduction best practices)
- Read *Job Safety Analysis Training*: a handout comprising 83 slides which list and describe 29 potential hazards in mills and plants
- Watched English version of 50-minute *Work Safety* training video
- Took the English version of *Work Safety* test consisting of 30 test questions

² The author changed the titles of safety training materials, the safety test and the videoconference to ensure the MNC's anonymity.

- Interviewed 26 Hispanic mill workers and 2 native English-speaking mill workers
- Observed workers in action in every department of the mill
- Conducted daily interviews with the plant manager, the HR manager, and the safety director
- Interviewed five of six English and Spanish-speaking supervisors
- Attended a pre-shift team meeting
- Witnessed a controlled explosion due to dust accumulation
- Met with officials of the local County Office of Education

Safety orientation

Safety is the overarching theme in U.S. agriculture and is the primary content for ESL training. The rice mill's plant manager started the safety orientation with a complete tour of the plant at the beginning of the study and a second tour at the end of the week. The author, equipped with his own PPE³ (personal protection equipment) visited every department, which described all the processes in milling rice. The plant manager pointed out all the major dangers for workers, including a brief controlled demonstration of an explosion and flash fire when dust accumulates in a rice mill. The floors in each department were dust free and constantly monitored by members of the sanitation department. He pointed out other safety equipment such as the safety harness, which prevents workers from falling into rice siloes where they would die of suffocation.

On Day 2, the author attended the weekly *Incident Review Meeting* where the author was introduced to safety issues and solutions at GAI mills and plants worldwide.⁴ In the videoconference, the vice president of operations described and analyzed all safety incidents from the previous week. Despite the presence of hundreds of plants and facilities worldwide, there were only 6 minor work-related accidents. The exception was a death of a manager in a South Asian country, killed in a bike accident on his way to work. The manager had neglected to follow company policy which is to be driven to work in a company vehicle accompanied by a company driver. The *Incident Review Meeting* also featured a discussion of best safety practices and reiterated corrective actions such as proper lifting techniques, the maintenance of personal protection equipment, and the removal of mats. Safety procedures revolve in a constant 24-hour cycle from the time a worker wakes up until he or she falls asleep. Even worker injuries at home or on the way home count as safety accidents for GAI. The rice mill under study sports an eight-year streak of no work-loss days due to safety incidents.

Following the *Incident Review Meeting* the author watched a 50-minute *Work Safety* training video that all candidates must watch prior to taking the certification test. The video is available in both English and Spanish. After watching the video the author asked for permission to take the *Work Safety* test. Available in English and Spanish, the *Work Safety* test contains 30 multiple-choice questions, which the author rated as advanced-level English. The author got seven wrong on the 30-item test, which demonstrates the complexity of mill safety knowledge and procedures. The plant manager insists that prospective mill workers, who take the test in Spanish, must score 100% to work in the mill. The *Work Safety* test in English could serve as the pre-and post-test prior to ESL instruction. For course preparation, GAI also provided the author with *Job Safety Analysis*

³ PPE includes goggles, ear buds, a yellow vest, gloves, and steel-toed boots.

Training: a PowerPoint presentation comprising 83 slides which list and describe 29 potential hazards in mills and plants.

Interviews

The plant manager and the director of human resources organized interviews with all stakeholders at the rice mill. From the top-down, the plant manager permitted daily interviews at the end of each work day. Those interviews guided the author to maximize his time during the week and to understand the plant manager's issues and concerns. The safety director provided first-hand data on language use among workers and between the workers and senior management. The human resource manager organized interviews with four of the six supervisors, as well as Spanish-speaking workers and two native English speakers. The supervisors confirmed language use patterns cited by the safety director. On the last day of the needs assessment, the author met with two officials from the local County Office of Education. The officials confirmed two deaths at another rice mill the week before, reported the lack of consistent ESL instruction in the county, and prepared a list of potential ESL instructors in anticipation of a contract with GAI.

The Hispanic interviewees represented a cross-section of rice mill's departments: 11 from milling, 9 from packaging, 5 from shipping, and 1 from sanitation. Their jobs include forklift operators, graders, millers, mill hands, stretch wrappers, line operators, foremen, and truck loaders and unloaders. Most interviewees came to the northwestern U.S. from the two primary Mexican states that provide U.S. agribusiness labor: Michoacan and Jalisco. Other states include Guanajuato, Colima, Zacatecas, Hidalgo, and the Federal District (Mexico City). The workers averaged 6.6 years of employment at GAI and 34% worked in other rice mills prior to employment at GAI.

Formal schooling for the interviewees ranges from one year in primary school to three years of university education. GAI mill workers average significantly higher than the national average of 5.5 years of formal schooling for Hispanic migrant workers at 9.5 years. Residence in the U.S. ranged from 18 months to 36 years. When asked how they learned English, the responses include community classes, in school, talking with friends at work, practicing English with one's children, and on the street.

The interviews, lasting an average of 21 minutes, were designed to elicit the following information: (1) evidence of the interviewee's English-language skills, (2) the conditions in which English and Spanish are used at the mill, (3) the need to learn English at the mill and for personal life outside work, and (4) each family's need for English instruction.

We identified three levels of English proficiency using The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency levels among interviewees. They include novice (low, mid, high), intermediate (low, mid, high), and advanced. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages defines novice, intermediate, and advanced level speakers as the following:

Novice

“Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may

be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech.

Intermediate

Speakers at the Intermediate level are distinguished primarily by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They can recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate-level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.

Advanced

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of Advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.” (ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines, 2012)

Upon completion of the needs assessment, the author provided GAI with a seven-page report consisting of his findings coupled with an action plan to strengthen safety English skills (Sacco, 2015).

Findings and discussion

Most GAI Hispanic mill workers were identified with limited English proficiency, though less acute than the workers reported in Maloney & Grusenmeyer (2005), Opatik & Novak (2010), Baker & Chappelle (2012) and Douphrate (2014). The author identified 9 novice-level speakers, 11 intermediate-level speakers, and 6 advanced-level speakers.

Novice-level speakers

The novice-level speakers work in milling and packaging and average a fifth-grade education. (Formal education ranges from second to 12th grade.) They also average five years of work experience at GAI, preceded by several years of work experience at other rice mills. Their advanced level of work experience in rice mills seems to compensate for their limited English proficiency. One novice-level speaker is noteworthy; Rigoberto is a foreman who has two Spanish-speaking workers under him. He has served as a foreman for 10 years at GAI and 15 years before that at another rice mill. “I don’t need to speak English because everyone I work with speaks Spanish,” he revealed to me in Spanish. “I only need to know key mill terminology in English,”

he added. However, Rigoberto did admit that he has missed out on promotions because of his limited English proficiency.

During the interviews, novice mill workers provided information primarily in Spanish as they had trouble understanding questions or providing responses in English. The author frequently had to ask questions in Spanish, which were answered primarily in Spanish. At the mill, novice English speakers depend on managers and fellow colleagues to use Spanish for all job-related tasks. Interestingly, many mill workers admitted their need to use English to communicate with senior English-speaking managers. Currently, communication with senior managers breaks down, requiring the use of a translator to complete the language transaction. Productivity levels are negatively impacted as neither senior managers, the translator nor the novice-level colleague are engaged in the tasks they need to perform.

Intermediate-level workers

The intermediate-level speakers average more than four years of formal education than novice-level speakers at 9.8 years. Unlike novice-level speakers they represent every department at GAI. Intermediates average six years of work experience, one year longer than novices. Like novices, most have extensive experience at other rice mills prior to joining GAI. Intermediate-level speakers can handle most work-related tasks in English and communicate in English with senior managers in simple conversations. Complex discussions involving mill processes or procedures short circuit their English skills. Intermediate-level workers revert to Spanish among themselves and novice and advanced-level speakers. Four of eleven intermediate-level speakers are foremen. All but one aspire to further promotions and recognize that professional proficiency in English is needed to become a department supervisor.

Intermediate-level mill workers needed no translation to complete the interview and they effectively described their personal lives and background, work-related tasks and their weaknesses in English. Resorting to Spanish due to convenience retards their growth toward advanced-level English skills. Most admitted taking their *Work Safety* test in Spanish instead of English. Some would pass the test in English at the time of their interview. Intermediate-level mill workers still need English instruction to handle complex mill discourse, client interactions, and report writing.

Advanced-level workers

Advanced-level speakers average slightly less formal education at 9.3 years. Three work in shipping and three in milling. Two of the six are foremen. Their average 10.3 years of experience at GAI surpasses both novice-level and intermediate-level workers. Advanced-level workers communicate effectively in English with either supervisors or senior managers. If required, they could work completely in English and manage complex mill discussions. All advanced-level speakers would pass the safety exam in English, though all chose to take the *Work Safety* test in Spanish for certification. When they speak Spanish to mill workers, it is to accommodate weaker English speakers. However, they admitted writing their Job Safety Analyses, incident reports, and end-of-shift reports in Spanish. Most welcomed a report-writing course to enhance their writing skills.

Joaquin B., an advanced-level speaker, studied mechanical engineering for a time during his 22 years in the U.S. He has worked at GAI for 10 years and 10 years at a rival rice mill. His children

all speak English, including a son who is studying kinesiology at a California state university. Joaquin needs work in diction and cited reading and writing as weak areas. As a foreman, he speaks English to an American crew member and Spanish to limited English proficiency crew members. Joaquin feels he could become a supervisor but prefers to remain a foreman to spend more time with his family.

Native English-speaking workers

The two native English speaking mill workers present an interesting conundrum. Neither speak Spanish and both are team members in a sea of Spanish-speaking coworkers. In key pre-shift team meetings conducted in Spanish, they try to get bits and pieces of key information provided by coworkers seated nearby. Both insist that key information may be slipping through the cracks that one day might result in a work-related injury. Both expressed feelings of exclusion, like those of global team members mentioned in the introduction. The plant manager insists on pre-shift team meetings being conducted in English in the future with a Spanish translation for limited English proficiency mill workers who are the majority in most teams.

Steve D. has been a fork lift operator in shipping for over three years. He completed two AA degrees at a local community college. Steve says he understands Spanish but cannot express himself in Spanish. He is not resentful but is concerned about safety with the constant flow of new Anglos joining GAI. Elijah O., the second Anglo interviewed, served in the U.S. Navy and completed advanced firefighting training, which attracted GAI's attention. Elijah completed four years of high school Spanish but cannot understand pre-shift meetings conducted in Spanish.

Native English-speaking supervisors

It is noteworthy to comment on the presence of two monolingual mill supervisors. Neither appeared for the interview with supervisors. One supervisor, John D., has worked for GAI for three decades. The author interviewed him later in the week. A safety expert, who is largely responsible for the exemplary safety record at the rice mill, John D. communicates with Spanish-speaking employees through his bilingual foreman. GAI senior managers seem to overlook his inability to speak Spanish because of his safety track record. The author never saw the second monolingual supervisor during his week at the mill.

Dual language zones

The rice mill operates in two language zones: English in the offices and Spanish in the mill. English and Spanish are co-lingua franca, a breach of GAI's English common language policy. The plant manager and plant superintendent speak no Spanish, but the HR director is bilingual. She is often used as a translator when limited English proficiency mill workers come to the offices. There are six mill supervisors; four are bilingual and two are not. The two non-bilingual supervisors communicate with their Spanish-speaking employees through their bilingual foremen. Complicating communication, GAI employs over 70 limited English proficiency temporary workers in addition to full-time limited English proficiency mill workers.

Current English Needs

Safety is an overarching theme throughout GAI mills and plants. GAI's Vice-President of Operations, reminded participants in the Global Safety Videoconference Call that "every week is Safety Week." To heed his message, it was important to know, not only from the GAI mill

management team, but also from Hispanic coworkers, how English is used in the workplace and how effective communication impacts safety at the rice mill.

Senior manager ideally want ALL work-related tasks conducted in English from entry-level training and certification to report writing. Specifically, they included . . .

- understanding pre-shift team meetings,
- understanding all job-related instructions,
- socializing with managers,
- describing problems to managers and other coworkers,
- reporting all emergencies via 911 or shift supervisors,
- reporting safety hazards to shift supervisors or managers and
- writing shift reports and safety incidents in English.

Hispanic interviewees added . . .

- understanding all terminology related to their job
- understanding all signage,
- understanding and completing GAI forms and inspection sheets,
- providing and receiving instructions,
- interacting with client truck drivers and customers,
- knowing how to ask questions in English (“asking for news gloves”),
- leaving notes to coworkers and shift supervisors,
- reporting broken equipment to shift supervisors

Outside of work, respondents expressed with unanimity the need to improve their English citing activities such as shopping, medical and school visits, talking on the phone, citizenship classes, automobile repair, watching TV, among others. One interviewee simply stated “for everything!”

Why Spanish remains the de factor lingua franca in the mill

Virtually all Hispanic interviewees recognize the importance of English in their jobs and know that improved proficiency is needed to receive promotions. Many want improved English skills to pass the U.S. citizenship test. Why, then, does Spanish persists as the de facto lingua franca of the rice mill under study?

First, it is easier and more convenient to speak Spanish at the mill. The assistant safety supervisor stated in frustration that “they have no incentive to speak English.” The mill workers have little contact with non-Spanish speakers as they interact mostly with Spanish-speaking foremen and supervisors. Spanish-speaking supervisors do not insist that mill workers speak English. An interpreter is provided every time some mill workers interact with native English-speaking senior managers. Most reports are written in Spanish and then translated into English, which is OSHA’s lingua franca.

Second, Spanish remains the lingua franca in the area. Residence in the U.S. for the Hispanic interviewees ranged from 18 months to 36 years, but the average residence in the U.S. is 23.3 years! Coworkers not only work in Spanish but live in Spanish at home and shop in Spanish in

many of the stores and restaurants. Masses and other church services are readily available in Spanish.

Third, Spanish remains the de facto lingua franca because there are no ESL consistent instructional opportunities for GAI workers in the rural northwest. The nearest university is 60 miles away. There is no sustained ESL instruction in the town of 3,000 where the mill is located.

Fourth, GAI recognizes that rice mills are one of the most dangerous industrial sites in the U.S. (Two Hispanic mill workers died in a competitor's rice mill in the same area during the week the author studied GAI's facility.) Safety-related issues at the mill are complex and involve a very technical English. Professional proficiency in all four language skills is required to work exclusively in English. At GAI, the required safety training materials and the safety test all mill workers must pass are available in either Spanish or English. GAI makes this concession, in the author's opinion, to ensure effective communication. Perhaps, it is no coincidence that no lost work days (due to work-related injuries) have occurred at the mill in over eight years, perhaps due in large part to GAI allowing Spanish to remain the de facto co-lingua franca.

The impact of limited English proficiency on GAI Hispanic rice mill workers

Working conditions at GAI seem to have neutralized any negative impact on limited English speakers as GAI allows them to work in Spanish and provides safety training and testing for its Hispanic workers in Spanish. GAI Hispanic workers love their jobs; all but two said so in their interviews. The feeling is mutual. Senior managers at the rice mill and at GAI's world headquarters rave about their skill and work ethic. GAI's admiration for its Hispanic workers is reflected in workers' salaries, which are higher than other mills in the area. All GAI full-time workers also receive full benefits, including health insurance. Worker retention is high, as is reflected in the number of years revealed by the 26 interviewees. They work in a safe work setting as compared to other mills. Whereas two Hispanic workers died in a mill accident the week before, GAI's rice mill enjoys a stellar safety record of eight years.

Recommendations to GAI

At first, the author proposed a customized face-to-face Safety English Program designed for the rice mill under study. It would have consisted of three separate sections representing novice, intermediate and advanced-level mill workers rotating 10 weeks of instruction and a two-week break. Workplace safety would be the theme of the language-training program. Embedded within the theme would be all workplace task-based activities emanating from all GAI rice mill departments. The GAI safety supervisor would assist in course development and testing to ensure content validity. Her duties would include providing the author with all workplace-related written materials, assistance in designing role-playing situations, and ensuring validity in all of our activities, materials, and testing procedures. She would also attend classes to improve her English and to monitor our program.

GAI senior officials rejected face-to-face-instruction for just one rice mill. "What good is ESL instruction for one mill when GAI has a nationwide problem?" GAI operates over 100 facilities in the U.S. alone that employ thousands of Mexican mill workers who need workplace English instruction. Face-to-face instruction, especially for a global agribusiness like GAI, is costly and

non-cost effective except in special cases. The author then proposed a customized online Safety English Program based on a proven cost-effective mode of instruction that has been used for years at the author's home institution, San Diego State University (SDSU).

SDSU's Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC) is the largest provider of customized military language instruction in the U.S. LARC blends a combination of face-to-face instruction with online instruction to teach languages such as Arabic, Dari, Farsi, and Pashto (the primary languages of Iraq and Afghanistan). Approximately 70% of LARC's customized language instruction is offered online to develop listening and reading skills coupled with vocabulary and grammar development. LARC's online instructional model would offer a cost-effective method of teaching workplace English to potentially thousands of GAI Hispanic coworkers and their families.

Online learning, or E-learning, brings the classroom and the content to students in an engaging, interactive, and meaningful way with results that can match, and even outperform, the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom.

E-learning authoring tools, such as Articulate Storyline, in combination with Learning Management Systems (LMS), would . . .

- Incorporate video, audio, text, interactive activities, and learning checks into the e-lesson;
- Integrate 'gamification' techniques to inspire learner motivation and sustainment, such as digital badges and trophies, levels, points, leader boards, competition between GAI facilities;
- Be published in a variety of ways to give learners multiple access points, including on mobile devices;
- Incorporate learner input to enhance instruction;
- Allow administrators to track students' time on task, number of attempts, course completion, quiz results, and other detailed information to "datify" and better understand changes and growth in learner performance; and
- Include GAI professional development training material as course content.

The benefit of e-learning is not only in the technology to distribute it around the globe and track student progress but also in the latest design and delivery pedagogies that make the content meaningful, digestible, and able to "stick" with the students for demonstrable return on investment through improved employee communication and performance.

Nearly all Hispanic interviewees possess a smart phone that could serve as a learning platform for an online Safety English course, which could provide instruction 24/7 annually. GAI coworkers would have the flexibility to study English at their convenience. Online instruction would eliminate work stoppage that would occur during face-to-face instruction conducted at the mill.

GAI senior officials approved the online Safety English course in December 2015 but due to unanticipated disappointing financial earnings reported in mid-January 2016, GAI put the project on hold. GAI will revisit the project in early 2017.

Limitations of the study

The present study is limited to the study of workplace language use at only one rice mill. Although GAI's vice president of operations stated that the rice mill in question is typical of its U.S. mills and facilities, the author cannot predict language use patterns and English-language levels of Hispanic employees at other mills and facilities without further research. Additionally, GAI did not provide access to worker families for interviews. Ideally, the author would like to have interviewed family members concerning the use of English in the home.

Upon reflection, the author regrets not having included three activities in the needs assessment at the rice mill. First, GAI did not provide access to worker families for interviews. Ideally, the author would like to have interviewed family members concerning the use of English in the home. Second, it would have been beneficial to have asked advanced-level speakers to participate in a role plays concerning complex mill operations. Role play examples include reporting an equipment breakdown to a senior manager or describing a safety hazard they have just encountered. These questions would have revealed whether language breakdown would have taken place. Third, it would have been advantageous to have required all interviewees to take the English version of the *Work Safety* test. Test results would have confirmed language levels, provided the first stage of pre-test, post-test levels, and revealed which interviewees could have passed the test.

Conclusion

The present study assessed workplace language use within a U.S. multinational company where English is the official language of business. The case study examined language use by Hispanic immigrant workers employed at a rice mill in a rural northwestern community of 3,000 residents. Although English is the lingua franca at this U.S. agribusiness giant, Hispanic workers (a majority in most mills in the U.S.) worked almost exclusively in Spanish. This linguistic phenomenon occurred in everyday work situations from daily team meetings to report writing. Communication with senior mill managers often required the use of a translator. GAI senior officials are keenly concerned about (1) addressing safety issues when two languages are intertwined during daily operations in their mills and facilities nationwide and (2) finding an effective solution to enforce the use of English as a lingua franca of business.

GAI's rice mill operates in two separate language zones: English in the offices and Spanish in the mill. The mill operates with three layers of employees: senior management, supervisors, and mill workers. Only one of three senior managers is bilingual. Four of the six supervisors are bilingual while only six of 20 Hispanic workers can function comfortably in English. Communication between senior managers and supervisors is easily done in English while supervisors and mill workers communicate almost exclusively in Spanish. Communication between senior managers and mill workers breaks down without the availability of a translator. It is this break down that senior official at GAI world headquarters would like to address via English-language instruction.

In the present study, the emergence of Spanish as the lingua franca in the mill may be one of the reasons for GAI's exemplary safety record at the rice mill and other facilities. Communication between Hispanic coworkers (and communication between coworkers and their Spanish-speaking supervisors) is efficient, especially in an industrial area where decibel levels are as loud as in an NFL huddle during the Super Bowl. GAI's training and testing program provided in Spanish, ensures the development of a skill set designed for efficiency and safety. Insisting on the use of English exclusively may jeopardize communication and GAI's exemplary safety record. GAI represents, what Janssens & Steyaert (2014) call, *multilingual franca*, where mixed language use is tolerated. Regardless of future English instruction for mill workers or Spanish for senior managers, English will continue to be the lingua franca of the office, Spanish in the mill.

The present study indeed challenges the myth that English is the lingua franca of international business. Although Kelm (2014) cites valid examples where English is indeed the lingua franca in certain global business contexts, the reality in the present study is that Spanish may be the de facto lingua franca within U.S. agribusinesses where Hispanic migrant workers dominate employment numbers. Some U.S. agribusinesses have already surrendered to Spanish as the lingua franca in milling and meat processing. Tyson Foods, for example, has already accepted this reality by telling prospective workers that English is not required (Werman, 2013). It might be advantageous for GAI to focus on improving the Spanish-language skills of native English-speaking managers AND the English-language skills of limited English proficiency mill workers.

Finally, there is still a need for agriculture economics majors, business majors, engineering majors at American colleges and universities who are armed with professional proficiency in Spanish within U.S. agribusiness. Or equipped with Chinese skills in U.S.-owned mills in China or Portuguese for GAI's sugar mills in Brazil. Spanish-speaking business majors, for example, will break down language and culture barriers between native Spanish-speaking mill workers and native English-speaking managers that the author observed at GAI.

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Appendix A: Examples of the GAI’s 29 Job Safety Hazards List

1. Slips, Trips or Falls (surface condition, slippery floor, lack of housekeeping)
2. Fall from Heights (scaffolds, ladder)
3. Hit by Projectile or Deflected Objects (disintegration, rupture or debris)
4. Energy Release (gravity, hydraulic, system under pressure, springs, mechanical releases)
5. Fire, Explosion (flammable liquid or gas, vapor, dust in suspension, chemical reaction)
6. Ergonomic (pushing, pulling, reaching, force, repetitive, vibration)
7. Manual lifting (physical effort, weight, position, duration, shape)
8. Radiation (ionizing, non-ionizing, laser, electromagnetic)
9. Chemical (irritant, toxic, poison, corrosive)
10. Noise, Vibration (continuous, intermittent, impact)

Appendix B: Example of Safety English Glossary for Course Preparation

ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS, PREPOSITIONS, EXPRESSIONS (A through C)

Abnormal (abnormal dust present)

Above

Across from

Additional (additional measures)

Adjustable (adjustable wrench)

Ambient

Amended (amended risk level)

Appropriate (appropriate gloves)

Atmospheric (atmospheric hazards)

Available

Bare (bare hand)

Basic (basic information)
Behind
Between (to pass between the objects involved)
Beyond
Biological (biological hazards)
Black
Blue
Bottom (bottom left)
Bridged (bridged material)
Brown (brown recluse spider)

Catastrophic (catastrophic injury)
Chemical (chemical residue)
Clean (keeping work areas clean)
Clear (clear description)
Cold
Complete (complete list)
Confined (confined spaces)
Consistent (consistent risk assessment)
Contaminated (contaminated soils)
Continual (continual lifting)
Continuous (continuous vibration)
Control (control measures)
Conveying (conveying lines)
Correct (not using a correct ladder)
Corrosive
Critical (communication is critical)
Cryogenic (cryogenic processes)