

Oral skills of Hispanic workers in Columbus, Ohio: strategies for the acquisition of bilingual skills¹

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This article analyzes language learning strategies of seasonal workers in Midwestern United States. The extensive literature on Latinos in the US does not analyze such transnational, growing communities in Midwestern cities.

The complex definitions of literacy and bilingualism added two more layers to the conflicted concepts of transnationalism and *lirico* (informal) learning, as defined by Farr (1994). Although the participants are considered bilingual by others, their definition of literacy does not allow them to call themselves English proficient. A partnership between community members would help integrate these individuals to an area not as demographically diverse as other North American cities.

Key words: latinos in the USA, transnational communities, bilingualism, latino practices, acculturation, seasonal workers in the United States, H2B visa programs in the United States, ELL in the United States, ESP, ELL.

Resumen

Sobre las destrezas orales de trabajadores hispanos en Columbus, Ohio y sus estrategias para la adquisición de destrezas bilingües

Este artículo analiza las estrategias de aprendizaje del inglés usadas por trabajadores temporales latinos en los Estados Unidos. Estudios similares no exploran la situación de una comunidad transnacional en esta zona geográfica.

Las complejas definiciones de literalidad y bilingüismo problematizan los conceptos de transnacionalismo y aprendizaje informal (Farr, 1994). Aunque los participantes tienen las destrezas requeridas para considerarse bilingües, sus opiniones sobre literalidad no les permiten verse como competentes en

¹ This article is the summary of the research Project entitled "Latino Practices of US Seasonal Workers". This project was completed from June to December 2012 as part of a Doctoral research Project. The participants were Mexican seasonal workers in Midwestern United States. The whole Project was self-financed by the researcher.

inglés. Una solución a este reto requiere trabajo de equipo entre los sectores involucrados, para integrar a esta comunidad a un área no tan diversa demográficamente como otras ciudades norteamericanas.

Palabras clave: latinos en los Estados Unidos, comunidades transnacionales, bilingüismo, aculturación, trabajadores temporales en los Estados Unidos, programas de visa H2B en los Estados Unidos, inglés como segunda lengua en los Estados Unidos, inglés para propósitos específicos, aprendizaje del inglés.

Résumé

Compétences orales de travailleurs hispaniques à Columbus, Ohio: stratégies pour l'acquisition des habiletés bilingues

Cet article analyse les stratégies d'apprentissage de l'anglais, utilisées par des saisonniers latinos aux États-Unis. D'autres études similaires n'explorent pas la situation d'une communauté transnationale dans cette zone géographique.

Les définitions complexes d'alphabétisation et de bilinguisme mettent en question les concepts en conflit de transnationalisme et d'apprentissage informel (Farr, 1994). Bien que les participants aient les habiletés requises pour être considérés bilingues, leur définition de l'alphabétisation ne leur permet pas de se voir en tant qu'individus anglophones. Une solution à ce défi requiert un travail d'équipe entre les secteurs impliqués afin d'intégrer cette communauté à une zone démographiquement moins diverse tels que dans d'autres villes nord-américaines.

Mots clés: latinos aux Etats Unis, communautés transnacionales, bilinguisme aux Etats Unis, travailleurs saisonniers aux Etats Unis, programmes de visas H2B aux Etats Unis, apprentissage de l'anglais aux Etats Unis, l'anglais pour les professions.

INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic Community in Columbus

As of the 2010 census², the city of Columbus (Ohio) had 44,359 (5.6%) inhabitants with a Hispanic/Latino origin, of which 25,973 (3.3%) are of Mexican descent. It is important to add also that in 2014, a 14% of Ohioans admit to speak a language other than English at home. Sáenz (2011) explains why Latino immigrants have decided to move to the Midwest in search of better opportunities in areas of the United States where Latinos are not yet the dominant population. States like Illinois,

² <http://www.census.gov/>

Michigan and Indiana have seen a larger influx of Latinos than Ohio, yet the Mexican population in this particular state appears to be increasing. As Sáenz (2011) explains, “there is a shortage of information about the social and economic conditions of Latinos in the Midwest”(p.36).

Although the census does not indicate the Mexican state where these immigrants were born, their group appears to be very diverse in itself. It is relevant to explain that, just as in any other large city in the United States, a large percentage of these Hispanic immigrants have created a network to support each other in the Columbus area. A lot of these immigrants choose Columbus because of the lower living costs in the state, as well as diverse work opportunities provided in the job market in both the city and Franklin County itself. As Lemon (2006) explains:

The Hispanics that are here in Columbus come through migration chains. One family member calls home to his brother or cousin and informs them of job opportunities. This aspect combined with the fact that people tend to migrate towards their own culture has created cultural Hispanic enclaves in Columbus just as in any other city. (p. 3)

The present project was born from my work as a trainer for a landscaping company in the City of Cincinnati for three years, in which I had the opportunity to interact with a very diverse group of Hispanic workers, learn about their work ethics, respect and pride in their job, as well as their adaptability to the American culture, where they socialize mostly by interaction and peer teaching. My main goal was to analyze some of the issues pertaining to their bilingualism in the context of the city of Columbus, which has several branches of the aforementioned landscaping company, with a workforce composed mostly of Mexican workers. I wanted to identify some of the strategies these workers use to learn English without formal education and in a *lirico* (informal, non academic) context, as seen in Mexicans living in Chicago and explained by Farr (1994)

...those who read and write are respected for being especially “intelligent” and usually for being more formally educated... Thus, whether literacy is learned by books, in school or *lirico* (informally, orally, without books) it is ultimately connected to school and is seen as a cultural tool, like mathematics. (p. 17)

The Landscaping business in the US, the H2B Program and the Hispanic Community in Columbus: An Overview

Although the landscaping business appears to be limited in terms of resources and income, there is a huge industry supported by Hispanic labor. Due to the rough conditions of the work, as well as its repetitiveness and perception of landscapers being poorly paid, most companies face challenges when finding a sufficient number of workers every year. In order to find a solution to this problem, the landscaping industry has used the H2B Program, which was created by the US government in 1990, as an answer to the increasing demand for workers in the non-agricultural, service businesses and industries. It was also designed as a tool to fight illegal immigration. The program allows 66,000 seasonal workers to come to the US, perform their duties and return to their home country before the expiration of their visas. Provided that there are not any illegal, criminal or performance issues involved, the average H2B worker will be allowed to reapply for a new visa to return to the US as a guest worker the following season. It is necessary to add, at this point, that H2B visas are issued only to the temporary workers, as their families are not allowed to come with them for the duration of the work season.

Consequently, the landscaping business is one of the service industries that benefits the most from the H2B Program, as Wiesnewsky (2004) clarifies:

A Lawn & Landscape survey reports that 19 percent of contractors employed H2B workers in 2003. And according to the Department of Labor, landscape industry jobs made up 42000 of the 165000 petitions for H2B workers in 2003 (25.45%), making it the No 1. industry utilizing the program. (p. 39)

As of late October, 2015 The high demand of unskilled workers required that the United States Congress approved an increase in the H2B visa cap, in which returning H2B workers are no longer included in the 66000 yearly employees brought to the United States by the Green Industry. This modification obeys an ever-increasing demand of immigrant employees in the United States, even under the current immigration debate in this country. Chart 1 explains the amount of revenue some of the largest landscaping companies in the US received in 2014.

Chart 1: Top 5 Landscaping Companies in the US (2014) Based on Yearly Revenue³

Name/Location	Workers	Yearly Revenue
The Brickman Group/Valley Crest Landscape (Rockville, MD, Calabasas, CA)	22000 FT PT not disclosed	2 Billion
TruGreen (Memphis, TN)	Not disclosed	936 Million
Davey Tree Expert (Kent, OH)	8275 FT 382 PT	789 Million
Scotts Lawn Service (Marysville, OH)	600 FT 1850 PT	316.8 Million
Bartlett Tree Experts (Stanford, CT)	1500 FT 35 PT	210 Million

FT: Full time Employees; PT: Part-Time Employees

PREVIOUS STUDIES IN THE FIELD

There are some sources of information and studies related to Mexican workers in the Midwest, although some of them do not have bilingualism issues of immigrants as their main focus. Most of these studies, however, show how the growing Mexican population in Central Ohio is transforming the cultural landscape of the Greater Columbus area and Franklin County.

Even though their information and findings are not directly related to Mexican immigrants, the Ohio State University Office of Extension has shown an enormous interest in some of the issues involving the Hispanic population in Central Ohio. In an effort to retrieve information on the landscaping industry, and in order to develop better recruitment and training programs, Acuña and Mathers (2007) performed a multi-state survey on the workforce involved in these landscaping companies in the Midwest. Their main findings are, basically, that “70 percent of the industry’s labor force is Spanish-speaking or of Hispanic origin, and over half are from Mexico. Hispanic migrant laborers dominated the green industry in all of the states surveyed, with the exception of Indiana”.

It is the same OSU Extension Office that shows concern for some of the communication issues between English and Spanish speakers, as they have developed several training programs in an effort to create

³ Adapted from Landscape Management. “LM 150: 2015 Ratings”. Retrieved on March 31th, 2016. <http://landscapemanagement.net/lm150-2015-rankings/>

better understanding between their American management and their Hispanic laborers.

There are some other studies in regard to bilingualism and Mexican speakers of Spanish in the state of Ohio. Riestenberg (2007) conducted a major study on Spanish speakers in Lorain, a small Ohio town close to Cleveland. The author's goal was to identify "the contexts in which Spanish and English are used according to variables of "domain" (i.e., Family, Friendship, Religion, Education, Employment, and Marketplace). The investigation also had a secondary purpose of uncovering possible links between socio-demographic factors and language use" (p. 2).

With the current trend in the increase of the Mexican population in Central Ohio, I find it very relevant to add that some of the institutions existing in the Greater Columbus Area have noticed the upcoming changes in the area, due to an increased flow of Mexican population. As Lemon (2006), on his report of the Mexican communities currently living in the Columbus Area, explains; "The Greater Hilltop Area in 1990 had a population of 509 Hispanics according to Columbus infobase, in 2000 the Hispanic population had shot up to 3,089" (p. 5).

Lemon's findings seem to contradict some of the information in the census, but Lemon (2006) discusses this contradiction as he explains that "looking at demographic census data can be misleading. Many immigrants are unable to fill out the census for various reasons and the coming and going of others leaves the population influx." (p. 3).

One of the main challenges Mexican transnationals face is the lack of literacy skills in both Spanish and English. Farr (1994) addresses this challenge as she explains how her participants, a transnational network of Mexican immigrants in Chicago, are at a distinct disadvantage in the American school system. There is, however, a clear connection between Farr's participants and mine. Both groups' language learning skills are mostly self-taught or transferred from one worker to the next, because they lack the resources and time required to invest on a formal language education program.

Other issues being discussed in regard to the increasing Hispanic population in Central Ohio are currently being addressed and analyzed from diverse interdisciplinary perspectives, all the while focusing on bilingualism issues to some extent. Shomo (2006) analyzed some of the diverse issues the state of Ohio is facing, now that the existing Hispanic

population is increasing drastically. The author emphasized, in fact, that the state needs to be aware of the cultural, social and linguistic differences the Hispanic community will bring to the Midwestern social landscape. Shomo explains that some preventive measures have been taken in order to adjust the educational system to the changes these immigrants will bring. Yet these measures must be maintained and reinforced.

Even though research on Hispanic communities in the state of Ohio has increased in the past few years, I was not able to find any relevant information on seasonal workers and the development of their second language skills without formal education.

THE STUDY

Based on my personal experience with Latino workers, as well as my personal views on some of their pressing issues in terms of language learning, I decided to explore the following research question:

What are some of the strategies used by seasonal Mexican workers in Columbus in order to develop bilingual skills that help them to succeed in both their work environment and their life in the US?

MY PARTICIPANTS

All of my participants work for TallGrass⁴, one of the largest green industry companies in the United States, with almost 70 years of experience in the landscaping business. TallGrass has more than 100 branches all over the United States, and four of them, as well as the regional management offices for the Midwest territory, are located in Columbus.

This short study was conducted in the Columbus North Branch, which, by the time of the study, had approximately 43 Hispanic Employees during peak season, from February until late November. 33 of these employees, by the time of the study, were returning veterans with at least two seasons of experience. The remaining 10 employees were new workers just hired that particular season. Almost 65% of the

⁴ In order to protect my participants' privacy, I have chosen to use pseudonyms for this project. All first names have been changed.

members of this community came from the Mexican state of Veracruz, and the 35% left were from Michoacán. Due to the aforementioned restrictions of their H2B visas, 100% of these individuals were male, with an age range of 18-43.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis

My findings come from data collected from four interviews with some veteran TallGrass Hispanic employees. Data also includes interviews with one of the English-speaking managers, who gave me his insight in the strategies both Americans and Hispanics use to communicate with each other. In both cases, neither the English speakers nor the Mexican workers have had the opportunity to be formally instructed in the other group's language, literacy or culture.

In addition to these interviews, I also recorded four different interactions between English and Spanish speakers. I analyzed qualitatively the information provided, in order to find repetitive patterns that I could interpret in order to identify some strategies used by the workers of both ethnic groups to communicate with each other successfully. During my recorded observations, I took notes on the aforementioned interactions, which I kept in a research journal. Discourse Analysis of the aforementioned Data was completed following the Methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by Quinn (2010) and Riessman (2008).

I also had the opportunity to collect some artifacts that allowed me to analyze the bilingual practices of my target population. Some of these artifacts included interviews with both English and Spanish speakers; samples of procedural and training forms and translated manuals with basic vocabulary in both languages.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

After a detailed analysis of the extensive data collected, I found elements of negotiation of meaning during interaction, as well as a strict series of perceptions towards bilingualism to be predominant in the perception of

the Spanish-speaking group. The English-speaking group, on the other hand, has a more relaxed perception of bilingualism, based on how both groups are able to interact with each other in their job environment. Other external factors, such as my perception of how these two groups interact and socialize with each other, are also addressed.

The Spanish-speaking perception

- Negotiation of meaning during interaction

Myers-Scotton (2006) explains that bilingualism is born out of the necessity to communicate with others. However, in order to reach the goal of talking to another person in another language, a negotiation from both parties is required in order to make communication successful.

Although experienced Mexican immigrants at TallGrass are not totally fluent in English, they were able to develop a set of vocabulary and skills in order to communicate efficiently. This efficient communication process is born from the necessity to communicate in their job environment, where English is the powerful language and is the tool to success. In other words, Mexicans need to be understood to perform their functions efficiently. Myers Scotton (2006) defines this situation as Mutual Intelligibility “Whether two different people even want to understand each other can affect the claim of mutual intelligibility. Speakers of the more powerful group seem less willing to make the effort to understand speakers of the less powerful group” (p. 23).

In theory, we might assume that Mexicans are forced to learn English as they are part of a minority group, which does not speak the dominant language. However, since the entire roster of landscape workers at the TallGrass branch was composed of roughly 70% Hispanic workers, Americans feel they need to learn Spanish in order to make their communication more efficient with their Mexican counterparts, as Latinos are the dominant group inside the company. These two perceptions originate a negotiation process in which both English and Spanish are used in the same context for interaction, as we can see in the following segment⁵.

Alberto and Richard have known each other for the past 2 years. Alberto is a veteran foreman with 6 years of experience in the landscaping

⁵ All the interviews but one were conducted in Spanish. Translations were made by myself and are provided in italics, under each message unit

industry. Richard has been Alberto’s supervisor for the past two seasons. Richard needs Alberto to talk to Heriberto, another crew member. At the same time, Alberto needs plastic bags to pick up leaves and trash from one of the several job sites under his watch⁶.

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
1	Richard	Could you please give these to Heriberto?
2	Alberto	Luego, güey (Speaking Spanish) (later, you fool)
3	Richard	What was that?
4	Alberto	(Smiles, avoids eye contact) bags, I need bags, bolsas güey (bags, you fool)
5	Richard	There you go (Gives him a box with very small plastic bags, everyone laughs) –Incomprehensible–
6	Alberto	I don’t use this (walks out with a very serious face) (Looks at other workers, speaks in Spanish) – Incomprehensible– mira pero –soez– así, a esas que les cabe, una hoja (everyone laughs) (will you look at these –expletive–, what can I fit in them, maybe one leaf)
7	Richard	(In Spanish) una sí, maybe dos (gives him the actual bags, everyone laughs)

This previous interaction shows several interesting facts. First, after two years of working together, both Richard and Alberto have established a relationship in which they interact very informally, telling jokes to each other, beyond the typical boss/employee scenario. In addition to this, they both have learned enough words and contextual queues to talk to each other mixing languages, yet being able to bring their point across to the other. By means of code switching, they have taught each other words from their native languages, and are able to communicate their everyday needs.

- Perceptions towards bilingualism.

During my four interviews with Spanish speakers, two of the participants said they could speak very little English, and the other two denied being bilingual. However, three of these interact constantly with English speakers, in diverse circumstances and without any help.

⁶ Model for interview transcription was taken from Bloome et al. (2008).

Some typical answers include the ones given by Rey, an Assistant mechanic, who does not believe in his English skills, although he uses them constantly.

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
13	Julián	Dime la verdad ¿tú te sientes que lo hablas [inglés] o no? tell me the truth Do you feel you speak it [English] or not?
14	Rey	No no lo hablo pues ahí a señas (risas) batalla uno si No I don't speak it but by gestures (giggles) I do struggle
15	Julián	Pero entonces But then
16	Rey	Sí les entiende uno One does understand them
17	Julián	Pero entonces ¿Cómo le haces? porque Frank (el mecánico) no habla español por ejemplo But then How do you do it? because Frank(Chief Mechanic) doesn't speak Spanish for instance
18	Rey	Yo les pregunto eh verdad como se dice esto o por decir mira Josh cuando yo andaba trabajando con Ian ahí aprendí mucho verdad, porque eh y esto como se dice "pala" pues "shovel" o así cualquier cosa que no sabía pues yo le pregunto como se dice este que la "blower", entonces ahí es donde yo he aprendido verdad, pero cuando trabaja uno con gabachos trabaja uno con mismos hispanos pues no aprendes nada (risas) I ask them eh you know how do you say this or let's say look Josh when I was working with Ian I did learn a lot you know because eh and this how do you say "pala", "shove" I then how do you say this eh la "blower", then that's when I have learned you know but when one Works with gabachos (Americans) one works with same Hispanics then you don't learn anything (laughs)

It is possible to find several contradictions in Ray's answers, as well as in nother conversational exchanges with Elmer, a two-year TallGrass Veteran, who does not consider himself bilingual.

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
18	Julián	Y si tienes que ir a hacer cosas a la calle, como por ejemplo ir al Mall a comprar algo como cuando nos encontramos el otro día que, ¿Cómo le haces para hablar con la gente? So if you have to do your own things outside, for instance going to the mall as the other day when we ran into each other, What do you do? how do you talk to people?

- 19 Elmer No pues así uno nunca pues a uno casi nunca le consultan muchas cosas nada más me preguntan cosas así sencillas como si quiero bolsa o si quiero el gancho como cuando voy al Mall por ejemplo
No, well, I never well one never gets questioned too much, they Only ask simple things, like whether I want a bag, or if I want to keep the hanger, like when I go to the Mall, for Instance
- 20 Julián O sea que sí lo hablas aunque sea porque entiendes eso (sorprendido)
So you do speak it, at least a little since you understand that (surprised)
- 21 Elmer No pues sí aunque sea un poquito un poquito entiendo
No well, at least a little a little I do understand

Both Rey and Elmer are drivers for the company, with drivers' licenses issued by the state of Ohio. One of the main requirements to apply for a license is being able to carry a conversation with the officer at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, which requires basic oral English skills and the ability to follow directions in the target language. At the same time, applicants are asked to pass a written test, which is administered in both English and Spanish.

The English-speaking perception towards bilingualism

Although experienced Hispanic workers from TallGrass do not consider themselves bilingual, their English Speaking managers do not agree with this perception.

Richard has been working with Hispanic workers for several years, and supervises both Elmer and Alberto. From his perspective, there are no issues in order to discuss meanings or speak the language with his employees.

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
1	Julián	So, How do you talk to them?
2	Richard	Oh in English all time, I am very lucky, most [of] my guys are bilingual, Alberto and Elmer for instance speak English very well
3	Julián	I just talk to Elmer and he says he cannot speak English and he only speaks a little
4	Richard	Oh well he can talk to me (giggles, shakes his shoulders)

Richard does not seem to be affected by the opinion his employees have of their bilingual skills. Both his English level and his basic comprehension of the Spanish language allow him to interact with his employees in both languages, as he did with Alberto in the first segment I presented. At the same time, his standards to call someone bilingual seem to be much more relaxed than those of his Spanish-speaking employees.

Multicultural Interaction and socialization

Although there is not a formal context for English language learning at TallGrass, a lot of external factors appear to interact to construct a bilingual environment conducive to teaching and learning. These factors are the TallGrass's limited, yet well intended training program and the concepts of Additive and Subtractive approaches in the context of the Landscaping Industry.

- The Training Program

All of TallGrass's employees are ruled by a pay scale program, in which their salaries are directly tied to the amount of landscaping skills they acquire throughout the season. Some of these skills are strongly connected to language, such as obtaining a driver's license or being able to supervise crews. In order to prepare for these responsibilities and receive raises in their paycheck, TallGrass offers basic training programs taught in English, which also have Spanish versions for the inexperienced workers. At later stages, when workers are preparing to supervise other employees, they network and teach each other informally to perform the duties needed for each position.

Pedro is another veteran who has been supervising mowing crews for several years. His example is a typical one, in which he has been trained by his American supervisor to be able to do his job.

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
1	Julián	Tú eres Foreman, ¿no cierto? You are a Foreman, Right?
2	Pedro	Sí Yes
3	Julián	Y tú tienes que llenar papeles si se daña la troca, ¿tienes que poner las horas y eso? And you have to fill out papers if a truck breaks, you have to mark the work hours and all that

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit
4	Pedro	Sí, si eso pues si se friega una máquina o si tengo que ir a una tienda o algo a comprar algo Yes, yes right, well, if a machine breaks, or if I have to go to a store or something to buy something
5	Julián	Y ¿Cómo aprendiste a llenar esos? How did you learn to fill them out?
6	Pedro	Hmmm, estos la primera vez que hmmm, en Blue and Yellow landscaping (un empleador previo) tuve un entrenamiento como de dos horas para llenar ese papel, y en Mikey's Grass (otro empleador antes de esta entrevista) un compañero y en TallGrass son este son un poco más fácil todavía con lo poco que ya sabía no se me hizo difícil Hmm, those, the first time I hmmm in Blue and Yellow Landscaping [previous employer] I had a training of around two hours to fill that form out, and in Mikey's Grass [another previous employer] a friend, and in TallGrass they are a little easier, plus the little I already knew it wasn't hard for me
7	Julián	Y en Blue and Yellow landscaping quien te enseñó, ¿un americano? And in Blue and Yellow Landscaping who taught you, An American?
8	Pedro	Sí se llamaba Eric Yes his name was Eric
9	Julián	Y con señas con él, ¿o ya hablabas? So by gestures or Could you speak already?
10	Pedro	(risas) no por señas o sea el mas o menos hablaba un poquito español y ya me decía no tienes que poner el nombre aquí el código y ya las horas tantas (laugther) no, by gestures, I mean he more or less would speak a little Spanish and he'd tell me no you have to write the name here the code and then how many hours

Although the main goal of these training scenarios is not to teach English to the Hispanic workers, Mexicans must learn language on their own in order to improve and move up. This is done by means of peer teaching, as explained by Pedro, and later by means of interaction with Americans and total immersion, as in the cases of Elmer and Rey.

However, and due to the fact that only those workers who move up the ranks have the opportunity to interact with English speakers more often, veteran workers are the ones who have the chance to go through this learning experience. Moreover, the exposure of these veterans to the reading and writing skills is limited to work related materials.

Consequently, there is a big discrepancy between their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

Members of the landscaping business at the management level seem to be aware of the issues generated by the lack of communication between Hispanics and English speakers. Consequently, they have tried to fill this gap by means of hiring bilingual employees or producing their own teaching materials, such as booklets with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vocabulary for landscaping employees, and even their own English textbooks. Unfortunately, these materials seem to have been designed by people who do not have the background required for ESL/ESP teaching, as they all focus on reading and writing skills, which are not very useful for these workers at the early stages of their English learning. Moreover, these materials often present serious grammar and printing mistakes that end up causing more damage than help to the learner.

- Additive approach and Subtractive approach in the landscaping context

Due to the fact that all learning and training programs, as well as informal teaching are conducted in both English and Spanish, Mexicans are successfully taught and exposed to English in an additive setting, as defined by Stritikus and García (2005)

Imbedded in this additive perspective for minority language students is the understanding that language, culture, and their accompanying values are constructed in the home and community environments, that children come to school with some constructed knowledge about many things. Children's development and learning are, thus, best understood as the interaction of previous and present linguistic, sociocultural, and cognitive constructions. (p. 733).

As Stritikus and García explained in the previous definition, language, culture and values cannot be taught in isolation. Even though a full-immersion approach is crucial when learning a second language, discarding the cultural elements of the learner's mother language is not beneficial. It is by means of interacting with their peers and using their mother language that speakers make a sense of the new language and cultural elements that surround them in a different reality.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to time constraints, this study could not be developed in depth. Because the participants were only available towards the second-half of their landscaping season, they were mostly focused on their return to Mexico and were not interested in being part of a research project. If this project had been developed on a different portion of the landscaping season, I could have created a stronger connection that would have allowed me to analyze even more diverse perspectives from the Spanish-speaking workers and their views on bilingualism, language, literacy and culture.

CONCLUSIONS

After my data analysis and discussion of the issues raised in this document, it is possible to conclude the following:

1. Language learning and socialization for this community occur in two areas: informal contexts first, and semi-formal situations second, which are mostly oriented to development of work skills and financial improvement. These two particular contexts create a situation in which the community members identify English as a key tool for success, which causes them to develop a series of strategies to appropriate the target language and navigate in the dominant culture in which they perform their daily activities.
2. Due to the lack of formal education, Mexican landscaping workers at the North Branch of TallGrass are bilingual mostly at the oral level, and later develop a limited reading and writing proficiency when they have the opportunity to get promoted. Those who do not develop these bilingual skills see their wages affected. Those who develop the required proficiency skills are able to move up within the ranks of the company and acquire different roles within the community, but they still do not see themselves as fully proficient users of the English language within their own perception of bilingualism.
3. Although all of the workers who are proficient in oral English are able to sustain conversations with native speakers in different contexts, they do not see themselves as bilingual, due to the

informal nature of their learning. This finding agrees with the concept of *lirico* learning proposed by Farr (1994), in which formal learning is more valuable than skills acquired without a traditional education. It is important to empower these community members, so they can understand that the skills they have acquired are as valid and relevant as those learned by others in more academic settings.

4. Statistical evidence shows a dramatic increase in the Spanish Speaking population in Central Ohio. Unfortunately, the evidence also shows that the state is not prepared for facing the changes and consequences this particular change in demographics will bring to the area. Consequently, a partnership between community members would help integrate these individuals to an area not as demographically diverse as other North American cities.

IMPLICATIONS

Although the present article addresses some key issues in the strategies used by immigrant, transnational workers in Central Ohio, my findings establish that more research is needed in some areas not discussed in this study. Some of these areas include, but are not limited to:

- A. The ways in which the identity of transnational, seasonal immigrants is affected by their acculturation and language acquisition process.
- B. The strategies used by such a particular group of immigrants to negotiate their multiple identities in the different contexts in which they interact with others.
- C. The methods and strategies used by seasonal immigrants to succeed and become part of the dominant culture.
- D. The views the dominant English culture have on seasonal immigrants and how these views affect their acculturation and the negotiation of identity of Spanish Speaker workers.

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