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COMMUNICATION IN US FIRMS EMPLOYING LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

The US is becoming an increasingly multilingual nation. According to the 1990 Census, at least 32 million people in the US speak a first language other than English, and half of those do not speak English fluently; in the 2000 Census, these numbers are expected to rise considerably. The influence of these Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) individuals in the US labor force is growing as their numbers rise, compounded by three additional phenomena: 1) ethnic groups today seek to maintain their native languages and cultures more than they did in the past (Piatt, *Language on the Job*); 2) unemployment and a healthy economy are compelling firms to recruit LES workers for positions which previously might have required fluent English; and 3) the evolving legal framework interprets language rights as part of affirmative action and equal opportunity employment (Piatt, *Only English?*).

These changes are obliging managers in many US firms to cope with issues of language and culture for which they are often ill-prepared. While companies hiring large numbers of LEP workers tend to be those that rely heavily on low-skill jobs in manufacturing or services (such as assembly-line production, food preparation or custodial work), a growing number of businesses are putting the skills of LEP workers to use in high-skill jobs in which entire teams of workers speak languages other than English.

Almost no research exists about foreign language use in US firms, except where litigation is involved (Woo and Geyelin). Very little is known about how companies manage the language barrier or what strategies and practices work best. Such knowledge could help educators prepare students to work in this new environment, and could also help prospective employees market their skills more effectively as US firms in

the new millennium move away from the “English-only” model of management.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the Midwest, primarily in the Kansas City and Wichita areas. This region may be considered typical of much of the interior of the US, which has traditionally experienced less immigration than the US coasts and border with Mexico, but where there are significant and growing immigrant populations (Amato 23).

The research consisted of three phases: (a) interviews with managers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) employees, (b) interviews with Hispanic workers who spoke limited English, and (c) a mail survey of area firms.

Interviews with Managers

The researcher conducted forty face-to-face interviews with managers in organizations that employed LEP workers. The purpose of the interviews was to explore how the lack of a common language affected the organizations and what measures were used to facilitate communication. In setting up the interviews, contact was requested with the person who was most familiar with the management of each organization’s LEP work force. Generally, this was the human resources or personnel manager. Many of these organizations had a high percentage of LEP workers: sometimes 80% or more of the total work force. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the interview sample, including the type of business, number of employees, percentage of LEP workers, and the approximate distribution of the foreign languages among those workers.

TABLE 1: *Characteristics of Organizations in the Interview Sample*

<u>Type of Business</u>	<u>Employees</u>	<u>% LEP</u>	<u>Language Groups</u>
Metal Fabrication			
Company #1	1000	15%	Hispanic (.5), Vietnamese (.5)
Company #2	270	90	(.5)
Company #3	248	50	Hispanic (.95), Laotian (.5)
Company #4	136	90	(.5)
Company #5	100	30	Hispanic (.5), Vietnamese (.5)
Company #6	100	40	(.5)
Company #7	45	30	Vietnamese (.9), Laotian (.1)

Hispanic (.8), Other (.2)
 Laotian (.95), Other (.05)
 Hispanic (.33), Asian (.66)

Plastics			
Manufacturing.	420	20	Hispanic (.3), Asian (.6)
Company #8	150	30	Asian(.9), Other (.1)
Company #9	140	65	Hispanic (.7), Vietnamese (.3)
Company #10	120	40	Hispanic (.6), Asian (.4)
Company #11			
Light Manufacturing			
Company #12	300	50	Hispanic (.1), Asian (.9)
Company #13	300	50	Hispanic (.5), Vietnamese (.5)
Company #14	160	50	Hispanic (.7), Other (.3)
Company #15	130	50	Hispanic (.5), Vietnamese (.5)
Company #16	85	30	Hispanic (.5), India (.25) Vietnamese (.25) Vietnamese (1.0)
Company #17	76	10	
Food Preparation			
Company #18	275	5	Mixed (1.0)
Company #19	55	30	Mexican (1.0)
Company #20	26	85	Hispanic (.75), India (.1)
Company #21	1000	50	Hispanic (.5) Asian (.4), Other (.1)
Company #22	225	10	Hispanic (1.0)
Company #23	175	5	Hispanic (.8), Other (.2)
Company #24	20	50	Hispanic (1.0)
Laundry/Uniform Services			
Company #25	120	40	Mixed (1.0)
Company #26	64	30	Hispanic (.5), Vietnamese (.5)
Company #27	48	80	Mixed (1.0)
Company #28	23	0.5	Bosnian (1.0)
Housekeeping/ Custodial			
Company #29	1200	50	Hispanic (.8), Asian (.2)
Company #30	500	5	Mixed (1.0)
Company #31	208	30	Mixed (1.0)
Company #32	120	50	Hispanic (.7), Other (.3)
Company #33	30	30	Mixed (1.0)
Mail Processing			
Company #34	120	50	Hispanic (1.0)
Company #35	100	75	Vietnamese (1.0)

Temporary Employment Services			
Company #36	2000	10	Hispanic (1.0)
Company #37	1000	30	Hispanic (1.0)
Company #38	560	20	Hispanic (.5), Asian (.5)
Horticultural Services			
Company #39	358	40	Hispanic (.9), Other (.1)
Company #40	195	50	Hispanic (1.0)

Interviews with Hispanic Workers

This aspect of the research consisted of twenty face-to-face interviews with Hispanic workers. The researcher conducted these interviews in Spanish. The purpose of these interviews was to add a perspective from the side of LEP workers, in order to see whether language issues described by managers appeared to coincide with the experience of Hispanic workers, and to consider how organizations that wished to do so might better attract or retain Hispanic workers through incentives or changes in the work environment.

Subjects were recruited through an Hispanic community organization that provided evening English classes to adults. The nexus through the Hispanic community center was important to establish an atmosphere of trust (Marin and Marin 46) and to help dispel subjects' potential reluctance to be interviewed. Subjects were selected to represent, insofar as possible, a broad spectrum of Hispanic workers: about half were men and half women, their time in the US ranged from less than one year up to twenty years, and their English-speaking skills varied from extremely limited to fairly good.

Survey of Employers

The survey covered six general types of information: (1) reasons why companies hired LEP workers; (2) managers' preparedness for managing the LEP workforce; (3) organizational strategies for dealing with the language barrier; (4) work outcomes; (5) interactions among employees and between employees and supervisors; and (6) the use of translators and interpreters.

A questionnaire was mailed to 400 human resource managers in area organizations, including local chapters of the Human Resources Management Association and Chambers of Commerce. There were 132 respondents, of which 76 had LEP employees.

RESULTS

The research findings are summarized in ten points below. These results incorporate the survey responses as well as the two sets of interviews.

- 1) *Organizations generally began hiring LEP employees out of need, but continued hiring them out of satisfaction with the LEP work force.*

A major factor driving organizations towards multilingual workplaces was the limited availability of US workers for certain jobs. Only about 30% of the organizations surveyed were satisfied with the quality of the US workers who would accept low-wage jobs. In addition, 30% of firms in the survey indicated that they had trouble finding US workers of *any* quality to do the jobs filled by LEP workers. The major complaints regarding quality of the US workforce had to do with high turnover and absenteeism, particularly among younger workers, who were seen as “spoiled” by managers; and lack of work ethic, in contrast to LEP workers, who were perceived as having a very strong work ethic.

The main circumstances that made a company fertile ground for the LEP work force were (a) availability of jobs based on routine processes that could be accomplished with a minimum of verbal or written communication; (b) in some cases, foresight by owners or managers who saw the potential of the immigrant work force; and (c) the arrival of one or more LEP workers, often by chance, but also strongly influenced by location. For organizations hiring LEP workers, work ethic became of primary importance. As shown in Table 2, over 40% of survey respondents indicated that LEP workers appreciated their jobs more, complained less, and had a better work ethic than US workers.

TABLE 2: *Frequency Distribution — Reasons for Hiring LEP Workers*
(1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree) *N*=76: *Only valid responses reported*

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Stand. Dev.</u>	<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Valid %</u>
12) LEP workers appreciate their jobs more than US workers	2.51	.89	Strongly Ag.	7	9.3
			Agree	35	46.7
			Neutral	22	29.3
			Disagree	10	13.3
			Strongly Dis.	1	1.3
11) LEP workers complain less than US workers	2.56	.99	Strongly Ag.	10	13.3
			Agree	29	38.7
			Neutral	21	28.0
			Disagree	14	18.7
			Strongly Dis.	1	1.3

9) LEP workers have better work ethic than US workers	2.72	1.04	Strongly Ag.	6	8.0
			Agree	28	37.3
			Neutral	25	33.3
			Disagree	13	17.3
			Strongly Dis.	3	4.0
10) LEP workers are more reliable than US workers	2.88	1.07	Strongly Ag.	6	8.0
			Agree	22	29.3
			Neutral	27	36.0
			Disagree	15	20.0
			Strongly Dis.	5	6.7
6) Organization is unsatisfied with quality of US work force	2.91	1.04	Strongly Ag.	6	8.1
			Agree	23	31.1
			Neutral	22	29.7
			Disagree	18	24.3
			Strongly Dis.	5	6.8
48g) LEP employees are an advantage with foreign clients	2.92	.84	Strongly Ag.	7	9.2
			Agree	17	22.4
			Neutral	33	43.4
			Disagree	13	17.1
			Strongly Dis.	6	7.9
48f) It is hard to find US employees	3.04	1.22	Strongly Ag.	0	0.0
			Agree	21	27.6
			Neutral	35	46.1
			Disagree	16	21.1
			Strongly Dis.	4	5.3
5) It is hard to find US employees	3.07	1.22	Strongly Ag.	4	5.4
			Agree	28	37.8
			Neutral	13	17.6
			Disagree	17	23.0
			Strongly Dis.	12	16.2

Interviews with managers indicated some negative consequences, including the increased possibility of accidents due to miscommunication in conveying safety instructions, complaints by customers about the use of foreign language, and the difficulty of implementing team-based improvements. In general, however, managers emphasized that the LEP workers' good performance outweighed these potential difficulties.

2) *The use of foreign language in the workplace was not a major source of conflict in the organizations studied.*

The interviews unearthed a rather lengthy list of areas of friction, discomfort, miscommunication, and potentially negative consequences that could be attributed to language differences. The managers who were interviewed, however, saw these as relatively rare incidents that did not invalidate the overall positive impact of the LEP workers. As seen in Table 3, only about 13% of survey respondents indicated that friction

among language groups was a problem in their organizations (question 30).

Respondents recognized, however, that they may not have been aware of problems that did exist (questions 31 and 32). In addition, interviews with Hispanic workers indicated that managers in fact were often ignorant of problems involving LEP workers. Many Hispanic subjects who were interviewed stated that they were likely simply to quit and walk away when dissatisfied or when they perceived they were not being treated fairly; thus, managers would never recognize and could not correct the underlying problems.

3) *Friction among workers in organizations appeared to be related more to cultural than to language differences.*

Complaints or confrontations among language groups were relatively uncommon in the organizations studied. Both sets of interviews and the survey results supported this conclusion. As shown in Table 3, more survey respondents disagreed than agreed with most of the negative statements about interactions in the workplace. Two areas where they tended to see problems were non-verbal communication and male/female relations (questions 42 and 43). These two areas involve deep-seated behavior within cultures and may require special attention from management, such as training to increase awareness of differences in non-verbal signals (Schneller) .

4) *Communication between LEP workers and management was often less open and less accessible than communication between US workers and management.*

A majority of the survey respondents felt that communication from management to LEP workers might be distorted by language difficulties (see Table 3, question 34). Respondents also tended to agree that LEP employees were less able to communicate with management (question 35) and reluctant to communicate with management (question 36). LEP workers could be expected to be reluctant to communicate with their superiors, due to the language barrier and cultural characteristics of the Asian and Hispanic groups that constituted the bulk of the LEP work force in this study (Thiederman 23).

5) *The effectiveness of LEP organizations depended strongly on the intercultural communication competence of their managers.*

Questions representing three dimensions of intercultural competence--attitude, knowledge and behavior (Imahora and Lanigan)--were included in the survey. For brevity, the frequency table is not reproduced here. Most respondents demonstrated a positive *attitude* towards LEP workers and felt competent at intercultural communication skills (*behavior*), but only about one-third felt that they had a good *knowledge* base for dealing with LEP issues.

TABLE 3: *Frequency Distribution - Organizational Interactions*
(1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree) *N*=76: *Only valid responses reported*

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Stand. Dev.</u>	<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Valid %</u>
30) Friction among language groups is not a problem	2.28	.90	Strongly Ag.	11	14.5
			Agree	44	57.9
			Neutral	11	14.5
			Disagree	9	11.8
			Strongly Dis.	1	1.3
31) I may not be aware of conflicts between US and LEP workers	2.58	1.00	Strongly Ag.	7	9.2
			Agree	37	48.7
			Neutral	15	19.7
			Disagree	15	19.7
			Strongly Dis.	2	2.6
29) I am confident that LEP workers understand safety procedures	2.58	1.11	Strongly Ag.	11	14.5
			Agree	32	42.1
			Neutral	15	19.7
			Disagree	14	18.4
			Strongly Dis.	4	5.3
32) I may not be aware of conflicts between LEP groups	2.68	.97	Strongly Ag.	2	2.6
			Agree	42	55.3
			Neutral	13	17.1
			Disagree	16	21.1
			Strongly Dis.	3	3.9
42) Nonverbal communication is often misunderstood across cultures	2.76	.95	Strongly Ag.	4	5.3
			Agree	30	39.5
			Neutral	25	32.9
			Disagree	14	18.4
			Strongly Dis.	3	3.9
34) Communication from management may be distorted by language difficulties	2.79	1.01	Strongly Ag.	3	3.9
			Agree	36	47.4
			Neutral	14	18.4
			Disagree	20	26.3
			Strongly Dis.	3	3.9

43) Male/female work relationships are complicated across cultures	2.87	.91	Strongly Ag.	3	3.9
			Agree	27	35.5
			Neutral	24	31.6
			Disagree	21	27.6
			Strongly Dis.	1	1.3
36) LEP employees are reluctant to communicate with management	2.90	.95	Strongly Ag.	3	3.9
			Agree	27	35.5
			Neutral	23	30.3
			Disagree	21	27.6
			Strongly Dis.	2	2.6
35) LEP employees are less able to communicate with management	3.00	.98	Strongly Ag.	1	1.3
			Agree	30	39.5
			Neutral	16	21.1
			Disagree	26	34.2
			Strongly Dis.	3	3.9
44) Some employees are offended by habits of other groups	3.01	.94	Strongly Ag.	4	5.3
			Agree	18	24.0
			Neutral	28	37.3
			Disagree	23	30.7
			Strongly Dis.	2	2.7
41) Workers sometimes feel they are being made fun of	3.13	.96	Strongly Ag.	2	2.6
			Agree	20	26.3
			Neutral	24	31.6
			Disagree	26	34.2
			Strongly Dis.	4	5.3
40) US workers perceive LEP workers as less intelligent	3.23	1.01	Strongly Ag.	1	1.3
			Agree	21	28.0
			Neutral	20	26.7
			Disagree	26	34.7
			Strongly Dis.	7	9.3
33) LEP workers have less knowledge about the organization	3.25	1.11	Strongly Ag.	3	3.9
			Agree	21	27.6
			Neutral	15	19.7
			Disagree	28	36.8
			Strongly Dis.	9	11.8
37) LEP workers are more reluctant than US workers to report injuries	3.48	.91	Strongly Ag.	1	1.3
			Agree	11	14.7
			Neutral	21	28.0
			Disagree	35	46.7
			Strongly Dis.	7	9.3
39) US workers feel that LEP employees work too hard	3.55	.93	Strongly Ag.	1	1.3
			Agree	11	14.7
			Neutral	18	24.0
			Disagree	36	48.0
			Strongly Dis.	9	12.0

38) US workers are afraid of losing their jobs to LEP workers	3.78	.89	Strongly Ag. Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Dis.	1 7 13 42 13	1.3 9.2 17.1 55.3 17.1
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As seen in Table 4, answers to an open-ended question indicated that managers recognized their own knowledge needs, particularly for foreign language training.

TABLE 4: *Survey Respondents' Interest in LEP Management Information*

Q. 68: *What kind of preparation or training do you feel would have helped you be better able to manage LEP employees*

	<u>Number of responses</u>	<u>% of responses</u>
Foreign language training		
Training about other cultures/customs		
English training for LEP employees	22	40.0
Access to professional interpreters and translators	14	25.0
Management-focused information	5	9.0
Intercultural communication training	4	7.0
Availability of bilingual managers	3	5.5
"Anything"	3	5.5
Total responses	2	4.0
	2	4.0
	55	100.0

6) *Organizations employed a variety of strategies in dealing with language issues.*

The interviews showed that organizational attitudes ranged from passive acceptance of communication limitations with LEP workers to a proactive tackling of these hindrances. These responses depended on a variety of factors, including the intercultural competence of key managers, the type of industry, the organization's structure and its communication climate.

Passive Language Strategies

The companies with passive strategies accepted the fact that the jobs they offered were at the bottom of the employment heap, and that workers who learned English would soon move on to other companies. These organizations obtained their LEP workers strictly by word of

mouth. They tolerated the use of foreign language on the job, but made few efforts to improve communication beyond the minimum needed to do the work. Few, if any, written materials were provided in the workers' native languages. Whenever an interpreter was needed, one of the workers who had some knowledge of English was called into service. Managers in these companies did not speak another language, and no effort was made to help workers learn English.

Proactive Language Strategies

More proactive strategies, on the other hand, appeared in many organizations, often in combination with some of the passive strategies. Some organizations actively recruited LEP workers. Proactive organizations translated written materials for LEP employees. Several had created bilingual or multilingual positions at the managerial level and promoted foreign language learning by managers. Another proactive approach was to hire professional interpreters on some occasions, especially for job training and safety instruction. There were also proactive strategies in the area of English learning, which ranged from announcing the availability of English classes off-site to offering free, on-site instruction during work hours.

The survey data (table not shown) indicated that over 62% of the organizations used passive, word-of-mouth hiring strategies, and 64% saw themselves as temporary way stations for LEP employees as they prepared themselves for better jobs. However, 30% to 40% used proactive strategies, including hiring professional interpreters, providing ESL classes, translating written materials for LEP workers, and creating bilingual or multilingual managerial positions. About one-fourth promoted foreign language learning by managers.

7) Interpretation was a pivotal, but largely ignored, function in the operation of LEP organizations.

Interpreters and translators were the "glue" that held the multilingual organizations together. Most managers in the interview sample paid relatively little attention to the quality of interpreting and translating; instead, they appeared to assume that any worker who was fairly bilingual could perform these functions. Thirty-four of the forty managers interviewed said that workers were used as interpreters for *all* types of oral communication, e.g., training, supervision, feedback,

disciplinary action, communication about benefits, layoffs, schedules, and leave time.

Advantages of relying exclusively on workers as interpreters and translators included convenience, economy, availability, and the fact that bilingual workers understood the work process and used appropriate native dialects. Disadvantages were that interpreting took time from other work, took longer because workers could not do simultaneous interpreting, compromised confidentiality, particularly for disciplinary matters, and could produce a “gatekeeping” effect with management.

8) *Organizations that relied on the passive recruiting of LEP workers tended to be dominated by one language group over time.*

An issue of potential concern to LEP employers, noted in the literature, was the likelihood that passive reliance on immigrant networks to provide new employees could lead, over time, to dominance of one particular language group, and possibly to the development of a work climate that was unattractive to US workers (Martin, 542-543). To test whether organizations in the sample had found this to be true, a chi-square test was performed using the responses to questions 14 (*My organization obtains its LEP workers almost entirely through word of mouth*) and 16 (*In this organization, over time, one foreign language group has tended to grow much larger than other foreign language groups*).

As shown in Table 5, organizations that depended on word-of-mouth recruiting did report that one language group assumed predominance over time. This has been suggested as being unhealthy to organizations, since it may discourage job applications by US workers (Martin). On the other hand, bilingual organizations probably have much simpler communication tasks than do multilingual organizations. It may well be an intelligent strategy for some organizations to accept their reliance on a particular ethnic group and focus their efforts on meeting the needs of that group.

TABLE 5: *Chi-Square Test of Question 14 and Question 16*
 Q. 16: *One language group grew larger than others*

Q 14: <i>Obtain LEP workers through word of mouth</i>	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Strongly Agree	Count	5	2	1	1	10

Agree	4	21	3	9	0	37
Neutral	0	0	3	1	0	4
Disagree	0	5	5	11	1	22
Strongly Dis.	1	0	0	0	1	2
Total	10	28	12	22	3	75

	Value	Df	Asymp. Significance (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	53.637	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	45.107	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.572	1	.001
No. of valid cases	75		

9) *Communication was a key variable in creating a favorable work environment for Spanish-speaking employees.*

The Hispanic subjects interviewed were very tolerant of language differences. Even a small amount of Spanish language learning at the managerial level was viewed positively. *Personalismo* or *simpatía* (Triandis, Marin, Lisansky and Betancourt) appeared to be more important than language in relating to Hispanic workers.

It was clear from the interviews, however, that the language barrier restricted the access of Hispanics to organizations that might benefit from hiring them. Spanish-speaking immigrants were very isolated from the broad business community and were unlikely to apply for work at a firm unless friends or family were already established there, although they were interested in learning about new job opportunities and responded favorably to recruitment efforts through church and community centers.

For the most part, Hispanic perceptions of work environments were similar to those expressed by the managers interviewed. Hispanics were, as managers assumed them to be, largely satisfied with work conditions and relatively uncritical of management and organizational procedures. They appreciated their jobs, were willing to work hard, and appeared to get along well with co-workers.

The Hispanic workers, were, however, sensitive to what they considered to be rude nonverbal language, and often perceived that they carried heavier workloads than non-Hispanics. Management was generally unaware of these problems, as workers would leave their jobs without protesting or explaining the cause. Problems were most frequently found at the supervisory level, where bias against Hispanics and favoritism towards other groups were sometimes perceived.

10) *While many LEP organizations were operating successfully, many were also experiencing significant problems.*

Survey respondents were divided on many questions into nearly equal groups of “Agree,” “Neutral,” and “Disagree,” or into bimodal groups. This indicated that there were a number of problem areas which were quite widespread. For example, while over 50% of respondents indicated that their organizations were not handicapped by the language barrier, 30% felt that their organizations were handicapped. In addition, important interactions related to foreign-language-speaking workers could occur without managers’ knowledge, due to the language barrier and complicated by communication reluctance on the part of LEP employees.

The variability of the responses made it difficult to draw conclusions about many aspects of this research. One facet of this variability was the difference between the interview responses and the survey responses. For example, managers in the interviews raised the possibility that the language barrier increased the accident rate, or kept US workers away, but fewer than 4% of the survey respondents agreed with these statements. In general, the interviews tended to signal behaviors that were somewhat extreme, and the survey findings tended to smooth out these extremes. This may have been due to the fact that the organizations in the interview sample were chosen because they faced significant LEP management problems.

CONCLUSIONS

While the three phases of the research converged towards the conclusion that multiple languages did not ultimately decrease the effectiveness of the organizations in this study, communication difficulties still exist within these firms. LEP workers often feel less involved in the organization and are reluctant to share their viewpoints and suggestions. As firms move more to just-in-time operations, participative management, and teamwork, special language and intercultural skills will be acutely needed to help bring LES workers into these new styles of management.

Demonstration of the link between organizational effectiveness and language practices in LEP firms may be attempted in future research, but the difficulty of evaluating this connection statistically should be noted. Many of the organizations in this study were under extreme pressure to

produce large volumes of products or services with low-cost labor. As Youndt, Snell, Dean and Lepak have pointed out, the effectiveness of human resource interventions (such as introducing bilingual managers) is hard to establish in organizations where firms base their competitive strategies on cost factors rather than quality. However, as firms become more sophisticated in their use of LEP workers, and begin to employ them in higher-level positions, it should become possible to measure the impact of multilingual management strategies and techniques.

The ability of managers and supervisors to communicate well with LEP workers appeared in this study to be the most important factor in creating a successful multilingual workplace. Good communication included not only managers' ability to speak the languages of the workers, but also their specific knowledge of other cultures, and, most importantly, their ability to relate to LEP employees in spite of language differences. Thus, the inter-cultural sensitivity developed by learning one language should certainly be helpful to managers, even when they must communicate with workers whose language is unfamiliar to them.

Workplace language issues are likely to become more prominent within US firms in the new millennium. It was clear from this study that firms are keenly interested in learning more about how to operate in a multilingual setting and are willing to share their experiences. It is hoped that this research will provide a starting point for sensitizing businesses, students, and faculty, to the important role that managers with expertise in foreign language and culture can play within firms operating in the US

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