

Communicating with Frontline Workers with Limited English Proficiency

Caitlin A. Hamstra, Ph.D.

Birchwood Foods

chamstra@bwfoods.com

For North American Meat Institute (NAMI)
Environment, Labor & Safety Conference



Communicating with Frontline Workers

1. Limited English proficiency
2. Spoken Communication
3. Written Communication
4. Translation/interpretation



English Proficiency

- Proficiency is “the fact of having the skill and experience for doing something” (Dictionary.com)
- English proficiency is the ability to use the language for what the speaker needs



Limited English Proficiency



Image via storyset.com

- Workers speak one language or multiple languages other than English
- Limited English proficiency is lacking the ability to use English for what the speaker needs

Spoken Communication



Keys to Spoken Communication

- Use pauses and some repetition
- Slow down
- Speak clearly
- Patience
- Empathy

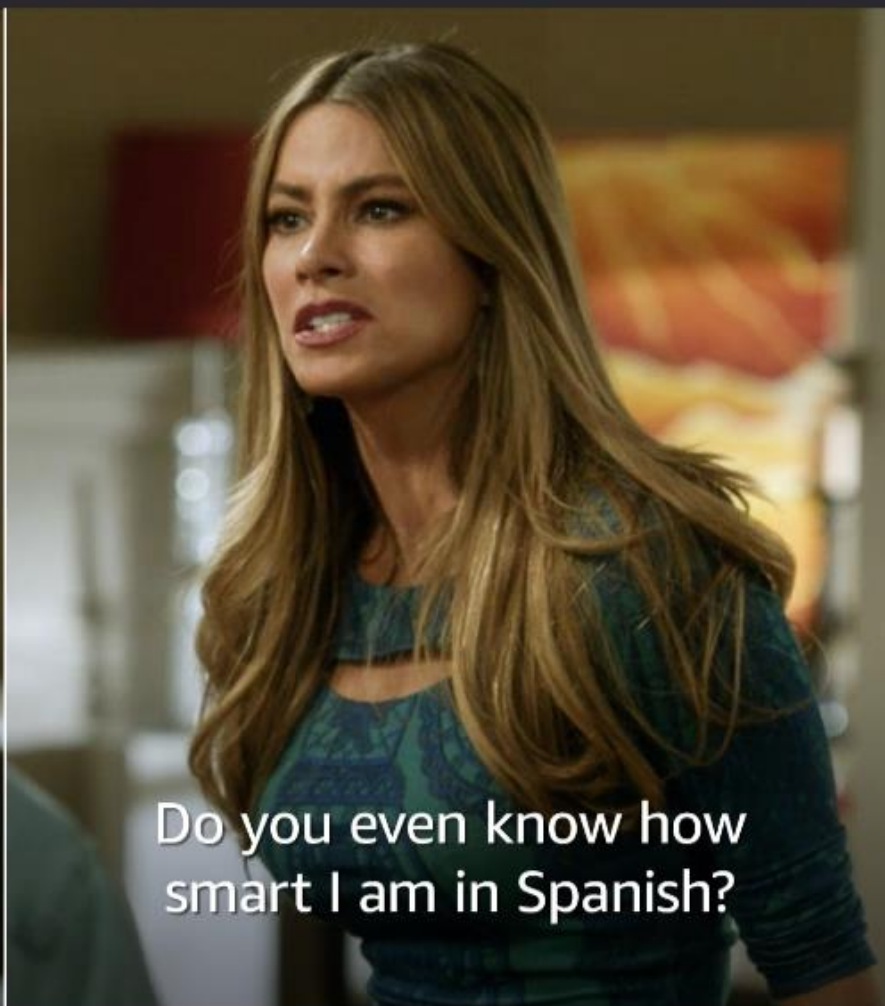


Image via storyset.com





Do you know how frustrating it is
to have to translate everything in
my head before I say it?



Do you even know how
smart I am in Spanish?

Image of Gloria (played by Sofia Vergara) from Modern Family via Twitter.com

Simplify Grammar

- Use fewer words
- Simple sentence structure

Subject	Verb	
You	work	on the grinder.
I	will help	you with this.
You	are	important.



Simplify Grammar

Avoid unneeded words and phrases

- It would be great if...
- I am going to need...
- Go ahead and...
- Just so you know...



Image via storyset.com

Simplify Grammar

Make these sentences simpler:

1. I am going to need to you go over there and grab that blue bag.

Example: Please get the blue bag.

2. Just so you know it's really important that you are not late on a daily basis.

Example: You need to be on time every day.



Simplify Vocabulary

- Let's play a game!
- Decide which word is harder



Image via storyset.com



Occur

Happen

Accomplish

Complete



Problem

Issue



Simplify ~~Vocabulary~~ Words

- Choose more common words
- Include an easy synonym if you have a difficult word:
 - We need to **develop** a training plan for new workers.
 - We need to develop—**make**—a training plan for new workers



Simplify ~~Vocabulary~~ Words

- Avoid verbs with two words
 - Turn in
 - Get over (something)
- What are some alternatives?
 - Show up
 - Help out
 - Call off
 - Calm down



Avoid Slang and Idioms

- Slang and idioms are difficult to understand
- They are figurative and confusing
- Examples:
 - Once in a blue moon
 - Cost an arm and a leg
 - When pigs fly



Avoid Slang and Idioms

- What are some common idioms that you use?
- Make these phrases more literal:
 - It's up to you
 - Kick the can down the road
 - Get a taste of your own medicine



Image via storyset.com



Pronunciation

- Clear, careful, and slow speech
- Make each word clear to hear and separate from the other words around it
 - Wanna, woulda, coulda, etc.
 - Watcha doin'?
 - Wadjado that for?



Body Language

- Smile!
- Keep eye contact
- Look at people you talk to
- Use positive body language
- Use gestures, facial expressions to support your message



Body Language

- Pay attention to listeners' body language
- What is their body language telling you about what they understand and how they feel?



A few more tips

Yes!

- Specific questions: What time do you need to be here tomorrow? What day do you start work?
- Please tell me what you learned/understood/heard need to do.
- What questions do you have?

No!

- Yes/no questions
- Do you understand?
- Do you have questions?



Written Communication



Written Communication

- Written communication can support verbal communication
- Easy to ignore
- Consider literacy
 - Not everybody is literate in the languages they speak
- Formal school experiences vary



Written Communication

- Avoid too much text on one page
- One font, one color
- Different size fonts to highlight key points



Keys to Written Communication

- Use native language when possible (for those who read)
- Provide comprehension support
- Do not assume literacy
- Simpler is better



Translation and Interpretation



Translation & Interpretation

- Utilize current employees
- Invest in their skills
- Connect with community groups
- Outside services for less common language groups
- Be aware of different ethnic groups



Communicating Front Line Employee's Importance



Communicating Front Line Employee's Importance

- Correctly pronounce names
- Know preferred languages
- Listen to them as individuals
- Include when making decisions and changes
- Recognition programs with rewards that they actually want

Communicating with Frontline Workers with Limited English Proficiency

Caitlin A. Hamstra, Ph.D.

Birchwood Foods

chamstra@bwfoods.com

