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The necessity and practicality of Spanish for the Professions and Specific Purposes
in the public sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

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ABSTRACT

This project sought to explore the demand for Spanish for the Professions and Specialized Purposes (SPSP) to aid current and future public sector workers in Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to the possible implementation of related courses in Tertiary Education. This topic was selected as the steady influx of refugees from Venezuela within the past five years has created a communicative strain among public sector workers, specifically in areas of healthcare, immigration and national security. It has been reported that there is no policy nor requirement for Spanish in these sectors, creating a shortage in employees equipped to deal with Spanish-speakers. These areas of public healthcare, immigration and national security were selected because they rely more heavily on accurate and immediate information, compared to other areas, because of life-threatening or legal implications.

In order to address the deficiency of Spanish competence within the public sector, Spanish for the Professions and Special Purposes should be consulted to assist with the development of teaching programs. These specialized programs target key areas which are necessary for the daily function of an employee's duties and can be taught to current staff, in addition to an introduction in Tertiary education to help in the preparation of those interested in working in the public sector. Currently, there are limited resources on this topic that are relevant to the Caribbean as this is a fairly new issue in this region. For this reason, foreign sources of secondary data were consulted, in addition to the opinions of individuals currently employed in the public sector of Trinidad and Tobago. This research should be able to highlight the necessity of greater Spanish competence in society as well as to provide a foundation for further exploration in other areas of the public sector.

Keywords: Trinidad and Tobago, public sector, migrant crisis, Spanish for the Professions

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Trinidad and Tobago has seen a rise in the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants especially in recent years with the influx of Venezuelan refugees into the region, however minimal accommodations have been made for these individuals when it comes to our communication with them. Although there are ongoing programs to assist refugees and asylum seekers to learn English on arrival, the level of English taught in these programs is insufficient to aid Spanish speakers in communicative environments where specialized English is required. It has been stated by interviewees that levels of English competence amongst the Venezuelan refugees are not sufficient for effective communication, despite having to interact with frontline public sector employees in different environments compared to other non-English speaking migrants, as in cases of applications for asylum, registration for special work permits etcetera. Public sector staff in particular ought to be able to communicate effectively with Spanish-speaking migrants and for this to happen, employees should be educated in specialized Spanish for their area of work. In this regard, there would need to be an assessment of the demand for Spanish for the Professions and Specialized Purposes in the public sector which can facilitate effective communication with Spanish-speaking refugees in situations where interpreters are impractical.

At present, a great number of Venezuelan migrants have not yet been registered as asylum seekers, nor have they been granted refugee status, even though the international community is aware that the rapid exodus of Venezuelans is due to the political crisis in their home country. Their urgency in fleeing suggests that Venezuelans are ill-prepared for life in the receptor country, where there are limited resources to facilitate their integration into a different society. Based on the current

social situation, it can be adduced that there exists a need for the introduction of specialized Spanish courses for the public sector workers of Trinidad and Tobago in order to accommodate the exponential number of monolingual Spanish-speaking refugees in spaces which require urgent communication such as healthcare, immigration and national security.

1.2 Objectives

This research intends to explore the demand for Spanish for the Professions and Specialized Purposes (SPSP) for current and future public sector workers in Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to outlining possible implementation of different courses in Tertiary Education. The results should be able to provide insight on the societal need for SPSP as little literature is currently available on this topic produced specifically for Trinidad and Tobago, since the growth in the influx of Spanish-speaking migrants. This paper can also be used as a foundation in the development of more long-term studies relevant to Trinidad and Tobago or the wider Caribbean and utilized for other areas of the public sector not mentioned in this paper, for instance, social services, education and in non-governmental organizations aimed at refugee aid.

1.3 Parameters

The introduction of specialized Spanish was chosen specifically because it is one of the most widely spoken languages in the Caribbean and the recent influx of Spanish speaking migrants to Trinidad and Tobago. This research paper focuses specifically on the public sector workers of Trinidad and Tobago, however, not all areas of the public sector were mentioned in this research, only areas such as public healthcare, immigration, and national security because these sectors encounter more immediate interaction with refugees than others and miscommunication can result in serious consequences for both parties. As a result of time restraints, primary sources were

limited to several members of the aforementioned areas of the public sector and for this reason, the sample size may not be representative of the opinions of the entire public sector of Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, due to the limited sources of recent literature produced on this topic for the Caribbean, secondary data sources were taken from studies applied to a variety of countries.

1.4 Methodology

For the purposes of this research, secondary data was sourced online in order to provide background information on the topic of Spanish for the Professions and Specialized Purposes (SPSP) and its introduction into tertiary education for current and future public sector workers. These secondary data sources came from studies conducted and research papers written by foreign researchers, including linguists, as well as textbooks published in this area of Applied Linguistics.

Given that this research paper is a social study to explore the demand for specialized Spanish in the public sector, interviews were selected as a primary data collection method as they can provide qualitative data that support the secondary data previously gathered. Interviews can also provide some quantitative data but with the provision that the interviewee has access to such statistics, if not, the quantitative data provided by interviewees is given by assumption. All those interviewed are members of the public sector in the areas of healthcare, immigration, and national security, and were able to discuss their first-hand experience of the current reality of the language situation in their work environment. This included four (4) nurses, one (1) nursing teacher, three (3) immigration officers, one (1) airport security officer, one (1) court service officer and five (5) police officers of different divisions totalling fifteen (15) interviewees. These individuals were also able to comment on the general communicative experience of their monolingual colleagues with Spanish-speaking migrants and the system, or lack thereof, in place to facilitate their interaction.

1.5 Chapter outline

This paper is laid out in three chapters. Chapter 1: Literature Review, provides the background information for the topic of Language for Specific Purposes and how this can be useful to Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to the possible challenges regarding its introduction into the workplace based on secondary research. Chapter 2: Presentation of the Problem, provides a basic assessment in the areas of healthcare, immigration and national security as observed by individuals currently employed in the public sector. The final chapter, Chapter 3: Solution to the Problem, examines the possible methods of rectifying the communicative gap and will solidify the relevance and practicality of Spanish for Specific Purposes in the public sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

CHAPTER ONE

The Literature Review

In the past five years there has been a growing influx of Latin-American migrants to the Caribbean, specifically Trinidad and Tobago, as a result of the political and economic crisis in Venezuela. The arrival of more than forty thousand Venezuelan migrants (Mohan, 2019) has resulted in societal pressure directed to an efficient means of communication with Spanish-speaking migrants to replace the current, disconnected system of both parties attempting to communicate with each in their respective languages. This need becomes evident especially in the public sector where there are often situations which require immediate, efficient communication, for example in healthcare, immigration, and national security situations. For these reasons, until Spanish speakers are able to acclimatize themselves to the English Creole most widely used, the public sector workers of Trinidad and Tobago can introduce the use of Spanish for the Professions and Specific Purposes (SPSP) into their workplace.

Spanish for the Professions and Specific Purposes is a strain of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) which falls under the branch of Applied Linguistics. Although one may first think of English for Specific Purposes relating to LSP, mainly because it has become the language of commerce and is on its way to becoming the “universal” language, studies are being explored in Spanish as well. Hall et. al (2015) claimed that Language for Specific Purposes deals with the context in which the language is being used, therefore functionalist and pragmatic approaches are used. It is important to address what is meant by “Specific Purposes,” this paper deals with the type of language used in the workplace, in interaction with patrons or professionals of that field. This type of communication is not the same as everyday speech and is highly dependent on

specialized terminologies and concepts, in addition to the ability to partake in general discourse in that field.

It is said that LSP is interdisciplinary which holds two meanings (Hall et al, 2015). Firstly, research done in LSP takes on various approaches from different fields considering cultural and societal aspects as well as various branches of linguistics. The intention of this research is to inform the pedagogy of the language for the intended purpose. Secondly, the teaching of the language for any specific field should be done from multiple perspectives, for example, teaching Spanish to be used in Business Marketing should take on a socio-cultural approach in order to be well received by the target audience. This reinforces the idea that Language for Specific Purposes and by extension SPSP, is not solely driven by the need to be aware of special terminologies, but to be able to use the language in contextual communication with other speakers.

This then invites the question of why a focus on Spanish in particular, is necessary in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, its answer being migration. This is not a new topic, for years individuals and families from Latin America and other Caribbean countries have come for a myriad of reasons (World of Work, 2017). As previously mentioned, the exodus out of Venezuela began roughly five years ago when the economy showed little signs of recovery added to the authoritarian governance under current president, Nicolas Maduro. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have fled the country to neighbouring territories including the Caribbean - specifically Trinidad and Tobago - which has received almost sixty thousand immigrants (Gedan, 2017). Organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) actively facilitate the registration of Venezuelan migrants throughout the Caribbean and other countries, assisting in granting asylum and refugee status, however not all those who leave for Trinidad and Tobago are registered as refugees. The volume of migrants escaping their country

without much preparation, indicates that there are few well-equipped for life in the receptor country where the process for registration is a slow one.

It appears that there is no foreseeable end to the Venezuelan Migrant crisis in the near future, which means that unless the government of Trinidad and Tobago attempts to repatriate the vast majority of Venezuelan nationals, there will remain the need to accommodate these individuals in different societal domains, and a large part of that includes being able to efficiently communicate with them. Most cases of interaction with Trinidadians and Spanish-speaking migrants as it stands right now, involve both parties struggling to communicate in Trinidadian English / English Creole, Spanish or a mix of both. This creates an inefficient work environment that could be vastly improved by both parties communicating using the same language in places where an interpreter is not always practical.

An introduction into society means their involvement in different institutions, businesses, or environments where communication with Spanish speaking immigrants is necessary and possibly urgent. This urgency occurs in situations where the immigrant may be seeking medical care and is unable to understand the nurses or doctors. It then becomes necessary that said medical personnel are able to communicate efficiently with their patient, using sufficient medical terminology in a manner that is well understood by the listener. Without this, there may be life-threatening consequences for the patient as he/she is given incorrect or misleading instructions due to poor linguistic performance on both ends. Similarly, in matters of National Security, it is possible that on-the-ground police officers must associate with immigrants for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to eye-witness questioning, conducting arrests, criminal investigations etcetera. All these tasks are to be carried out with a degree of formality and depth that requires certain linguistic competence of terminologies and concepts to be communicated with the Spanish

speaker. In matters such as these, a clear understanding of what is being communicated by both parties, will be the deciding factor in the accuracy of information and investigation done.

It is evident that one of the primary reasons for the arrival of legal and illegal migrants to Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to seeking asylum, is the search for work, which in either case translates to a direct relation between migration and the increase of the labour force. Within Trinidad and Tobago, efforts have been made by the government and by private institutions or individuals, to include migrant workers into the labour force. In May of 2019 the government of Trinidad and Tobago began the registration process of tens of thousands of Venezuelan migrants, including granting work permits for many of them, named the “Migrant Registration Framework” or the “Work Permit Exemption” policy (Mohan, 2019). Since then, the most recent renewal of work permits was in August of 2021 until November of the same year (Newsday, 2021). This is to say that the legal inclusion of Spanish speakers into the workforce has continued and is set to continue for an unprecedented future. An inclusion in the workplace further increases the need for a means of communication between workers in the same environment. Although there may be time for immigrant workers to learn the language as they work, urgent situations will need immediate communication using technical language, without room for linguistic errors.

To help Spanish speaking migrants become acquainted with Trinidadian and Tobagonian English / English Creoles, there have been programmes geared toward the education of immigrant children. One example is Equal Place, set up with the assistance of different organizations including UNHCR Trinidad and Tobago - the Refugee Agency, UNICEF, Living Waters Community and the Trinidad and Tobago Venezuela Solidarity Network (TTSOLNET). This programme was set up in 2019 and assists immigrants with access to free necessary education in both English and Spanish because public government education is not yet available nor adequately

equipped for Spanish-speaking children (UNHCR,2019). Education offered in Spanish is used transitionally to facilitate English learning so that students can eventually join the normal route of schooling. This then means that in order to teach specific subjects, teachers should be acquainted with certain terminologies and concepts in Spanish first before introducing their English equivalents, because as stated by Hebblethwaite (2012), education brings greater success when conducted in the first language.

There are many studies which explore the implementation and pedagogic process for different Languages for Specialized Purposes in countries like the United States. Doyle (2017) highlights that many authors on this topic share the view that the United States for years now has seen the need for Spanish for Specific Purposes to be introduced into the curriculum and steps have been taken toward this. However, despite the growing population of immigrants in the Caribbean within the past few years, there have not been many studies done on possible steps toward the inclusion of Languages for Specific Purposes in the curriculum and in effect, little to no steps have been made toward its implementation among the current public sector workers. It has been established that there are benefits of SPSP in Trinidad and Tobago, what then becomes important is figuring out the most effective course of action for its implementation and practice among current and future public sector workers.

It is possible that the introduction of courses in Spanish for the Professions and for Specialized Purposes at the tertiary level may face certain challenges for the institution and for the students. The investment to offer said courses may be seen as too large compared to the amount of students willing to take Spanish courses for Medicine, Business, Law or Law enforcement etcetera. In order to be effective and to be considered truly “Specialized”, the aims of these courses may not accommodate many students in different areas of the same field, further narrowing the

pool of students willing to take these courses (Tebano, 2007). Considering that these courses may only be applicable to students willing to specialize in those fields, before their implementation, that willingness should be assessed. It is likely however, that as a result of the developments in migration previously mentioned, there may be an increased interest to take these courses and a bigger demand for them in the workplace.

CHAPTER TWO

Presentation of the Problem

In research conducted with fifteen (15) individuals working in public healthcare, immigration and national security, a common ground was reached that Spanish for Special Purposes would be beneficial to their work environment. These interviewees included four (4) nurses, one (1) nursing teacher, three (3) immigration officers, one (1) airport security officer, one (1) court service officer and five (5) police officers of different ranks and divisions. All interviewees expressed concern over their current communicative competence given their frequency of interaction with Spanish-speaking individuals and agreed that more staff with the ability to communicate in Spanish, would improve their ability to carry out their duties efficiently.

2.1 Healthcare

In Trinidad and Tobago, the public healthcare system has seen a great increase in the number of Venezuelan refugees since one of the principal reasons that cause many to leave their home country is to seek medical care. A major factor stimulating the exodus out of Venezuela is the poor status of their healthcare system, where the people face supply shortages paired with a re-emergence of diseases such as malaria, in addition to a rise in numbers of COVID-19 cases (Broner and Page). Trinidad and Tobago provide public healthcare at a much lower cost than other Caribbean and Latin American countries, motivating refugees to seek the care they grossly lacked in their home country.

Interviews with individuals in public healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago including a nursing teacher, nurses and general medical practitioner all demonstrated a shared opinion that

Spanish for specialized purposes would be beneficial to the carrying out of their practice. It was shared that because there is no basic language requirement for nurses or doctors aside from English - the official language of Trinidad and Tobago - there are limited persons available to efficiently communicate with Spanish-speaking patients. When asked about the current means of communication between English-speaking medical personnel and Spanish-speaking patients, interviewees described their employment of mobile applications for translating. Although mobile applications are helpful in some situations, they are often unreliable in terms of accuracy and efficiency. Interviewees explained that dealing with a Spanish-speaking patient takes substantially longer than with English-speaking individuals, because of the amount of time spent going back and forth through a translating application.

Medical personnel resort to these applications because the language barrier has taken a toll on how they conduct their work. They have taken it upon themselves to start improving their knowledge of Spanish, both in a general sense and relevant to their work, however great difficulty remains in understanding the Spanish spoken back to them. Although it is not often the situation, there are some Spanish-speaking patients who come with in-person English aids in the form of other migrants with better though not perfect English-competence, or Trinidadian acquaintances who speak some Spanish. This does not present a more efficient communicative environment between the two parties as there is still the problem of waiting for translations, added to the possibility that the interpreter does not fully comprehend the specifics of what is being conveyed to them.

This leads to the main problem that the interviewees stressed, which is that in their field, information provided between both parties must be thorough with as much detail as possible, because this can mean the difference in the patient's wellbeing. An example was given that new

mothers need to provide their attending nurse with as much information as possible about their baby's status so that their doctor can accurately track the developmental stages of the child, ensuring that there are no irregularities in the child's condition and that their development is progressing normally. Some mothers, because of their inability to communicate in English, give very brief responses to questions asked, unintentionally withholding crucial information a doctor might need in evaluating the mother's or the child's health.

2.2 Immigration

With increased efforts to register Venezuelan refugees for asylum and for work permits (Mohan, 2019), immigration officers have been experiencing great difficulty in adapting to the language. It was reported that competence in a second language is not a requirement for officers who work with documentation, and for this reason there is currently a lack of immigration officers who can efficiently communicate with Spanish-speaking migrants. Several problems arise in this environment, specifically legal concerns since Spanish-speaking migrants are often neither able to read nor understand the technicalities of certain documents.

It makes for a difficult transaction when the English-speaking immigration officer attempts to explain the requirements needed to complete a process, but the Spanish-speaking applicant is unable to understand. Similar to the case of healthcare workers, many immigration officers resort to the use of mobile translators, presenting limitations in accuracy and efficiency. This system is extremely inefficient given the increasing number of refugees requesting aid in addition to dealing with the needs of other immigrants. It was stated that because immigration officers must now rely so heavily on online translators, they have begun learning the Spanish vocabulary relevant to their work, in order to facilitate the ease of communication with applicants. This does not cater for the

detailed instructions migrants must follow to complete their application process, nor does it give immigration officers sufficient ability to provide thorough explanations of the legal documents required.

Immigration officers are often unable to explain with sufficient Spanish vocabulary the documents required to complete different processes, thus prolonging the time needed to help each individual. They also expressed their concern over immigrants being placed at a disadvantage because of their poor economic situation upon their arrival to the receptor country, they may not be in possession of essential documents needed for their application. Provisions are made for these individuals, but there are still legal concerns such as the verification of one's identity and their true purposes for coming to Trinidad and Tobago. This problem can be applied to other areas of the public sector which require the use of legal documents.

2.3 National Security

Police officers have also shared that their interaction with Spanish-speaking individuals has increased tremendously within the past five years, however this is not a new problem for them. Trinidad and Tobago, due to its proximity to South America, are frequently involved in illegal trade with drugs and arms dealers from Venezuela. The social unrest in Venezuela has only caused more Venezuelans to turn to criminal activity across the water as a faster way of earning money to potentially afford them a more sustainable life in a country with better economic standing. There have been many occasions where police find Venezuelan migrants involved in illegal activity in Trinidad and Tobago, however, they encounter difficulty when trying to communicate with them.

Although the migrant crisis has only continued to grow, the vast majority of police officers have little to no communicative competence in Spanish relevant to their field of work. This does

not mean that there are no officers capable of communicating with Spanish-speakers, some are able to carry-out thorough investigations in Spanish, however the ratio is insignificant in comparison to non-Spanish users. A task force officer interviewed stated that their field work in violent crime calls for immediate communication in order to maximize the efficiency of the short time frame some situations provide them with. Their ability to efficiently carry out their duties is greatly affected when they are met with a Spanish-speaking person who may have crucial information, but no way of communicating with them. Currently, when faced with Venezuelan refugees, many police officers attempt to find a way of using a mobile translator, although, there is little they can do aside from using gestures and their limited knowledge of Spanish that they picked up from other, similar interactions, without access to the Internet.

By extension, interviewees involved in part of the law practice briefly outlined their interactions with Spanish-speakers who seek legal advice regarding problems they may have encountered while in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, there is the opinion that the Court of Law is not sufficiently equipped to communicate in relation to the legal concerns of Spanish-speaking individuals. This once again relates to the problem of translation, although the courts do have translators for these situations, there are some associated safety concerns. These include a judge's concern over whether translators might collude with the Spanish-speaker, a plaintiff or defendant, to give illicit advice, or provide inaccurate translations which may harm the sanctity of the Court of Law. This shows an aperture in the needs of both public service workers and monolingual Spanish speakers as it relates to legal problems.

As an attempt to address the problem of inadequate communicative competence of police officers, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service offered a virtual Spanish training program targeted at the needs of their officers. While this training course was not made a requirement, some

officers took advantage of the opportunity to improve their abilities and to help their peers in translation where necessary. The goal of the program was to have at least one or two individuals versed in specialized Spanish acting as interpreters for their unit, but the focus was placed mainly on those who reported increased exposure to working with Spanish speakers. This was an experimental model but still it holds great potential for a larger scale course of the same type to address the linguistic barrier many officers continue to face.

CHAPTER THREE

Solution to the Problem

There was a consensus among the fifteen interviewees that there is limited efficiency in the public sector; the linguistic barrier hinders what can be considered the normal functioning of their workplace, presenting difficulty for both parties. There then needs to be a route to guarantee the restoration of the productivity of public sector workers by means of improving their communicative capabilities with Spanish-speaking migrants. The question was posed as to whether access to an in-person Spanish translator at their workplace would be an appropriate way to mitigate the issues being faced by public sector workers. The interviewees stated that while this would be a useful contribution to their work environment, there are still some concerns that will persist.

In the case of public health staff, there are currently few individuals able to communicate in Spanish with refugees seeking medical attention. Although these persons can act as translators for their peers when needed, this impedes productivity on their own work as one would have to delay their duties to assist in translation. Like medical staff, immigration officers can use the help of their Spanish speaking peers, police officers who work in the field do not have the same option of calling their co-worker from another room to help translate an eye-witness report at an active crime scene. Without the help of their Spanish-speaking peers, public sector workers resort to using online translators which call into question, their accuracy and efficiency in communicating with their patients.

Many government offices and healthcare facilities have begun providing written signs and instructions in Spanish in addition to at least one member of staff who acts as a guide for Spanish-

speakers in order to relieve the employees of some of the communicative burden that they face. While these are valuable additions to the workplace, there are limits to their capabilities as staff would still find difficulty in direct communication. This would mean that having a government assigned translator to every medical centre, immigration office or police station will not completely fill the communication gap unless there is a translator for every individual interacting with Spanish-speaking persons.

The answer then may lay in all personnel being given sufficient training in Spanish for the Professions and Special Purposes, that is, language training relevant to their needs. The question was posed as to whether the public sector personnel in healthcare, immigration and national security would be willing to take advantage of the course and all interviewees said that this would be extremely valuable in improving the manner in which they carry out their duties. They also agreed that it would be crucial for individuals interested in a career in these fields because by their estimation, the number of Spanish-speakers is going to increase steadily as long as the government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to accept refugees fleeing from the Venezuelan economic crisis. It must also be considered that while Spanish-speaking refugees are learning Trinidadian English Creole through living and working in Trinidad and Tobago, the language used every day does not assure their comprehension or communicative ability in environments where technical jargon relating to medicine or law, might be involved.

The program offered by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service could be a starting point or baseline to guide similar programs for other sectors of the public services. It is important to remember that Spanish for Specialized Purposes caters to the communicative needs of the environment, therefore the courses offered cannot be based on a “one-size-fits-all” system (Tebano, 2017). A broad example would be that nurses working in postnatal clinics would be met

with different communicative situations compared to doctors in urology, although both work in the hospital, their needs are different. The programs being offered to the Police Service may have less variation in the needs of every division compared to the healthcare sector, whereas the immigration office might have little to no variation at all. This means that each sector must carry out an internal assessment in order to customize a language program capable of providing them with sufficient Spanish to support their duties.

The healthcare sector would need to conduct an investigation within each ward and specialty clinic to estimate where the greatest difficulty is found due to an increased degree of interaction with Spanish speakers. Their frequency of communication would also determine how many people would need to receive training in Spanish, greater frequency would require more trained individuals, but lower interaction would only call for a few needing training who can deal with Spanish-speaking patients. The program should not be too general, technical language along with sufficient context will be essential for maintaining the “Specialized” requirement of a course in SPSP. That being said, there will still be general language courses required by all staff regardless of their specialty area, including essential information all patients present to their doctors or nurses.

Immigration officers would also need to carry out a survey of their communicative needs in Spanish and an evaluation of their frequency of interaction with Spanish-speakers. The program developed for immigration officers would be more uniform than for healthcare workers because their duties scarcely differ. Their program will have to include the explanations of documents in extensive detail so as to avoid miscommunications that can cause major legal problems for the immigrants. Compared to the others, the police service has already made an attempt at formulating a course for the purposes of their officers, their program will need to follow similar requirements as the other sectors. This includes an evaluation of which divisions or units come into more

frequent contact with Spanish speakers in order to decide upon how many officers they will require to have competence in Spanish.

Opinions from interviewees suggest that there is no foreseeable end to the influx of Spanish-speaking refugees, therefore one must consider the future of what the public sector will require from its employees. Provided that Venezuelan migration does not stop in the near future, adjustments may be made to include the Spanish language as an integral part of daily business within the public service. This means that those hoping to be employed in these sectors would find that Spanish competence will serve as an asset to their duties, and perhaps positively impact their probability of being hired. While one should not assume that Spanish will become a requirement to enter the public service, the responses of the interviewees show that Spanish will greatly benefit future employees. Should those interested in employment in public healthcare, immigration or national security choose to learn Spanish, they should not be expected to learn a full Spanish language course in order to communicate in the workplace.

For this reason, a specialized Spanish course should be available for these individuals in preparation for their entry into the service. The Spanish programs developed specifically for each area of the public sector, health, immigration, national security, should be simplified and made into a course which caters to future employees. In the case of medical students, there can be programs available at the university which can be taken to support their area of study as these courses are more highly specialized. In contrast, programs targeted at future police officers would need to be offered by the police academy since there is no University requirement for this area of work. The willingness or motivation of these individuals toward taking these courses is a concern, however with the advice of current public sector workers who believe that Spanish is necessary in the workplace, one can estimate that their participation will be high. For courses offered at a

Tertiary level, willingness to participate means a decreased preoccupation over the relevance of the course, which relates to the financial burden put on the school to fund them.

CONCLUSION

The Venezuelan migrant crisis escalated as a result of poor economic and political environment and has resulted in a heavy influx of thousands of monolingual Spanish-speakers to Trinidad and Tobago. The public sector has felt the communicative burden with Spanish-speaking immigrants, specifically in the areas of public healthcare, immigration and national security. These areas were selected as they are dependent upon accurate and efficient communication between both parties because they involve legal and health information that can put one's human rights at risk. This project sought to explore the demand for Spanish for the Professions and Specialized Purposes (SPSP) for current and future public sector workers in Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to the possible implementation of different courses in Tertiary Education.

Primary data was conducted through interviews of individuals working in public healthcare, immigration and national security. Interviewees working in public healthcare stated that their main problems arise because of patients not understanding technical jargon relating to their health and are often unable to explain the extent of their health status. Immigration officers reported that working with documentation in English poses difficulty for both parties since there is a barrier in explanation of different requirements for documents or processes to be carried out. The police officers interviewed find problems in collecting information about criminal offenses especially in field work where there is greater need for immediate communication in order to optimize the window of time, they have to work on cases successfully.

Interviewees highlighted their concerns over the use of online translators as they pose threats to accuracy and are not time efficient. It was also found that most Spanish-speakers do not have competence in English and only a few come accompanied by English-speaking individuals to assist in translation, however, like online translators, this is still not time efficient. The

possibility of an in-person translator being introduced to the workplace in order to facilitate communication was also considered to be limited in its usefulness to all work environments. Workplaces experiencing frequent interaction with Spanish-speakers would call for a greater number of translators, but this maintains the issue of time efficiency and can present problems in privacy depending on the sensitivity of information being communicated. For these reasons, it was commonly agreed that Spanish for Specialized Purposes is necessary in the workplace to aid in interactions with Spanish-speaking refugees.

A unique language teaching model would need to be presented to each specialty area of these fields in addition to a general foundation which addresses basic needs of all learners of a new language. An assessment of all the communicative needs of public sector workers would determine how each of the programs should be tailored in order to guarantee the ultimate efficiency in communicating with Spanish-speakers. The results of this project can be used for further research in a variety of other areas in the public sector as it is still a relatively new topic with little literature in a local context.

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APPENDIX A

Interview questions - Part 1

1. Please provide a brief description of your work.
2. What would you say is your competence in Spanish? If any, was this a personal choice or a work requirement?
3. What is your frequency of interaction (on average) with Spanish-speaking immigrants at your workplace?
4. How easy or difficult is it for you and your peers to communicate with Spanish-speaking immigrants
5. How difficult is interaction with Spanish-speaking immigrants? In the case of interviewees with knowledge of the language, if you or your co-workers did not have competence in Spanish do you think that interaction would be much more difficult
6. How often do immigrants speak English or come with people to help them with the language?

Interview questions - Part 2

1. With the recent influx of immigrants, especially before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say that there is a need in the public sector, currently and in the near future, for employees to have some knowledge of Spanish relevant to their field?
2. Do you believe that the type of work you do has an impact on the need for the language, given that you may require immediate communication with technical jargon?
3. Are translators sufficient, or do you think that a specialized Spanish course is a better option for public sector workers? Would this be well-received by employees?