

## **Allied Interpreters: Exploring the Role Perception and Ethics of Uncertified Interpreters Supporting Migrant Agricultural Workers in British Columbia**

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### **Abstract**

Uncertified interpreters enable migrant agricultural workers in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program to access key resources and connect with community. Through providing a range of services, including support work and advocacy, interpreters assist migrant workers at risk of exploitation and injury in Canada. This article explores how uncertified interpreters navigate the power dynamics between migrant workers, interpreters, and other actors. Moreover, this article investigates how uncertified interpreters perceive their role and the ethical values that guide their communicative methods. This study's research findings show that interpreters may adopt a pro-worker role perception as they gain knowledge of the disempowerment experienced by migrant workers. Arising from this role perception, interpreters may also adopt pro-worker ethical values that renounce interpreter neutrality in favour of accessibility and an explanatory communication style. Ultimately, this article contends that uncertified interpreters may reject some traditional interpretation guidelines to adopt a role perception, ethical framework, and communicative style perceived to be more well-suited to supporting migrant farm workers in British Columbia.

**Keywords:** Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program; migrant workers; British Columbia; ethics; interpretation

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## Introduction

In July 2021, residents of the Pacific Northwest faced an unprecedented heat dome in addition to forest fires, smoke pollution, and outbreaks of COVID-19. Under such extreme conditions, migrant farm workers continued to perform the physically taxing and low-wage work that is unattractive to most Canadians (“Heat Wave,” 2021). Local journalist Madison Erhardt (2021) wrote that migrant worker housing in the interior of British Columbia was often unequipped for the extreme weather, and, in some cases, workers were unable to access clean drinking water. In response, migrant justice advocacy organization Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture (RAMA) raised awareness, provided community support to workers, and distributed food and water. Even in such extreme environmental conditions, local news sources reported that some migrant workers feared that receiving support from RAMA could cost them their jobs due to their precarious immigration status (“Heat Wave,” 2021).

This situation points to the pervasive vulnerability of migrant farm workers within Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). Migrant workers, also known as temporary foreign workers, are recruited from lower-income countries through transnational employment programs to work in Canada on a temporary basis (Lee et al., 2022; Polanco & Zell, 2017). Hired through a low-wage stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), migrant agricultural workers often perform strenuous, tedious, and poorly compensated work (André, 1990). While employed in these roles, migrant workers also face a disproportionate risk of workplace abuse due to the considerable power that employers have over migrant employees (Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Indeed, speaking out against employers can jeopardize the livelihood of workers, who often live in employer-provided housing and are vulnerable to deportation (2017). As Bhuyan et al. demonstrate in their 2018 article on Canada’s TFWP, certain practices within Canada’s SAWP constitute a form of “structural violence” that places migrant workers at a disproportionate risk for physical and psychological harm (p. 614). The power that the SAWP gives to the employers of migrant workers, the inaccessibility of migrant worker support systems, and the inadequacy of regulatory workplace protections all contribute to the structural violence perpetuated by the program (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Robillard et al., 2018).

To combat the disempowerment of migrant workers, many non-profit and community organizations in Canada provide workers with resources and wide-ranging forms of support. Within these sectors, uncertified interpreters connect non-fluent workers to community and social services. These interpreters therefore hold positions of trust and must manage complex ethical considerations in their work. Thus, this study investigates how role perception, ethical values, and communicative methods influence how uncertified interpreters support migrant workers. The research findings of this study suggest that uncertified interpreters for migrant workers may develop a pro-worker role perception and reject traditional ethical values in favour of contextually relevant values and communicative methods.

### **The Structural Violence of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program**

Historically, Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was a transnational employment program established in 1966 in response to employer reports of a shortage of low-wage agricultural laborers in Canada (André, 1990; Horgan & Liinamaa, 2015; Mysyk et al., 2009; Polanco & Zell, 2017). The reported decrease in and continuing demand for agricultural workers

in Canada led Canadian farmers to recruit workers from low-income countries as a stopgap measure (André, 1990; Polanco & Zell, 2017). Since then, the SAWP has expanded dramatically despite allegations of rampant workplace exploitation and abuse of migrant workers (Basok, 2009; Caxaj, 2021; Cortina-Castro & Kobayashi, 2020; Horgan & Liinamaa, 2017; Polanco & Zell, 2017; Prokopenko & Hou, 2018).

Several structural factors exacerbate the risk of workplace abuse in the SAWP (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Robillard et al., 2018). First, the SAWP allows employers to dismiss and deport migrant workers without sufficient avenues for workers to appeal this process (Cole et al., 2019; Cortina-Castro & Kobayashi, 2020; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Since SAWP workers are assigned temporary work visas linked to specific employers, workplace dismissal can jeopardize the immigration status of migrant labourers (Binford, 2019; Edmiston, 2020; Preibisch, 2004; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Some employers exploit this vulnerability to keep workers trapped in harmful employment situations; moreover, if a SAWP employer suspects an employee of reporting an injury or workplace violation, the employer may retaliate by threatening workers with deportation (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Mysyk et al., 2009; Strauss & McGrath, 2017).

Second, the SAWP requires that employers provide housing to migrant workers, which gives employers unchecked power over the employees who live on their properties (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). Academics and reporters in the field of labour rights have shown that the housing provided to migrant agricultural workers is often overcrowded, unsafe, in close proximity to pollutants (such as agrochemicals), and lacking in adequate hygiene facilities (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Edmiston, 2020). These inhumane conditions also contributed to COVID-19 infections and the COVID-related deaths of migrant workers during the pandemic (Lee et al., 2022). Moreover, some employers have used their positions as landlords to surveil and prevent workers from accessing community resources, securing reliable transportation, shopping for groceries, or partaking of life beyond the bounds of their employer's property (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Preibisch, 2004).

Thirdly, government regulation of the SAWP is inadequate and demonstratively biased towards employers (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Cole et al., 2019;). Through complaint-driven systems, government regulatory bodies require migrant workers to identify and report workplace violations committed by their employers (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Edmiston, 2020; Strauss & McGrath, 2019). However, formal regulatory processes often fail to prevent workplace abuse since workers often lack the legal knowledge required to identify the illegality of employer actions, are generally non-fluent speakers of English and/or French, and remain vulnerable to employer retaliation (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). As Caxaj and Cohen (2019) have reported, SAWP inspectors may pre-schedule and complete workplace inspections virtually, which may enable unethical employers to hide illegal workplace conditions from inspectors. Cumulatively, these structural components act together to jeopardize the well-being and safety of migrant workers employed on farms throughout Canada.

### **Uncertified Interpreters, Role Perception, and Ethical Values**

Current research has identified that language barriers often compound the pre-existing structural harms of the SAWP, which highlights the importance of interpretation services (Basok, 2009; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Cole et al., 2019; Mysyk et al., 2009). In the context of the SAWP, the inaccessibility of government-provided interpretation services, and the associated cost of private interpretation, have prompted pro-worker groups to rely on the support of uncertified interpreters (Cole et al., 2019; Mysyk et al., 2009). Uncertified interpreters are typically bilingual

community members who are not certified by an official licensing body. While migrant workers and community groups may utilize the services provided by uncertified interpreters, certain ethical concerns may cast doubt on their suitability (Drugan, 2017; International Medical Interpreters Association, 2007; Mysyk et al., 2009).

The ethical complexities that surround uncertified interpreters may be linked to the way that their role is exercised (Álvaro Aranda et al., 2021; Hsieh, 2006). Dr. Elaine Hsieh (2006), a respected academic in the field of interpretation, has drawn attention to the influence of role perception in interpreter practice. Hsieh has explained that, “when interpreters (re)define their roles, they justify their communicative behaviors [sic]” (p. 728). What Hsieh’s scholarship posits is that interpreters typically see their role on a spectrum between a traditional “conduit” for information and a controversial “advocate” for disempowered populations. The perception of an interpreter as a neutral conduit is upheld by most traditional views (Bravo, 2019; Hsieh, 2008). For instance, The New York State Psychiatric Institute Center of Excellence for Cultural Competence has outlined that “the interpreter renders all messages accurately and completely, without adding, omitting, or substituting. The interpreter limits his or her professional activity to interpreting within an encounter” (as cited in Álvaro Aranda et al., 2021, p. 3). As conduits, traditional interpreters provide word-for-word interpretation and do not explain concepts, clarify information, or provide advice (Bravo, 2019; Hsieh, 2008). Furthermore, a traditional perspective considers neutrality an ethical requirement, which dissuades interpreters from expressions of loyalty to any party (Hsieh, 2008; Prunč & Setton, 2015).

In contrast to this conduit role, advocate interpreters reject neutrality by challenging power hierarchies to allow minorities greater access to social capital (Bravo, 2019; Hsieh, 2008). Dr. Elena Aguirre Fernández Bravo (2019), a scholar of translation, interpretation, and intercultural communication, has written that advocate interpreters “are aware that their performance may be crucial to the power dynamic between the actors. Consequently, interpreters must make conscious decisions regarding the type of power relation they wish to favour” (p. 66). This performance may include taking a more active approach to communication by providing explanations, offering advice, and conducting advocacy work—practices generally discouraged by the International Medical Interpreters Association (2007). While certified interpreters are trained to adhere to a conduit role perception, as this study shows, uncertified interpreters are more likely to transgress these standards in favour of an advocate role (Mysyk et al., 2009).

Since uncertified interpreters are generally untrained, important questions surround their competency, sense of ethics, and accountability to clients. The International Medical Interpreters Association (2007) has stated that interpreters must have linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge beyond bilingualism to perform their work competently. That said, recipients of interpretation services generally lack the linguistic skills needed to accurately assess the quality of the interpretation services received. Consequently, both the quality of interpretation and competency of interpreters are critical since omissions, mistakes, additions, and other distortions to originally communicated content are difficult to detect and regulate. The absence of a rigorous certification process, and the perception that uncertified interpreters may lack the skills necessary to support clients, have prompted several scholars to challenge the ethics of utilizing uncertified interpreters (see Basok, 2009; Drugan, 2017; International Medical Interpreters Association, 2007; Mysyk et al., 2009). In consideration of interpretation as a profession, Dr. Joanna Drugan (2017) has noted that interpreters are subjected to less regulation than other professions, despite working in highly sensitive settings. Drugan has argued that interpreters should therefore receive professional training through formal education to manage precarious contexts. Given these concerns, it is

important for all of the actors who provide or receive uncertified interpretation to better understand the perceptions and values that inform the practices of uncertified interpreters.

While both interpreter ethics and the experiences of migrant workers in Canada's SAWP have garnered the attention of researchers (see Basok, 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2018; Drugan, 2017; International Medical Interpreters Association, 2007; Mysyk et al., 2009; Strauss & McGrath, 2017), far less attention has been devoted to understanding the intersection of interpreter ethics within the context of Canada's SAWP. Indeed, few scholarly articles have adequately analyzed how uncertified interpreters navigate their role and the relational power dynamics inherent to the SAWP. Hence, this article seeks to address this gap in scholarship by undertaking qualitative interviews to determine the perceptions and experiences of uncertified interpreters, as well as the challenges interpreters have encountered while working in this sector.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This article explores the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of uncertified interpreters who offer their services to migrant agricultural labourers in British Columbia. To that end, this research is guided by the following research question: How do interpreters navigate power dynamics and manage ethical challenges when interpreting for migrant workers in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)? This study examines how uncertified interpreters perceive their role, manage their ethical values, and select communicative patterns when interpreting for migrant workers. Additionally, this study sheds light on the challenges interpreters face when navigating complex power dynamics. The primary purpose of this article is to inform actors involved in Canada's SAWP about the perceptions, challenges, methods, and ethical values of the uncertified interpreters who support migrant agricultural workers. Consequently, this study seeks to promote a contextually relevant understanding of interpretation and its associated challenges as well as to bring greater transparency to the work of uncertified interpreters. Furthermore, this research calls attention to the structural barriers uncertified interpreters face when supporting migrant agricultural workers in British Columbia, and the potential benefits these interpreters offer to disempowered populations. Lastly, this research highlights the benefits and risks uncertified interpreters may experience when adopting pro-worker goals, ethical values, and communicative methods.

### **Methodology**

This study conducted qualitative interviews to examine how uncertified interpreters perceive their role as well as how their perceptions and experiences shape their work with migrant agricultural workers in British Columbia. The research sample included three participants who had each worked in British Columbia as uncertified interpreters for migrant agricultural workers registered in the SAWP. Each met the requirements for minimal-risk research and provided informed consent through forms approved by the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria (HREB: 21-0528). Furthermore, participant data were securely stored in a locked personal computer, and all data related to this study will be destroyed within 5 years of completing this research. To recruit eligible participants, both professional and volunteer interpreters employed by or associated with non-profit services for migrant workers in British Columbia were contacted. Recruitment emails were also sent to uncertified interpreters affiliated with the research

networks of researcher and sociologist Dr. Anelyse Weiler. Participation in this research study was voluntary and no remuneration was provided to participants.

To answer the aforementioned research question, three remote, qualitative interviews were conducted that ranged from 45 to 75 minutes in length. Two interview sessions took place through Zoom video-conferencing, and the third and final interview session was conducted over the phone. All interviews were recorded with participant consent on a separate digital recorder. Each interview was comprised of both open and closed questions within a semi-structured framework that allowed for flexibility within a predetermined schedule (Bryman & Bell, 2019, p. 241). Afterwards, participant data were anonymized through the removal or modification of participant identifiers and identity markers (such as gender pronouns). Then, interview data were thematically analyzed to identify the themes that answered this article's research question (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 271). In keeping with the thematic analysis guidelines developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), interview data were transcribed and reviewed to generate initial codes, then grouped into potential categories and themes. Initiatory themes were subsequently reviewed, named, and refined according to noted similarities, recurrences, and references to the central research question that undergirds this study.

## **Findings**

Through exploring the perceptions and experiences of three uncertified interpreters who work to support migrant agricultural workers registered in Canada's SAWP, what emerged were the following three themes: first, participants described navigating disempowering social contexts that prevented migrant workers from accessing community supports; second, participants reported maintaining a pro-worker role perception based on their knowledge of the vulnerability of migrant agricultural workers to workplace harm and abuse; and, third, participants discussed embracing pro-worker ethical values and communicative methods to help migrant agricultural workers in British Columbia overcome the barriers that stemmed from damaging social structures and practices. Cumulatively, these findings highlight insights into uncertified interpreter role perceptions, ethical values, and communicative methods in the context of supporting migrant agricultural workers employed through Canada's SAWP.

### **Uncertified Interpretive Support for Disempowered Agricultural Workers**

The three uncertified interpreters who took part in this study, hereafter referred to as Stella, Mateo, and Ina, provided a breadth of support services to migrant agricultural workers. Conducting outreach at grocery stores, advocating for greater workplace protections, navigating complex governmental processes, providing transportation to healthcare and legal services, facilitating educational workshops on Canadian labour laws, and building trusting relationships with migrant agricultural workers all fell within the work undertaken by these participants. Moreover, each individual who took part in this study had years of experience providing interpretive support to migrants in British Columbia while witnessing the multifaceted harms suffered by SAWP workers. Navigating the power imbalances between SAWP employers and migrant workers has underlain much of the work undertaken by the uncertified interpreters interviewed in this study. All of the participants mentioned employers who had leveraged their power over migrant labourers to control

significant aspects of their employees' daily lives, including workers' housing arrangements, immigration status, means of transportation, and access to community resources.

Two participants in this study, Mateo and Ina, commented that employers often used their power to hinder workers from disclosing illegal or unethical working conditions to government bodies or community members. When reflecting on how employers leverage employees' fears to isolate workers, Ina asserted that "workers are always afraid of speaking up ... the employer has the power to do whatever they want, so they are always afraid [to even] speak with other people in the community." According to several participants, many workers relied on their employers for transportation since the workers lived on employer-provided housing close to rural farms. These participants went on to report that some SAWP employers appeared to intentionally prevent workers from travelling off-site, accessing healthcare, consulting with legal professionals, or meeting with uncertified interpreters. For example, Ina shared how a SAWP employer became aggressive and prevented them from speaking to the migrant women whom Ina had witnessed working extreme hours. According to Ina, after attempting to approach these workers, the employer told Ina that the workers were his "property" and "slaves." While not all employers hold such views, the SAWP occasions the opportunity for some employers to abuse their power. In addition to the potential for unrestrained abuse, all of the participants interviewed found that harmful systems of power permeated the governmental systems meant to help migrant workers in British Columbia.

Within the context of governmental supports, Stella and Mateo argued that inaccessible bureaucratic structures often exacerbated the disempowerment of migrant agricultural workers. As Mateo explained, most SAWP workers obtained elementary levels of education and struggled with significant language barriers. According to Mateo, this combination made navigating governmental or bureaucratic systems challenging for many migrant workers. Often Mateo witnessed workers struggling to impart accurate information to government officials, such as the details of their preferred mailing address. Moreover, the participants interviewed commented on how the governmental systems created to receive reports of abuse frequently failed to provide accessible support to workers lacking the computer literacy skills or foundational knowledge needed to complete Canadian paperwork. Further, inaccessible bureaucratic systems were also seen to prohibit uncertified interpreters from supporting migrant workers. Stella, for instance, recounted how a Service Canada official prevented her from supporting the online identity confirmation process of a migrant worker. In this illustrative case, limited language fluency compounded by educational barriers prevented the worker from completing their identity confirmation with the consequence of halting that worker's access to a crucial monetary allowance. In short, the inflexibility and inaccessibility of government systems were identified as contributing to the disempowerment of migrant workers, despite the provision of formal interpretation services intended to reduce language barriers.

The professional interpretation services designed to support migrant workers were also said to exacerbate the hierarchical power relationships seen to disempower migrant agricultural workers. Theoretically, certified interpreters are available free of charge to workers who experience language barriers when attempting to access governmental, legal, or medical services. However, as all of the participants in this study have explained, many migrant workers are either unaware of or do not know how to request free interpretation services. Moreover, service providers (such as doctors or government officials) often request interpretation services on behalf of migrant workers. Consequently, professional interpretation tends to place the balance of power in the hands of service providers who, as Mateo recounted, rarely make use of interpretation services even when

needed. Instead, Mateo shared that service providers often “talk to [workers] using signs or speaking really slowly in English, which is just really not adequate.” Even in instances in which professional interpretation has been accessed, Mateo stated that service providers often emphasized their power over migrant workers through inappropriate conduct. This conduct included service providers addressing their remarks to the interpreter (rather than to the worker), holding conversations with the interpreter while excluding the worker, and discouraging the worker from asking relevant follow-up questions. After witnessing the aforementioned power dynamics in their work, most of the participants interviewed for this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the perceived inadequacies of professional interpretation and chose, instead, to ally themselves with migrant workers as uncertified interpreters.

### **Uncertified Interpreters and Pro-Worker Role Perceptions**

As witnesses to worker abuse, exploitation, disempowerment, and risk, the uncertified interpreters interviewed reported adopting a pro-worker role perception when providing informed and allied support. Rather than perceiving themselves as neutral third parties, participants encouraged migrant labourers to report workplace concerns to regulators, access healthcare services, understand important verbal and written communications, as well as advocate for their needs. Mateo characterized their role perception as follows:

I feel very strongly that you have to be allied and affiliated with the migrant worker ... and there's a lot of reasons why [—] because the population of people that I interpret for have a major lack of institutionalized power. They're vulnerable in so many ways; they don't have allies. So, part of that relationship building and part of me demonstrating “hey I'm here for you” is being 100% on their side and 100% allied with them.

This pro-worker role perception helped some participants build trusting relationships with workers, as explained by Ina:

Over the years we've gotten to know a lot of people personally in the migrant community, and so you build the relationship by going to visit them, by hanging out, by, you know, supporting them as they need it, right, by following through.

These relationships also provided all of the participants interviewed with opportunities to learn about the cultural backgrounds and day-to-day needs of migrant workers, such as buying groceries, meeting with others, and accessing transportation. According to participants, spending time and building rapport with migrant workers cultivated a sense of safety that enabled workers to disclose risky, illegal, or abusive workplace situations. Furthermore, several participants felt that the quality of their interpretation skills improved because they had a greater understanding of the experiences of migrant workers, who trusted these participants to accurately interpret disclosed information.

Due to the development of their pro-worker role perception, none of the participants adopted a neutral or unallied stance. Instead, participants explicitly stated their desire to be firmly allied with workers. As Mateo explained, maintaining a neutral stance in the context of blatant exploitation would be unethical: “I think it would be, from my perspective, unethical if you are like, ‘Oh I'm totally neutral.’ ... [To] be neutral is, to me, just adding to [worker] vulnerability.”



For Mateo, remaining neutral as an uncertified interpreter would be both morally wrong and emotionally cold. Similarly, Stella explained her perspective on neutrality as follows:

It's been very few times when I felt the necessity of being neutral because [abuse is] always very evident. It's so evident that there's no room to give anybody the benefit of the doubt. The evidence is so clear, like people being underpaid ... people being threatened of deportation, things that are just very real ... When you speak to somebody that is going through a situation of abuse you can tell immediately.

When presented with clear evidence of the abuse, disempowerment, and harm experienced by migrant workers, some participants believed that neutrality might reduce a worker's trust in an interpreter. Further, they believed that neutrality might make migrant workers feel unsupported, which might, in turn, discourage workers from accessing interpretive services or reporting abuse to regulatory bodies. Consequently, the participants interviewed adopted a pro-worker role perception in response to the perceived disempowerment of migrant workers to avoid causing further harm. Although all of the participants perceived themselves as allied with migrant workers, some did not consider themselves to be advocates. Even so, all reported leveraging their position and skills to benefit the interests of, and demonstrate allied support for, migrant agricultural workers employed in British Columbia.

### **Pro-Worker Ethical Values and Communicative Methods**

When asked about their ethical values, the participants interviewed described the guidelines that informed their interpretation practices, which aligned with their pro-worker role perception. More specifically, participants aimed to uphold the values of accessibility, accuracy, and transparency. Additionally, participants identified confidentiality and informed practice as crucial to interpreting for migrant workers. These values were developed in step with the specific communicative methods believed to be accessible to migrant agricultural workers. For each participant, the ethical value of accessibility referred to the importance of making communication accurately understood. For example, Ina explained accessible interpretation in this way:

[It] just means using the most understandable, simple terms possible, and if there is no accurate translation, then trying to explain a concept or a thing in a way that is the simplest and the most understandable and checking in often with the person to make sure that they understand ... and also giving them space to say it if they don't.

In order to make communication more accessible, all of the participants rejected the ethical necessity of word-for-word interpretation in favour of active and explanatory communicative methods. As Stella asserted, "People think that interpreting word-for-word exactly is, like, the best thing you can do, and I don't believe that at all. I think it has to be understood." Through explaining concepts, conversing with migrant workers, and simplifying the language used, participants sought to ensure that the information communicated to workers remained understandable and accessible. Furthermore, Ina was firm in her belief that patience was a foundational quality for facilitating interpretive comprehension: "I can [interpret] it as many times as they want, because I just want them to feel good when they're communicating." Both Ina and Stella believed that it was important

for interpreters to encourage workers to ask questions, express confusion, and request further explanation. These active and explanatory communication methods were seen to stem from the ethical value of accessibility that participants perceived as relevant to the needs of workers.

Even as participants in this study laboured to make communication accessible to workers by rejecting a word-for-word interpretative approach in favour of active interpretation, all upheld accuracy and transparency as key ethical values. These values compelled participants to strive to accurately relay both positive and discouraging information to ensure that communication remained transparent during interpreter-mediated interactions, including disclosing inadvertent interpreter mistakes. As Stella explained, migrant workers often relied on their employers to provide interpretation, though employer's self-interests often impacted the integrity of that type of interpretive assistance. At times, employers distorted relayed information when interpreting for workers who were often unable to assess if their employer had imparted information accurately. For example, Stella recounted how an employer told a migrant worker that their doctor had deemed them fit for work when, in reality, their doctor had recommended that the worker refrain from physical labour. In this case, the values of accuracy and transparency were seen to lead to a high standard of conduct that was cognizant of the potential damage that could result from inaccurate interpretation. With respect to transparency, Ina confessed, "I do think that sometimes we act out of compassion, or we want to minimize the impact that [information] is going to have on that person." However, Ina went on to explain how crucial transparency was to preventing additional harm to migrant workers, particularly in terms of mitigating misleading or false expectations. Given these reasons, all of the participants in this study found that transparency and accuracy were foundational ethical values for garnering the trust of migrant agricultural workers.

In addition to accessibility, accuracy, and transparency, confidentiality was identified by both Stella and Mateo as a necessary value for protecting the safety of migrant workers. Stella asserted that she would not share private information about a migrant worker unless by worker request—especially information that might put workers at risk of employer retribution. Relatedly, Mateo highlighted how easily employers can instigate the deportation of a migrant worker on the grounds that illness or injury has rendered a worker "unfit for work." Consequently, Mateo stated that they had seen "workers [who were] really uncertain or fearful that their private medical information will be shared with people without their consent ... so unethical interpretation would also be sharing any information without [their] consent." Some participants confirmed that certain employers retaliated after a worker had received support from an uncertified interpreter. Due to this type of retribution, the uncertified interpreters interviewed all sought to protect the confidentiality of personal information disclosed by migrant workers.

Finally, the last key ethical value identified by some of the participants within this study was knowledgeability. To explain the importance of context-specific knowledge for interpretation, Stella commented that "you cannot assume that because you can provide that interpretation that you will do the job correctly and you're not going to do any harm, because you could do a lot of harm without knowing." Stella went on to deem context-specific knowledge gained through relational experiences more important for ensuring adequate worker support than training attained through professional certification. Unfortunately, each participant found that professional interpreters tended to be uninformed about Canada's SAWP, and this lack of information drove incorrect and potentially harmful assumptions and behaviours towards migrant agricultural workers. Ina, for instance, expressed frustration that some government officials appeared to be unaware of the precarity of worker immigration status and how that precarity might impact migrant workers. As a result, government officials often harboured unrealistic expectations about the

ability of workers to navigate bureaucratic Canadian systems as self-advocates. Echoing Ina, Stella explained how this lack of knowledge often caused well-intentioned government officials to provide insufficient support to workers:

When you have ... a certified interpreter from Service Canada [or] from WorkSafe BC, yes, they might be able to try to provide that support, but I oftentimes see that they're not as patient with the workers, and they make a lot of assumptions about what the workers know and don't know ... and their knowledge on the program, the SAWP program specifically, is very limited. So that makes challenges for the workers because they feel like they're not being understood or they're not explaining themselves.

Most participants believed that uninformed certified interpreters were not only ill-equipped to meet the needs of migrant agricultural workers but also caused harm to workers. For example, participants reported that certified interpreters were often unaware that migrant workers could not receive mailed correspondence from WorkSafe BC since workers tended to share their employer's street address, which might permit employers to view (and potentially withhold) mailed documents addressed to workers. Further, showing up to the wrong location, sharing personal information, or contacting workers indiscreetly might exacerbate employer abuse. Ultimately, the practices of pro-worker uncertified interpreters—premised on the ethical values of accessibility, accuracy, transparency, confidentiality, and knowledgeability—were intended to reduce these potential harms to migrant workers.

## Discussion

In this research, uncertified interpreters shared their perspective regarding their role in supporting migrant agricultural workers registered in Canada's SAWP. In response to the disempowering systems seen to cause structural violence to workers, participants allied themselves with migrant workers, rather than maintaining a traditional stance of neutrality, amid oppressive conditions. As previously mentioned, their practices stemmed from the values of accessibility, accuracy, transparency, confidentiality, and knowledgeability. These values often led uncertified interpreters to transgress traditional interpretive standards by integrating additional communicative strategies, building relationships, and undertaking political advocacy to improve the well-being of workers. In light of extant literature on the SAWP and the present-day conditions impacting migrant agricultural labourers in Canada, the findings of this study confirm themes found in the reviewed literature. That is, this study affirms extensive research on how exploitative employer-worker dynamics often enable abusive and harmful workplaces for migrant agricultural labourers (see Basok, 2010; Bhuyan et al., 2018; Binford, 2019; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Cortina-Castro & Kobayashi, 2020; Mysyk et al., 2009; Preibisch, 2004; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). More broadly, research on structural violence within the SAWP confirms such multifaceted issues as power hierarchies, workplace abuse, and barriers to governmental and community supports (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Mysyk et al., 2009; Strauss & McGrath, 2017)—issues similarly highlighted by the participants in this study.

Structural violence, or systems and practices that place select groups at heightened physical, social, or psychological risk, underlies the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual harms experienced by migrant workers in British Columbia (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Robillard, 2019).

However, the SAWP policies that enable dangerous working conditions, unhygienic housing, precarious immigration status, and inadequate access to interpretation services are not the only forms of structural violence to permeate migrant worker experiences. Participants in this study echoed previous research on the inadequacies of professional interpretation services (Basok, 2010; Mysyk et al., 2009). In fact, participants pointed to systemic issues observed in professional interpretation services, workplace regulations, and governmental services believed to contribute to worker vulnerability. Further, participants believed that ethical guidelines requiring interpreters to act neutrally and refrain from active support of workers could hinder accessibility and cause additional harm to workers. Therefore, widespread expectations concerning interpreter practices are another facet of embedded structural violence. Participants in this study, therefore, rationalized their rejection of traditional interpreter expectations as necessitated by their pro-worker role perception. Participants observed the unmet needs of migrant workers and, in response, used their skills to help when circumstances permitted.

As uncertified interpreters, the participants interviewed made context-specific decisions on what ethical values to maintain when supporting migrant workers. Although these uncertified interpreters generally accepted ethical values aligned with those of traditional certified interpreters, certain values differed with significant implications for their practice. In general, the participants upheld the ethical values of transparency, accuracy, confidentiality, and knowledgeability as vital for interpretation, in keeping with the guidelines provided by the International Medical Interpreters Association (2007). So crucial were these values to maintaining workers' trust that few interpreters would dispute these core principles. Additionally, providing informed support through cultural acumen training was also identified as an ethical value shared by participants in this study and certified professional interpreters. More broadly, this finding aligns with Drugan's (2017) assertion that bilingualism alone is not sufficient: that interpreters must be able to contextualize communication within different sociolinguistic frameworks. While each participant acknowledged their lack of training, they also contended that many professional service providers did not have the context-specific skills that uncertified interpreters had acquired through their role. While participants in this study shared some common perceptions with certified interpreters, their pro-worker role perception was responsible for key differences within their respective practices.

In keeping with the interpreter advocates discussed by Hsieh (2008) and Bravo (2019), participants in this study rejected neutrality while allying themselves with migrant workers to reduce perceived power imbalances between employers and migrant workers. Consequently, participants chose methods believed to be necessary to uphold the ethical value of accessibility and promote worker well-being. Such communicative methods included building relationships with, explaining concepts to, and deviating from word-for-word interpretations for workers—methods typically discouraged within traditional guidelines for certified interpreters. This deviation showed the significant impact of training on interpreter role perceptions and ethics. Since these uncertified interpreters were not socialized into traditional practices through institutionalized training, they utilized their skills in a more flexible and context-specific manner to support migrant agricultural workers.

Despite the benefits of pro-worker role perceptions, ethical values, and communicative methods in empowering vulnerable communities, active and explanatory communication methods have garnered scholarly criticism. Drugan (2017) and Mysyk et al. (2009) contend that interpreters can unduly influence communication or distort information to benefit personal agendas. Although limited and potentially unsupportive, the conduit role remains the ethical standard for many certified interpreters because that positioning reduces the power of interpreters to skew

information imparted by others. Even so, replacing the conduit role with a more active approach to interpretation has the potential to significantly benefit vulnerable populations, such as migrant workers. At the same time, an arbitrary, uninformed, or inconsistent attempt at allyship may harm the integrity of an interpreter and their mediated communications. Such risks underscore the importance of holding interpreters accountable for their ethical standards and practices. Unless interpreters hold tightly to such ethical values as accuracy and transparency, their explanatory communication styles can come to rely too heavily on the beliefs and perceptions of each interpreter. This overreliance may, in turn, compromise the integrity of the interpretation services provided by introducing such risks as miscommunication, deception, and abuse of power. In contrast, allies of migrant workers who are equipped with the skills required to provide accessible, accurate, and transparent interpretation can reduce harm to migrant agricultural workers in Canada. Since uncertified interpreters can perform roles that are outside of the scope of a professional interpreter, their work may be categorized more broadly as “language support.” Redefining uncertified interpretation in this way can help to differentiate community allies from traditional certified interpreters. Thus, rather than discrediting uncertified interpreters for transgressing traditional ethical standards, this distinction may reframe the former as valuable allies capable of exposing structural violence, providing holistic support, and bridging language barriers for disempowered populations.

## **Conclusion**

This study has sought to understand the role perceptions, ethical values, and communicative methods of the uncertified interpreters who support migrant workers in Canada’s SAWP. These interpreters identified how intersecting forms of structural violence, language barriers, harmful workplace conditions, and obstacles to social support silence migrant workers and hinder interpreters’ efforts to provide adequate support. In response to the systemic disempowerment of migrant workers, uncertified interpreters adopted pro-worker role perceptions, ethical values, and communicative methods to reduce the exploitation of migrant farm workers in British Columbia. While maintaining the traditional ethical values of accuracy, transparency, and confidentiality, participants spurned the traditional conduit role, which required the provision of neutral, unallied, word-for-word interpretation. Instead, participants adopted context-specific values and practices that affirmed the empowerment and agency of SAWP workers.

This research is applicable to many of the actors who provide services for marginalized populations in Canada since this study sheds light on the potential obstacles interpreters may encounter when providing services to populations at disproportionate risk of experiencing trauma, abuse, educational and language barriers, as well as precarious immigration status. This article thereby calls attention to the systems of structural violence and oppression inherent to the SAWP, as well as to inadequacies within official interpretation services and social supports for migrant workers. Moreover, this study highlights some potential improvements service providers, government officials, certified interpreters, advocacy groups, health professionals, and SAWP employers might undertake to bolster community support for migrant workers in British Columbia. Perhaps most importantly, these findings may assist uncertified interpreters with the process of refining their role according to context- and population-specific ethical values and communicative methods. Consequently, future scholarship in this field might augment the research undertaken in this study by recruiting a greater number of uncertified interpreters from diverse backgrounds to further analyze the pro-worker methods deployed by uncertified interpreters to support migrant

agricultural workers in Canada. Developing this research further may not only bring greater transparency to the role of uncertified interpreters in Canada but may also help to refine the ethical guidelines specific to the SAWP.

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