SEEKING SOLACE

LGTBQIA+ ASYLUM SEEKERS

AT THE US-MEXICO BORDER

by

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DEDICATION

For the ones who have made it, the ones who have lost their lives trying, and those still to

come.

You are seen. You are heard. Your life matters.

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I would like to give thank my loved ones for keeping me grounded during this experience. Without your encouragement and support, I would not have been able to accomplish this.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my mother for everything she has done for me. Without your sacrifices and love, I would not be here today.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Immigration from Latin American countries has steadily increased along the United States-Mexico border over the past decade. Apart from an overall increase, the demographics of migrants have changed as well, with fewer single men and more women or families with small children (Huber, 2022). The various drivers that perpetuate insecurity and affect migration from Central America include climate disasters, political turmoil, and organized crime. Also increasing are the numbers of migrants driven to leave their home countries due to discrimination or violence based on sexual or gender identity. In the US-Mexico border area, several policies and resources are designed to protect and assist migrants, including asylum policies and non-governmental organizations. Migrants who leave behind their homes and families to seek asylum in the United States are inherently vulnerable, but non-heteronormative migrants become extremely exposed and hyper visible. Although many Latin American countries have taken steps to legalize LGBTQIA+ (LGBT) rights, gender-based violence is still rife. Additionally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacted a shift in policy by the United States, impacted the flow of aid to all asylum seekers, and resulted in increased immobility of displaced people at the US-Mexico border (Blue et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to combine a subset of qualitative and survey data with visualization tools and techniques, such as qualitative geographic information science (QGIS), to gain a new perspective on individual accounts and recognize potential patterns among them to answer the following questions: During their journey to and at the

US-Mexico border, what are LGBTQIA+ migrants experiencing? Can corpus linguistics be used to identify additional distinguishable patterns in this group's thematic experience? How can software such as QGIS visualize these themes and narratives to bring attention to the common experience while retaining the individuals' stories?

Following a brief overview of recent U.S. immigration policies, I will discuss their changes considering the recent global health crisis. I then will investigate the precarity and vulnerability of asylum seekers and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer migrants in the spaces through which they navigate their journey. This will be followed by an analysis of the narratives provided by the participants using corpus linguistics techniques and GIS applications. In addition to helping to understand the experiences of sexual and gender minorities during disasters, these methods demonstrate new ways of understanding the experiences of the LGBTQ migrant community.

II.   BACKGROUND ON U.S. BORDER POLICY

Immigration policy in the United States has shifted towards border security and

the deportation of undocumented migrants since the 1990s (Abrego et al., 2017).

Following the 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, the U.S.

began building border fences and tightening immigration eligibility requirements. In

2002, the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act and Homeland Security

Act continued this trend of heightened national security and border security following

9/11. As a result of the Secure Fence Act of 2006, physical barriers at the U.S. border

have been strengthened, specifically at the southwest border. In 2012, Barack Obama's

platform for the Democratic party focused heavily on immigration policy reform. Due to

a lack of necessary bipartisan support in both the Senate and House, he failed to pass

major immigration legislation during his tenure in office (Cohn, 2020).

During his campaign and presidency, Donald Trump championed border security

and "building a wall" in response to the failed immigration reform attempts of the Obama

administration. Through policies of heightened detention and deportation within the

United States and expulsion at the border, the Trump administration targeted asylum

seekers. Trump signed an executive order on terrorism prevention within a week of

entering office (CFR, 2022). This order suspended the refugee program for 120 days,

banning Syrian refugees indefinitely, and reduced refugee admissions to 50,000. Other

existing immigration policies were eroded relentlessly from this point forward. In 2019,

'Migrant Protection Protocols'(MPP) was implemented. This program, also known as

"Remain in Mexico," was initiated to contain asylum seekers in Mexico while they legally pursued their asylum claim in the United States (Blue et al. 2021). This resulted in thousands of people amassing in Mexican border cities to await due process within the United States immigration court system.

The COVID-19 pandemic began during a period of one of the highest numbers of displaced people in history and led to one of the most restricted periods of human mobility in the 21st century (UNHCR, 2022). The priority of many health and immigration was securitization of borders to attempt at stopping the spread of the virus. As a result, it is important to recognize how the Trump administration politicized the pandemic in an effort to further restrict migration for the sake of national security (Arias et al., 2021). Mexico's pandemic policy made little to no mention of migrants or asylum seekers. The lack of recognition is startling when compared to the misrecognition in the policy of the United States (Bojorquez, 2021).

In the US, the CDC director enacted a 19th C public health law, Title 42, ostensibly to prohibit people from entering the country in an effort to decrease the potential spread of the virus. In March 2020, Title 42 effectively suspended the right to seek asylum in the U.S. With its automatic expulsion of asylum seekers, tens of thousands of people were displaced on the Mexican side of the border. When the Biden administration inherited the MPP and Title 42 policies in 2021, the government of the United States allowed thousands of MPP asylum seekers to enter the US on parole as they awaited their asylum trials and established some limited exceptions to Title 42

restrictions for at-risk groups. Groups deemed to be at 'high risk', such as families with

small children, people in extreme medical situations, or members of the LGTBQIA+

community, were granted entry to the United States on a case-by-case basis. However, the

Biden Administration's attempts to end the MPP policy were blocked by court rulings.

According to Chishti and Bolster (2021), by February of 2021, 1.7 million expulsions had

been carried out under Title 42, including 1.2 million during the Biden administration.

Savitri and Yates (2021) reported, "Civil society organizations report that Black, LGBTQ

and Indigenous asylum seekers have faced targeted discrimination by local authorities

while waiting in Mexican border cities." Exceptions were granted under Title 42 in

August 2021 based on health and security concerns. Families with small children,

LGTBQIA+ individuals, and people suffering from medical emergencies were included

in this group.

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a discussion of the literature I used for this study. It begins by addressing the role of "queer geographies" in geographic research. It presents an overview of LGBTQIA+ visibility as it relates to policy development and interpretation. The next section examines the long-term health and livelihood impacts of misrecognition of this community. Finally, I address the need for LGTBQIA+ experience in policy to be further explored. A review is divided into three sections: 1) queer geographies, 2) LGTBQIA+ representation in policy, and 3) long-term consequences associated with underrepresentation and misrepresentation.

Queer Geographies

In the last decades of the 20th century and especially the earlier decades of the 21st century was marked by significant liberalizations of sexual and gender norms, especially (but not exclusively) in Western countries. With 29 countries legalizing same-sex marriage and more beginning and continuing to legislate other sexual minority rights, there was also a significant shift in geographic research of sexuality and identity in. The work of Binnie and Valentine (1999) highlights the spatialities of sexual and gender equality during this time, which they call "queer geographies." Queer geographies challenge the existing reliance on the "default" heteronormative binaries in westernized social spaces (Gorman-Murray and McKinnon, 2015).

In addition to exploring the limitations of cultural and legislative equality, scholars have begun to consider heteronormative resistance to the sexual and gender changes of the 21st century. Geographers argue that the concepts of space and place play important roles in understanding changes in sexual and gender equality as well as resistance. Even though gender, sexuality, and power relations are integral to the structuring of human lives within spaces, they have yet to be recognized fully within and beyond geographies (Browne et al., 2021). Brown et al. (2010) emphasizes that to understand dynamics of sexuality in Latin America, researchers must overcome their prejudices and existing, unequal power dynamics, especially when observing from a privileged place in Western culture. The recognition, awareness, and ability to challenge privilege are just a few ways in which researchers ensure the ability to explore new avenues of research without prejudice.

LGTBQIA+ Representation in Policy

Western-centric ideology of sexuality is a part of the foundation of modern-day political asylum policy. To be considered for asylum under grounds of persecution related to sexual identity, asylum seekers must identify themselves or "out" themselves to immigration officials, as well as conform to their expectations of sexuality and identity. Asylum policy requires them to prove their sexual or gender identity are "immutable" aspects of their existence that puts them at-risk (Cantú Jr. et al., 2005). This requires LGTBQIA+ asylum seekers to partake in "reverse covering." The term covering refers to

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the process of people downplaying traits that identify them as members of oppressed and marginalized groups, as described by Yoshino (2006). In contrast, reverse-covering occurs when someone is forced to display stereotypical aspects of their identity. There are a variety of reasons why people cover and reverse-cover, but external pressure is generally involved (Heller, 2009). Currently, the asylum system requires "reverse covering" in official places, while many are forced to "cover" in public spaces.

By moving through these systems, LGTBQIA+ asylum seekers' identities and sexual orientation become hyper visible, while they are usually an invisible, silenced minority (Shuman and Bohmer, 2014). Because binary systems have heteronormativity at their core, non-heteronormative individuals are essentially forced to fit their identity and expression in ways that are understandable within these systems (Gaillard et al., 2017). Furthermore, problems with the systems are exacerbated because the "queer" recognition attempts to construct a concept of identity that fails to recognize the fluidity and ambiguity of individuals (Wimark, 2021). The challenges that asylum seekers face span the entire asylum process; they are not limited to difficulties associated with misrecognition (Shuman and Bohmer, 2014; Heller, 2009).

Additionally, the process forces applicants to portray their home country as colonial/racialistic, while disclaiming any responsibility the US may have for their experiences (Cantú Jr. et al., 2005). As a result, it reinforces the distinction between "American progressiveness" and "backwardness" or "oppression" in the Third World. The result is colonial images of "us" vs. "them" that negatively affect Latin Americans, US

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Latinos, and Latin American asylum seekers in more than just legal environments (Cantú Jr. et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2010; Browne et al., 2021).

U.S. and Mexican governments' response to the pandemic is not free of heteronormativity. There is a need for recognition of gender and sexual minorities in policies created in response to a disaster. In stark contrast to the hyper visualization of the asylum process, most disaster policy ignores or misrecognizes the rights of this minority group. Research on disaster responses focuses primarily on weather-related events; migration and health disasters need to be examined further. However, most existing studies focus on unequal impact or discrimination in response efforts (Gaillard et al., 2017; Gowin et al., 2017). This heightens the need for further research on the role of policy and disaster recovery to meet the needs of everyone and not just the heteronormative majority (Gowin et al., 2017).

It is possible to gain valuable insights into disaster risk reduction policies and practices by integrating geographies of sexualities and disaster studies (Gaillard et al., 2017). Their theoretical and practical explorations highlight the diversity of sexual and gender identities beyond the binary of heterosexual/homosexual and man/woman. Developing strategies that accommodate the diversity and differences of the entire population may be more effective (Gowin et al., 2017). Thus, geographies of sexualities and disaster studies can engage in a dialogue that reaches a wide range of audiences (Gaillard et al., 2017; Gowin et al., 2017).

The many stressors placed on non-heteronormative migrants and asylum seekers can directly affect their health in the long run, in addition to the social and legal challenges they face. These stressors include violence (sexual, physical, verbal), unstable environments, fear for safety and security, hiding undocumented status, and economic insecurity among others. A study of 45 Mexican transgender women seeking asylum in the United States found that once admitted to the United States, the threat of gender-based violence may decrease, but that the new stress of their undocumented status, their socioeconomic status, and their new society only contributed further to their trauma (Gowin et al., 2017). This can have negative consequences for their relationship with healthcare and immigration officials who provide the limited services available to them. As a result of the study, three recommendations were made: increased research on transgender/ethnic minorities' socioeconomic status and documentation status, train and develop resource providers/organizations providing social and health services, and provide resources through trusted channels, such as doctors and social workers.

Migrants and asylum seekers who identify as LGTBQIA+ are at risk of discrimination, visibility, and conformity. Binaries pose a significant threat. When heteronormative systems attempt to categorize an individual's identity or sexuality, they discredit their experiences. People who are non-heteronormative face multiple negative consequences due to a lack of and misrecognition, which can negatively impact their livelihoods and health. Further insight into LGTBQIA+ experience in asylum and

disaster response is needed to minimize and avoid further ignorance and spur long-term change. Analysis of first-hand experiences of individuals who have been directly affected by policies in place is the purpose of this study in order to provide additional insights and recognition of issues relevant to vulnerable migrant groups.

Taken together, threats posed by binary systems are significant. As a result of categorizing an individual's identity or sexuality, heteronormative systems are challenged by 'queer geographies' in westernized social spaces. It is imperative that sexual minorities are included in policy-making, including asylum and disaster response efforts. There are multiple negative consequences for non-heteronormative people due to lack of recognition and misrecognition, affecting their livelihoods and health. In order to minimize and avoid further ignorance and spur long-term change, LGTBQIA+ experience in asylum and disaster response needs to be further explored. To provide additional insights and recognition of issues relevant to vulnerable migrant groups, this study analyzes first-hand the experiences of individuals who have been directly affected by policies in place.

IV.   DATA & METHODOLOGY

During the summer of 2021, I and fellow researchers from Texas State University visited Matamoros, Mexico, to volunteer and study the effects of the US policies on the community of asylum seekers who were waiting to seek asylum at the US-Mexico border. Our team conducted 31 semi-structured interviews using a survey created in ESRI Survey 123 (see Appendix I) while gathering geographic point data of their route to Matamoros. In instances where participants consented, interviews were recorded and were later transcribed using HappyScribe transcription services. To ensure the integrity of their linguistic, emotional, and social context, all data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in Spanish and later translated to English.

The study sites were various migrant shelters in Matamoros, Mexico and at the Greyhound Bus Station in Brownsville, Texas, where ICE coordinates with the city to release asylum seekers from detention. Rainbow Bridges, the sole shelter in the area for members of the LGTBQIA+ community, was one of the only shelters in Matamoros to accept and support nonheteronormative migrants. In August of 2021, our research team visited the Rainbow Bridges shelter and interviewed the shelter's founder, manager and three of the migrants who were staying there. These interviews highlighted the need for LGBTQIA+ representation in mobility/migration studies.

The survey consisted of five separate sections. First, we collected basic demographic information about the participants and their travel companions. The second section focused on the migrants' journey from when they left home until they arrived in

Matamoros/Brownsville. In this section, we asked the migrants to provide geographic data to recreate their routes. The third section asked them to identify specific drivers of their migration. These reasons ranged from social, financial, security, or even climate-related stressors. The survey concluded with questions regarding migrants' experiences at the border while waiting to cross into the United States, or following their entry into the United States, depending on where they were interviewed. The final section concluded the survey and interview with final thoughts or information that they wished to share about their experience.

This fieldwork was conducted by the Texas State University Latin American Migration Project (LAMP Lab) as an initial pilot study to make connections and assess the border's current status. As part of this initial interview process, we gathered information on a variety of immigration-related topics to guide future research. This paper is an example of the resulting papers that have resulted from this initial study, and will continue to do so.

Since the objective of this study is to analyze the experiences of self-identified LGTBQIA+ migrants as sexual or gender minorities, a subset of our dataset consisted of five self-identified LGTBQIA+ participants, which included the founder of the shelter (who was a former migrant residing in Matamoros before receiving temporary protected status in the U.S.), the shelter manager, and three temporary residents in the Rainbow Bridge shelter. After reviewing and analyzing the interview transcripts, I used open

coding, axial coding and thematic development to identify recurring elements of each interview to understand the experiences of each individual (Saldaña, 2021). The codes were then grouped into more generalized themes, as shown in Table 1. A continuous development of these themes was carried out throughout the analysis (Saldaña, 2021).

Geographic Information System (GIS) refers broadly to computer software that is used to store, analyze, process, and display geographically referenced data. Corpus linguistics (CL) is a narrative analysis technique using specialized linguistic software to analyze a set of narratives, known as a "corpus." Traditional GIS and CL share powerful visualization capabilities. Nonquantitative data are incorporated into traditional GIS systems using qualitative GIS (QGIS). By attaching qualitative data to traditionally quantitative techniques and tools, QGIS differs from traditional GIS practices and takes a more human-centered approach. It provides a more fluid analysis to usually rigid practices while providing a spatial context that anchors the qualitative data to geographical spaces. In this study, QGIS and CL work together to build a stronger sense of the places LGTBQIA+ asylum seekers move within at the U.S. border.

For optimum results, specific data processing and management strategies were utilized to prepare for analysis. The GIS data consisted of the various stops and the overall migrant route taken to Matamoros, Mexico with the survey responses serving as part of the final shapefile output. The data was translated into English and cleaned to include the relevant sections based on themes that emerged from the interviews, which included questions regarding migration push/pull factors, familial information and

security/insecurity. I then added an animated representation of the journeys using Adobe After Effects to bring these migrant journeys to life. ArcGIS Online developed an interactive QGIS platform called StoryMaps. With StoryMaps, users can pair maps with narrative text and other multimedia. Story maps are web maps that are thoughtfully created, contextualized, and accompanied by supplementary information.

Using participant narratives highlighted from the interview transcripts, I converted them into a CL-compatible format similar to life history interviews. This process analyzes autobiographical narratives in order to determine how living memories affect identity and experience. To mimic the life history interview method, I edited the transcripts down to include only participant anecdotes. This method presented an excellent way to examine the individual and shared experiences of LGBTIQA+ migrants. The CL open-source software I utilized, Voyant, allows for researchers to include what is known as a "stop-list" (appendix) of words for the software to "ignore" when analyzing the text. Stop-lists are created including common filler words, conjunctions (i.e., "and" or "the"), or verbs that would not provide deeper understanding of the narratives. A custom stop list was created to eliminate all filler words from the study in order to reduce it to its essential components. The software then presented a multitude of statistical analyses and corresponding visualizations that allowed for individual, collective, and thematic analysis.

This study focused on a few specific CL methods:

1. *Concordance* - displays the occurrences of a selected word or phrase in sentences

2. *Frequency* - the number of times a word or phrase occurs in a document

3. *Relative frequency* - the number of times a word or phrase occurs in a document compared to the larger reference corpus

4. *Collocation* - the juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance

5. *Correlation* - uses the Pearson's Correlation to determine whether term frequencies are in sync (terms that change at the same frequency at the same time)

Voyant provided corresponding visualizations and table outputs for many CL methods, including the methods of focus for this study, to facilitate pattern identification. The Cirrus tool creates a word cloud that includes n words of the highest relative frequency within the corpus or transcript. The higher the frequency, the larger the word. Trends is another visualization tool that displays relative frequency along a traditional trendline but provides more insight by including the frequency in each document from the corpus. Bubble Lines include the temporal sequence of the interviews for understanding proximity and frequency of terms. Concordance is shown in a table view. In addition to the default collocates, a search bar is available to find specific terms and any existing collocates. The Context tool offered a concordance table to allow for easy analysis of the "context" of the term. All of the tools interact with each other in an easy portal to maximize research results.

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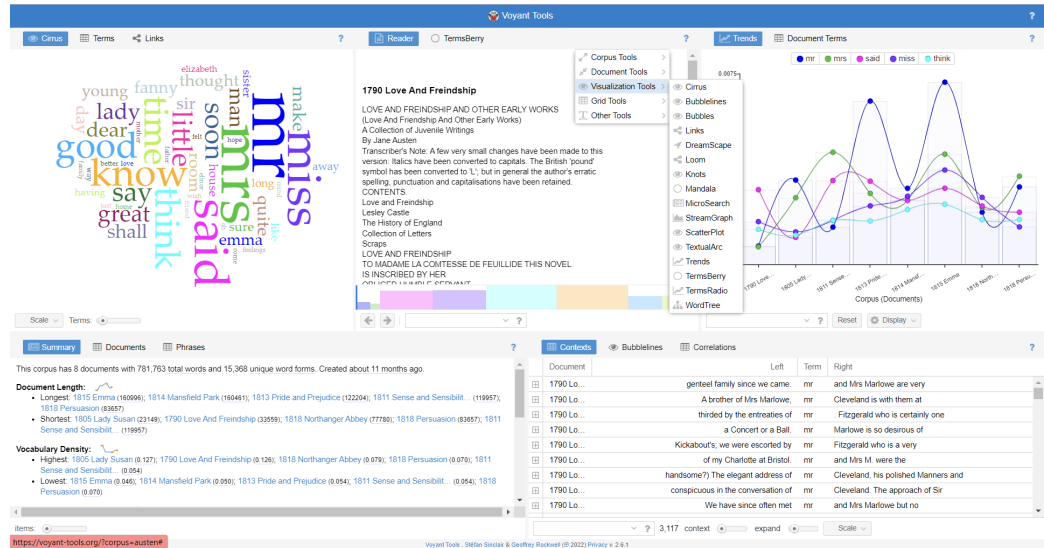
Figure 1. The Voyant home portal shows a variety of windows at once that interact with one another to optimize the research capabilities of users.

The first step in analyzing the subset of five interviews from Rainbow Bridges was to identify any high-frequency words that corresponded to the previously identified themes using the Cirrus tool. This task was made very easy by the straightforward nature of this tool. Using the trends tool, the top five trending words in the corpus are displayed in a traditional trend line, providing insight into the participants' unique narratives through a close examination.

To begin targeted thematic searches, I utilized the Bubble Lines tool. This tool is unique in the way it pairs concordance with a temporal element. Documents in the corpus were represented as horizontal lines divided into segments of equal length (50 segments by default). A bubble represents every selected word in a segment of text, with the size of the bubble denoting its frequency. A larger bubble indicates a more frequent occurrence

of the word and vice versa. The proximity of the bubbles correlates with the proximity of the terms. This combination allowed patterns to emerge across the entire corpus. I conducted three separate searches to identify emerging patterns between the solitary documents as seen in the Figures 2-12 below.

Certain words were left in the corpus when using these tools due to the possibility of contributing to thematic context. Context can make words like "nada" (nothing) or "todos" (all / everything) meaningful when regarding resources or community/family ties. Using the Context Tool, you can gain a better understanding of how words and phrases are used. It can shed light on our interviewees' lived memories and experiences.

After completing the CL analysis, I transferred the survey and geographic data from Survey123 into StoryMaps, as it is one of the easiest ways to share complex research findings. The format is similar to online news articles in that it is easily accessed once published, while maintaining the interactive features of conventional web maps. Through applications like StoryMaps, narratives like those explored in this paper can be brought to more audiences in an aesthetically pleasing, impactful way.

This study had several limitations, including limited costs and time, especially given the complexity of its focus. The LAMP group survey and interviews included a variety of topics since it was a larger pilot study. Projects with a more specialized survey regarding LGBTQIA+ experiences would be beneficial. Identifying patterns with corpus linguistics software like Voyant would be easier with a more specialized survey aligned with life history interviewing techniques. As well as eliminating filler words, a more

precise "stop list" may make it easier to identify existings patterns. With that, a larger funding and time budget would have allowed this study to expand in many ways, including the number of participants and study sites. Additional time would allow for growing connections and trust with the community, especially given that the nature of gender and identity along with violence and trauma are extremely personal. While there are other methods that could also contribute to studies like this, the size of this specific subset limits the utility of corpus linguistics methods but leaves room for future research. Further research could address these qualitative themes through a quantitative study with a larger dataset over a longer period of time.

V.   RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Three major themes emerged from this study regarding LGBTQIA+ migrants' experiences throughout their journey: devotion to family, emotional impact, and insecurity/precarity (the coding process is displayed in Table 1). Insecurity and precarity were the most prominent themes discussed by the participants. Most of the participants experienced of violence or discrimination because of their LGBTQIA+ status. Some participants reported that the main reason for fleeing their home countries was this violence. Many felt the violence was so disruptive, they could not return for fear of losing their lives. In border cities, such as Matamoros, asylum seekers of any demographic become hyper visible, compounding their insecurity. This is because most of them were displaced without housing or resources before finding the Rainbow Bridges shelter. One participant in this study, Felipe, is a gay asylum seeker who founded the shelter. Prior to his arrival in 2019, there was no safe space or shelter that was available for non-heteronormative migrants in Matamoros.

Every time participants mentioned safety or the lack of safety, insecurity and precarity emerged as a theme. Esmeralda gave a powerful example of the difficult circumstances in her home in Honduras. Her main reason for seeking asylum in the United States was violence. "My brother-in-law was killed first," she said. "They almost killed my young nephews, and then my sister. We had to come here." She was not alone in her experience. Maria, another participant, also mentioned violence in Honduras, but she also talked about the violence she encountered on her journey. "As we traveled along

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a railroad track, we passed a village where some people lived in this little house. They immediately called the police. We were covered in nylon bags because it was raining, and our suitcases had already been stolen. Only the money we were carrying had not been stolen yet. Others had already robbed us of everything else. However, the police caught up with us, told us to give them everything we were carrying, and then took it from us." Migrants' vulnerability as they travel unfortunately is not uncommon and has been broadly reported (i.e., Gowin, 2017).

LGBTQIA+ migrants experiences during their journey to and at the US-Mexico border

Participants also noted that a powerful driver behind their decision to migrate revolved heavily around their familial relationships, such as hoping for a better future for their children or to join relatives who have already relocated to the United States. Some had traveled with their family members, including small children, while others had to make the difficult decision to leave their family behind. The dire circumstances of migration and family separation led to a clear mental and emotional toll for these migrants. Maria spoke about the difficult decision to leave her children behind in Honduras in her interview: "I am leaving here so that my children can have a better life. I can't help them anymore, I have no way to help them here. We live in a poor area. I came to this place with a goal and a purpose to do something: to be able to support them."

The stress caused by their circumstances often led to feelings of fear, sadness, or depression. There were, however, some positive emotions reported as well. Shelters and

service providers were credited with providing a sense of security, resulting in feelings of peace, gratitude, or hope. Gowin's (2017) case study reported many of these same stressors. Thus, it is crucial to note the need for further research studies on the needs and gaps in service for this community. In addition, it is crucial for more shelters and spaces dedicated to safe spaces due to the seriousness of the situation facing LGBTIA+ asylum seekers.

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Themes
strong relationships with family	familial relationships	devotion to family
leaving to hopefully join family in US	join family	devotion to family
leaving to give their children a better life	seeking better life	devotion to family
feeling some peace in Matamoros since leaving home	feeling of peace	emotional impact
feeling shame because of being an outsider	feeling shame	emotional impact
insecurity at home because of violence/gangs	insecurity	insecurity/precarity
discrimination based on gender/sexuality	discrimination	insecurity/precarity
feeling hopeful for their future since leaving	feeling hopeful	emotional impact
can't return home/lives at risk	unsafe	insecurity/precarity
scared for their life/life of their children	emotion	emotional impact
outright violence in their homes	unsafe	insecurity/precarity
afraid in matamoros	afraid	emotional impact
grateful shelter provides supplies/feel secure in shelter	grateful	emotional impact
sense of community/safety in numbers LGBT	community	emotional impact
seeking protection/security	seeking safety	insecurity/precarity
feeling of uncertainty	uncertainty	emotional impact
trans ppl easy targets since no one misses them/isolation	easy targets	insecurity/precarity
mental toll/depression	depression	emotional impact
smuggling turning into trafficking	trafficking	insecurity/precarity
All Themes: devotion to family, emotional impact, insecurity/precarity		

Table 1. Open coding was used to develop axial codes to recognize overarching themes. The three main themes were identified: devotion to family, emotional impact and insecurity/precarity.

Corpus linguistics' Usefulness in Identifying Key Migrant Experiences

After identifying the most prominent themes, the next step was to further analyze the language used in the narratives to identify any further similarities or differences between them. As seen in Figure 2 and Table 2, there are a number of terms related to family devotion, three terms connected to insecurity and precarity, and no obvious terms pertaining to emotion. Although there may be terms related to these themes, their context may be less obvious on their own. For example, a term like "community" could have a familial attachment depending on the context. Additional analysis is required to determine this. Newly identifiable patterns include the importance of cities and countries names and travel-related verbs. A few examples are "Mexico", "Monterrey", and "Reynosa". It is likely that this is due to asking participants to describe their journey and how they reached Matamoros.

Figure 2. The Cirrus tool output for the main corpus. This includes the fifty-five of the highest frequency terms across all five interviews.

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Full Corpus - Cirrus Terms Grouped by Theme		
1. Devotion to Family:	hijo(s), hija, niños,	son(s), daughter, children
	mamá	mother
	hermana	sister
	familia	family
2. Emotional Impact:	None noted	
3. Insecurity/Precarity:	ayuda	help
	nada	nothing

Table 2. The Cirrus terms, grouped by relation to existing themes.

Figure 3 illustrates the relative frequency of these terms across all documents within the corpus. In spite of the fact that only two of the terms directly relate to the familial theme, the output provides other important words that connect the interviewees to their experiences. However, the use of a targeted search for thematic terms may allow for further insight into popular terms, such as "comunidad" (community).
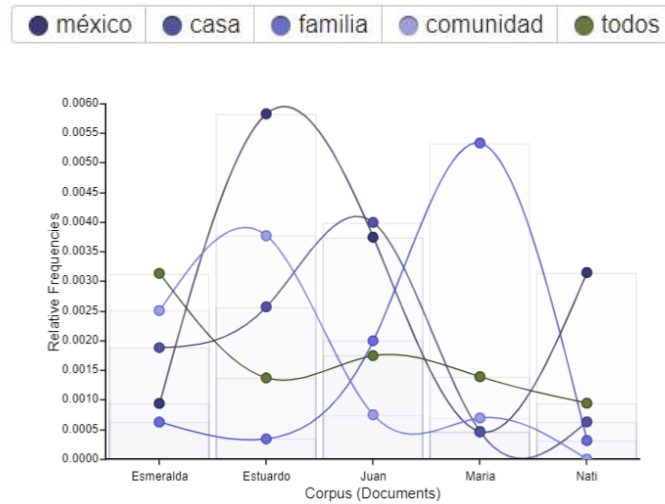
Figure 3. The trends seen in this graph give more individualized insight to the highest relative frequency used terms within the corpus while also providing insight to each individual's use of the terms.

familia*   mam*   papá   herma*   hij*
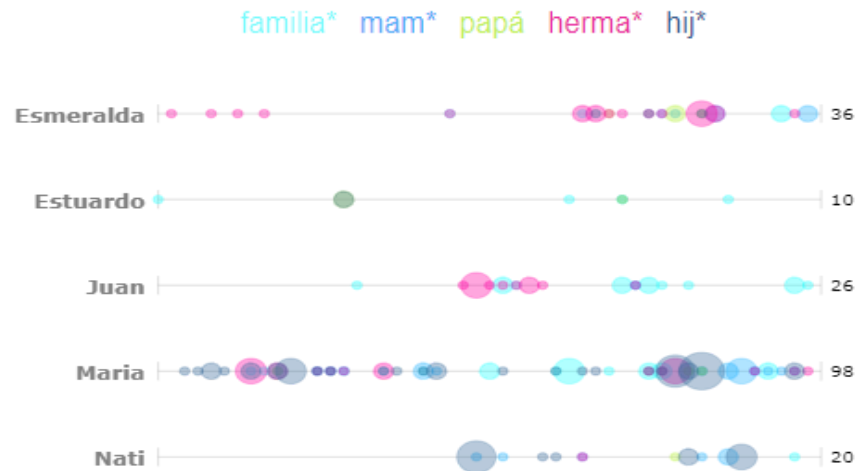
Figure 4. The Bubble Line graph shows Maria, Nati, and Esmeralda were more vocal about family in their interviews.

inseg*   esperan*   miedo*   paz*   depresión   comunidad*
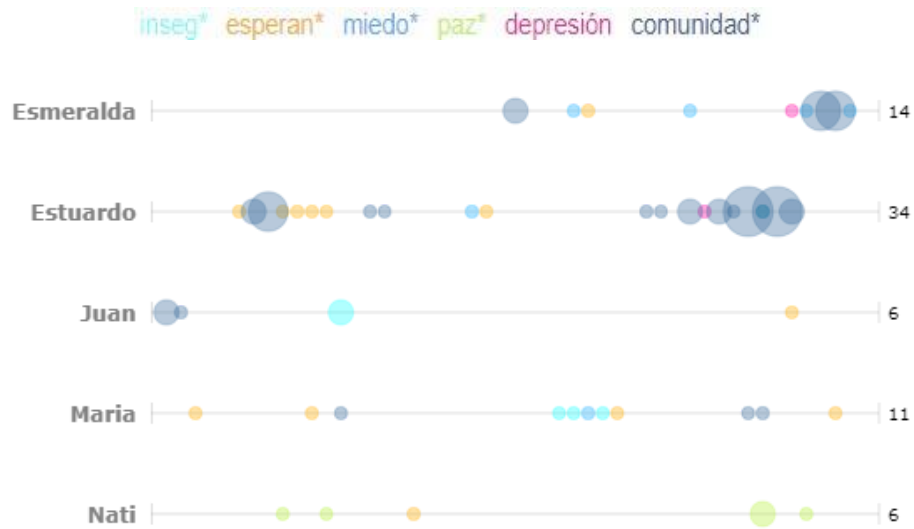
Figure 5. The majority of participants did not use literal emotional terms in their narratives, however, that does not mean they did not include emotional content or context.

Figure 6. Juan and Felipe mention more terms directly related to insecurity and precarity, such as "violence" and "discrimination".

There are two subtle groupings forming within the corpus. Juan and Felipe appear to share some commonalities in their language/topics, while Esmeralda, Maria, and Nati seem to align more closely. There is a difference in focus between two groups when one is more vocal about family and the other is less so (see Figure 4). A few inferences can be made regarding the cause of this pattern. One possible reason is gender. There is some evidence that different genders use different language patterns or terms (Giordano, 2020). Upon close examination, there is one other key difference to consider.

Despite being asylum seekers themselves, Felipe and Juan also provide services to their community. While Felipe is the founder of Rainbow Bridges and has already received temporary protected status (TPS), Juan is still seeking entry into the United States and acts as the shelter manager in the meantime. As a result, their interviews

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provided additional context to the residents and the political processes at play during the pandemic. They were also more forthcoming about the emotional and dangerous experiences for their community. To accommodate these differences, I divided the subset into two smaller groups, service providers and residents, to better analyze their experiences as LGTBQIA+ communities on the border, to find additional patterns and themes between the subgroups. Following the same methodology, each of the new subgroup were analyzed in Voyant. Starting with the asylum seekers turned providers, I created a new Cirrus output which is comparable to the original output (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The Cirrus tool output for Subset II: asylum seekers turned service providers. This includes a new set of fifty-five of the highest frequency terms across two interviews.
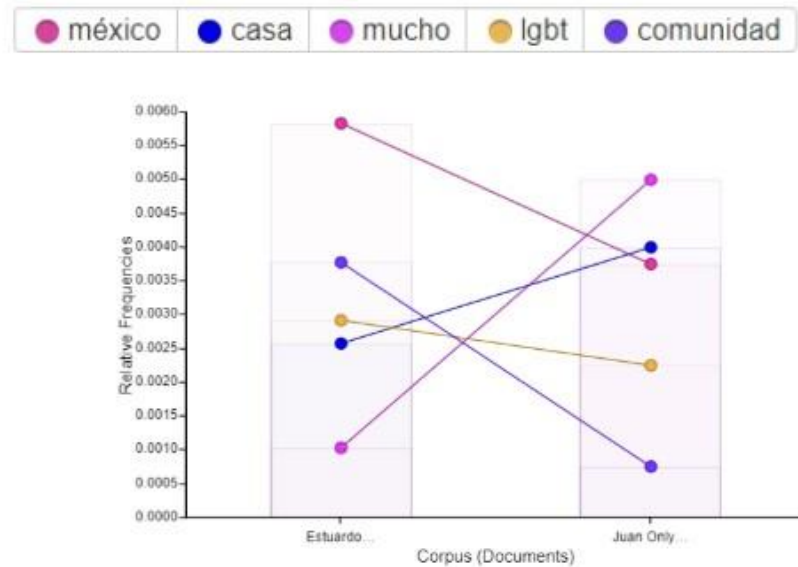
Figure 8. The trends seen in this graph give a more individualized insight to the highest relative frequency used terms within the corpus while also providing insight to each individuals use.

The word cloud appears to have some notable additions and changes upon initial viewing. The terms "processo" (process) and "MPP" (Migrant Protection Protocol) became much more prevalent within this grouping, while new terms such as "coyotes" and "legalmente" (legally) appeared. "LGBT" also became more visible and the first specific LGTBQIA+ term "trans" appeared within this subset. Location names and many verbs related to travel remain significant in this group. They might have been able to speak more freely about the political and social environment for their community in Matamoros because of their roles as service providers. This Voyant analysis reveals that their interviews focused primarily on legal issues and refugee experiences.

A close reading of the interviews confirmed these results. While the interviews still included Felipe and Juan's personal experiences, it became apparent that by separating their narratives, other themes could be identified, since their personal experiences were not as prominent. Data management and preparation are very important when using CL methods, as this demonstrates how sensitive they can be. To answer the second research question regarding the LGTBQIA+ asylum seeker experience, it was then more appropriate to focus on the subgroup of current residents who were focused on discussing the experiences that drove them to seek asylum in the US and while waiting for asylum in Matamoros.

The Cirrus output for the remaining subgroup (see Figure 9) compounds further on the importance of family among the interviewees. There are many terms referring to various family members. However, topics that appear with higher frequency are locations and action verbs. Terms like "comida" (food), "casa" (house), and "dinero" (money)–words related to resources–emerged as more important among this group. Despite the context of these terms, this demonstrates how important resources are to this group.

Figure 9. The Cirrus tool output for current residents of Rainbow Bridges. This includes a new set of fifty-five of the highest frequency terms among the three shelter residents interviewed.

A few correlation terms were identified across all corpus subgroups by the Correlation Tool. Residents of the shelter had a .6418 correlation between the terms "Dios" (God) and "mama" (mother). However, since these findings are based on small sample size, no inferences can be drawn. Statistical support for shared themes and experiences may be possible in future research with a larger sample.

Evaluating the utility of QGIS in visualizing migrant narratives and themes

A close reading also provided greater insight into the context of location names. During their interviews, Felipe and Juan mentioned a popular route among migrants based on their work and interaction with asylum seekers. Some cities from this identified

path appear in the word clouds across the corpus, indicating they are important to our study group. I compared this information with the survey's geographic data to visualize where these experiences are occurring, starting with the routes of our participants (see Figure 10). Having converted our study group's self-identified stops into a heat map, I analyzed whether certain frequently mentioned cities were correlated with this known pathway. The final output indicated many of our participants visited the named cities (see Figure 11). By identifying the areas where these communities are living these experiences, researchers and service providers can focus their attention on rallying around them to provide assistance.

Figure 10. Map of the various routes each participant took until they arrived at Rainbow Bridges in Matamoros, Mexico in the summer of 2021.
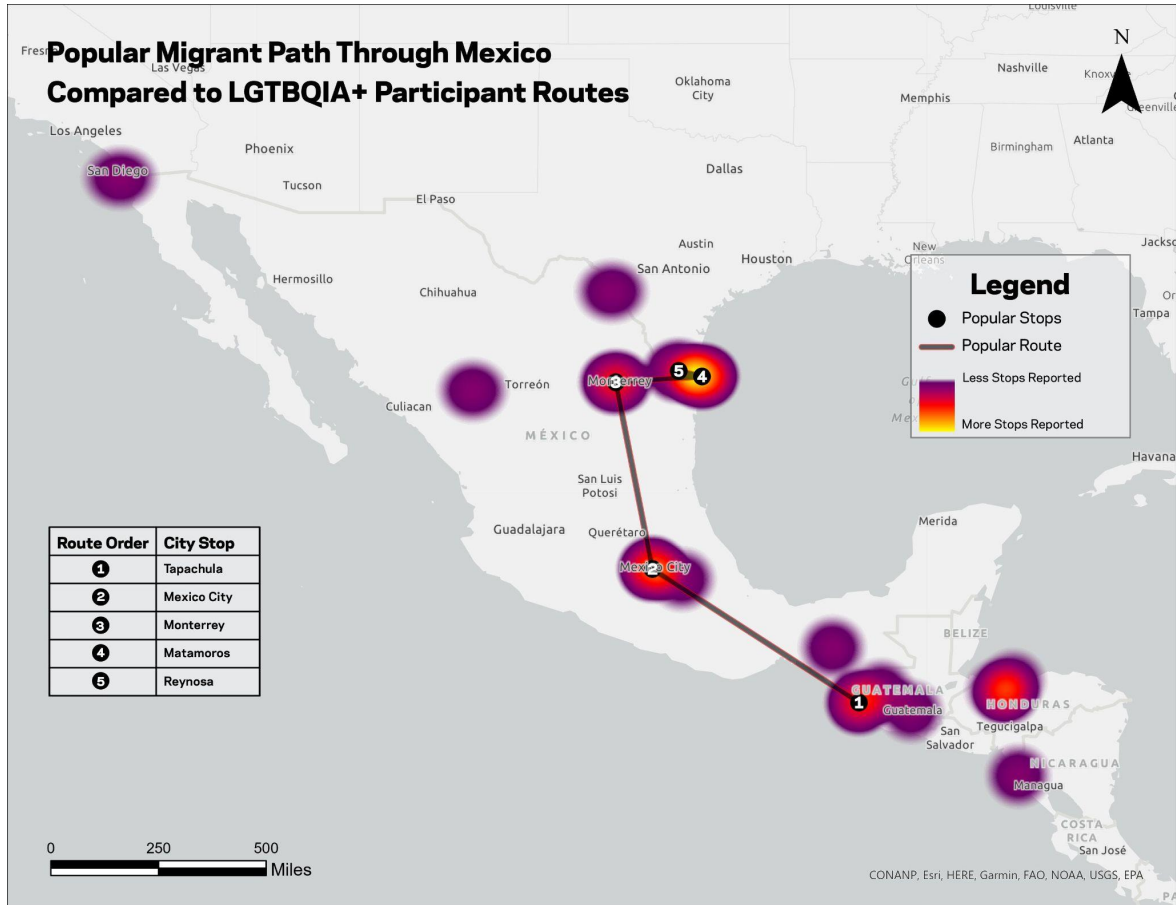
Figure 11. Map overlaying the popular migrant route identified by service providers over a heat map of the cities identified as stops the LGBTQIA+ migrants made along the way.

SEEKING SOLACE

LGBTQIA+ ASYLUM SEEKERS AT THE US-MEXICO BORDER

Mollie Price
November 29, 2022

Figure 12. An interactive StoryMap was created for users to interpret the data themselves using the findings and data from this paper.

As a final step, this data has been compiled into a StoryMap that has been published in an interactive format. By using this platform, the public and other researchers can explore the data and learn about these people who risk everything in hope of a better life. QGIS provides a new human aspect to studies like by giving life and dignity to data that would otherwise just appear as static numbers and coordinates. Pairing Corpus Linguistics with a QGIS tool, such as StoryMaps, emphasized the

identified themes, the importance of the geography of the spaces of migrant journeys, and

helped give a larger platform to already marginalized voices.

VI.   CONCLUSION

This study combined qualitative and survey data with visualization tools and techniques, such as qualitative geographic information science (QGIS) and corpus linguistics to gain a new perspective on individual accounts and recognize potential patterns. Semi-structured interviews and accompanying surveys with asylum seekers provided data to answer the following questions: During their journey to and at the US-Mexico border, what are the unique experiences of LGBTQIA+ migrants? Because of policies like MPP that leave displaced people in limbo at the border, this is an important issue due to the growing migrant population in border cities like Matamoros.

LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers are increasingly vulnerable to violence, such as extortion, kidnappings, sex trafficking, and discrimination, according to service providers and asylum seekers. Based on open coding and axial coding, three main themes emerged: devotion to family, emotional impact, and insecurity/precarity. With Voyant, these themes were further explored and patterns were identified across the subgroup of interviews. It was revealed during this analysis that resources and locations are important, and that it is important to know where aid is needed. Although there are many factors that contribute to migration, these asylum seekers were largely influenced by family relationships and insecurity/precarity, and each participant was affected emotionally by their circumstances.

This study also examined the usefulness of qualitative GIS tools such as corpus linguistics to identify distinguishable patterns in migrants' experiences and to visualize

these themes and narratives to bring attention to the common experience while retaining the individuals' stories. Pairing CL techniques with traditional and qualitative GIS methods allows the identification of precise locations of need for services providers and on which resources to focus.

APPENDIX I

Survey used for outlining interviews (translated in English):

I. Demographic Information

Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us. Is it okay to record this interview

so that we can listen to it later and make sure we understand everything you said correctly?

1. We ask that you choose a fake name to protect your identity and ensure your safety.

What fake name would you like us to use?

2. What is your nationality?

3. Do you belong to an indigenous group?

4. How old are you?

5. What is your marital status?

6. With whom do you travel?

7. Do you have children? If so, how many?

8. What is your highest level of education?

9. Have you lived in the US before? If so, for how long?

10. Have you been deported?

11. Do you have relatives in the US?

   i. If yes, who are they and how long have they lived in the US?

12. If you are not Mexican, have you lived in Mexico before?

13. If you are not Mexican, do you have relatives in Mexico?

14. If you are not Mexican, have you considered applying for asylum in Mexico?

16. Have you thought about applying for asylum in another country? Why or why not?

II. Migration Journey

The next questions are about your journey from the time you left your home until you arrived here. If you are

not comfortable with a question, you can say that you do not want to answer and we will move on to the next

question.

1. How long have they been here at the border (in Mexico) waiting to go to the US?

2. Please describe all the places you stayed once you arrived in Matamoros - for each place: how you found the place to stay, how long you stayed there, and why you left.

3. When did you first leave home to come to the US? (Date - as specific as possible)

4. Where have you stayed or slept throughout your trip?

5. When did you get to the border? (Date - as specific as possible)

6. How long did your trip take? (date they left, date they arrived at the border)

7. Can you tell me about your journey from when you left home until you got here?

        Where did you stop along the way and for how long at each location?

          i. *Interactive map included in this question for on-site geographic data collection*

8. How long have you been in the shelter OR were you detained in the US?

9. How many times were you stopped by immigration officials during your trip?

10. Where were you every time they stopped you? What happened?

11. Did immigration officials solicit a bribe?

12. Did you pay for a guide?

        i. How did you find the guide / was it someone you knew?

13. Did you experience violence during your trip?

        i. If so, what happened?

III. Drivers of Migration

Now we are going to ask you some questions about your decision to migrate. Again, if you don't feel comfortable with a question, you can say you don't want to answer and we'll move on to the next question.

1. Why did you leave home?

2. Which of the following things affected your decision to migrate, and how?

        i. Violence

        ii. Domestic or gender-based violence, gangs

        iii. Loss of land

        iv. Loss of home or business

        v. Debt

        vi. Drought

        vii. Hurricane/flooding

        viii. Discrimination

        ix. Need to help family

        x. COVID-19

3. If you experienced violence, did you report this violence?

        i. If no, why not?

4. What do you identify as the main reason for leaving home?

5. How long have you been affected by that problem?

6. What are your future plans?

IV. Survival and Resources at the Border

Now we are going to ask you about your experience waiting here at the border…

1. How are you surviving here while you wait to cross? (Matamoros)

2. How did you find this refuge / the refuge where you are staying? (Matamoros)

3. If you were already in the US, how did you survive while waiting to cross?

4. Did you feel safe in this city (or in the cities where you expected to cross)?

        i. Why or why not?

5. Who, if anyone, has helped you along your journey and across the border?

6. Have any of your friends or family sent you money during your trip?

        i. If so, how did you receive it?

7. Have you had enough money for food?

        i. If not, where have you found food?

8. Do you have access to medical care?

9. What medical services have you received and from whom?

10. If you have children, do your children have access to school here?

        i. If so, what type of school?

11. Have you been given (MX) / (US) information on how to apply for asylum in

Mexico?

12. Do you have or have you received legal services?

      i. If so, from whom?

V. Additional information

Thank you so much for your participation. We value your bravery and story.

1. Is there anything else you would like us to know or share?

algunos	dicen	está	mi	saber	una
a	cual	estados	las	pues	trabajas
ahorita	cuando	estais	le	que	trabajo
ahí	cómo	estamos	les	quien	tras
al	de	estan	lo	qué	tres
algún	digo	están	mientras	sabes	unas
algo	del	estar	los	sabe	tuyo
alguna	dentro	este	luego	sabeis	type
algunas	después	esto	me	sabemos	ultimo
alguno	dice	estoy	mes	saben	un
allá	dijeron	fin	mio	se	unidos
allí	dijo	fue	mis	seis	uno
ambos	donde	fueron	mismo	ser	unos
ampleamos	dos	fui	modo	si	usa
ante	día	fuimos	muchos	siendo	usais
antes	días	gente	muy	sin	usamos
aquel	el	gueno	más	sobre	usan
aquellas	ella	ha	mí	sois	usar
aquellos	ellas	había	no	solamente	usas
aqui	ellos	habían	nos	solo	uso
aquí	empleais	hace	nosotros	somos	va
arriba	emplean	haceis	o	son	vais
así	emplear	hacemos	otra	soy	valor
atras	empleas	hacen	otro	su	vamos
año	empleo	hacer	para	sus	van
años	en	haces	pero	sé	vaya
bajo	encima	hago	personas	sí	veces
bastante	entonces	han	podeis	también	ver
bien	entrar	hasta	podemos	te	verdad
bueno	entre	hay	poder	teneis	verdadera cierto

cada	era	iba	podria	tenemos	verdadero
cierta	eramos	iban	podriais	tener	vez
ciertas	eran	incluso	podriamos	tengo	vine
ciertos	eras	intenta	podrian	tenía	vino
como	eres	intentais	podrias	tiempo	vosotras
con	es	intentamos	por	tiene	vosotros
conseguimos	esa	intentan	por qué	tienen	voy
conseguir	ese	intentar	porque	todo	y
consigo	eso	intentas	Él	trabaja	ya
consigue	esta	intento	primero desde	trabajais	yo
consiguen	estaba	ir	puede	trabajamos	
consigues	estaban	la	pueden	trabajan	
cosas	estado	largo	puedo	trabajar	

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