

Teaching Students from Different Cultures

Some observations by Stanley A Lucero

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All teachers need to understand that their own language and culture determines what they do and say. The same is true for each of your students. Teachers need to develop the teaching skills to incorporate the languages and cultures of their students into their daily instruction. But first, they need to study the cultural differences to avoid cultural misunderstandings and to promote cultural democracy.

Much of Subtest IV of the CSET LOTE test is centered around this cultural instruction. What we say and what we do is based on our native language and culture. Most people are completely unaware of how their own culture expressed their cultural values through language and body language. People who are monolingual are unaware of that there are cultural differences between themselves and speakers of other languages.

As bilingual speakers we constantly see examples of how language and culture are different and intertwined. Edward T. Hall [Silent Language] states that monolingual speakers are slaves to their own culture and don't realize that there are other ways of doing things

LANGUAGE REFLECTS CULTURE



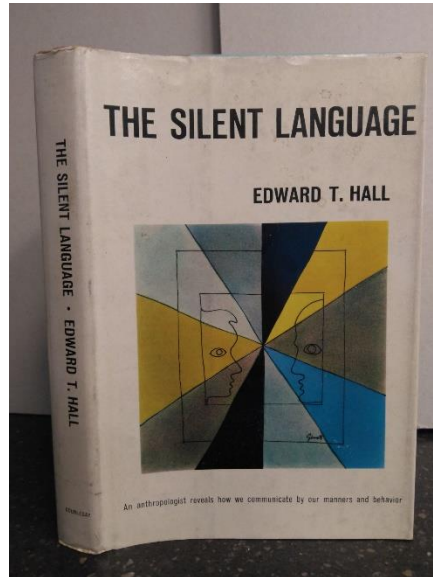
Language Reflects Culture by Dr. Mariluz Jaramillo. Here are some examples from an article I read by Dr. Jaramillo back in the during my 1967-1968 studies at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In English the clock runs, in Spanish the clock walks [el reloj anda]. Other languages for say the clock functions, marches, etc.

In Spanish we say "se me cayó el plato" I didn't drop the plate because it jumped out of my hands.

In Spanish we say "me dejó el avión." I didn't miss the plane because it left me.

SILENT LANGUAGE



Here are example from Silent Language by Edward T Hall. [Edward Twitchell Hall. The Silent Language. 1973, Anchor Books]

In some Native American languages, the smallest unit of time is the sun and the moon. In the English language time is measured in minutes and seconds.

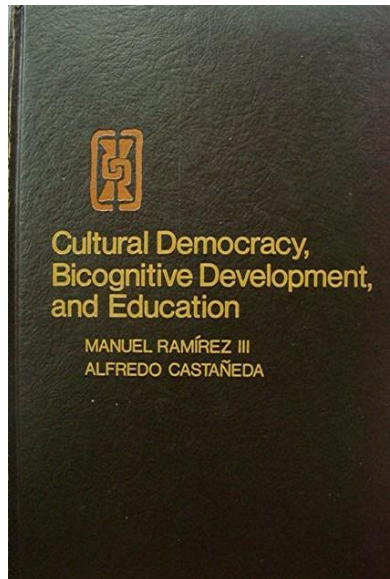
When the Hopis were helping construct a dam, they were given a detailed timeline of when tasks were to be completed. Sometimes the Hopis didn't report to work because of an important family or community event. The Hopis arrived to work at the time most convenient to them. They completed the construction of the dam. They were functioning on Hopi time, not Anglo time.

The Native Americans from northern Canada have many words for snow and ice while most of us are limited to a small vocabulary related to snow and ice.

When people from the United States travel to other countries, they become the Ugly Americans when they insist that everyone needs to speak to them in English and do what they pay them to do. The more experienced travelers go out of their way to experience the different languages and cultures and learn as much as they can.



CULTURAL DEMOCRACY



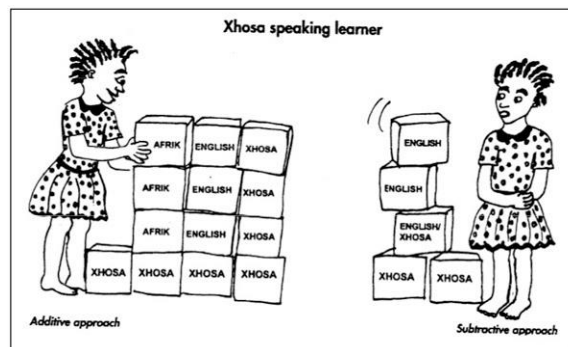
While working on my Master of Arts in Teaching at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces New Mexico, our teacher shared with us excerpts from the manuscripts for a book to be soon published. The book is Cultural Democracy by Manuel Ramirez III.

In an attempt to document how mothers taught their children how to tie their shoes, they observed Anglo mothers, Mexican mother, and Mexican American mothers. The Anglo mothers talked the children through the steps of tying their shoes. The Mexican mothers showed the children how to tie their shoes. The Mexican American mothers used a combination of talking and showing.

They studied reports of how pilots emerged from flying through clouds without the use of technology. Some pilots emerged flying straight while others emerged tilted to the horizon. Ramirez compared the pilots to how people from different cultures respond to the same situation.

Ramirez stressed that every individual had the right to choose to live within their own culture. Nobody must be forced to assimilate into the majority culture.

We can choose to acculturate and incorporate the best of two cultures to develop flexibility, unity and expansion.



CHILDREN’S MUSIC REFLECTS CULTURE



If you treated me with respect, I would call you usted instead of tú. “Patito, patito color de café. Si tú no me quieres porqué, porqué. Ya no me presumes que al cabo yo se que usted es un patito color de café”

I would rather eat tortillas than bread. “Pobre Juan, Pobre Juan, No le quieren dar tortillas. Pobre Juan, Pobre Juan, Come pan con mantequilla.”

Christmas is about family. “Toda la mañana en esta Navidad. Juntos en la casa con felicidad.”

Doña is usually used for large landowners, but Jose and Maria weren’t large landowners. However, Maria was the mother of Jesus. “Señora Doña María aquí le traigo a mi hijito.”

We have padrinos and madrinas at our weddings to help with all of the costs and the details. “Salta el ratón desde el ratal. Amarren el gato y yo iré a padrinar.”



“Ya no hay tortillas. Ya solo hay pan.”
There’s no tortillas. There’s only bread.
Song by Lalo Guerrero

DICHOS



I think every culture has “dichos” [sayings] that teach cultural moral values. Here are a few I learned in New Mexico.

“En boca cerrada no entra mosca.” Flies don’t enter a closed mouth.

“El que no llora no mama.” The one that doesn’t cry doesn’t get breastmilk.

“Dime con quien andas y te digo quien eres.” Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are.

We’ll cross that bridge when they build it.

MY NEW MEXICO CULTURE



Here are some examples from my experiences as a Manito in an Anglo society. In northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, we call ourselves Manitos. We are a mix of the European conquistadores under the Spanish flag in 1598 and New Mexico and Colorado Native Americans. Others call us Spanish Americans, Mexicans, Indo Hispanos, La Raza, Genizaros, and other not so pleasant names.

We give directions by landmarks [the tree that was hit by lightning] or important locations [the road to Taos, the road to Rio Lucio; the Y in the road in Penasco]. In the US cities, directions are given by street names. Many of our roads do not have street signs or road names. From my readings of Silent Language, I understand that the streets in France change names as they reach important buildings or locations.

In New Mexico, when I ask how far it is to the nearest city, I am answered in miles. Here in California, I am answered by how many hours and minutes it takes to travel to my destination.

In New Mexico when I order a hamburger, I am asked "Red, green or Christmas?" What kind of chili do you want on your hamburger?

As a child, when I was introduced to an adult, I was expected to answer "Stanley Andres Lucero a sus órdenes." As a child, when an adult called my name, I was expected to answer "Mande."

When I tell someone in New Mexico "ahorita te veo", it might be in a few minutes or a few days.

When I want my fellow Manitos to arrive at 530 pm, I tell them to arrive at 430 pm. Then, most of them will arrive at 530 pm. I have often heard Californios talk about Mexican time.

The Taos Pueblo Indians have a yearly 10 mile run where all ages participate [youth to great grandparents]. The winners are those who cross the finish line regardless of how long it takes them. In the American English language and culture, the winner is the first person to cross the finish line measured in hours:minutes:seconds. There is only one winner, all the rest are losers to varying degrees.

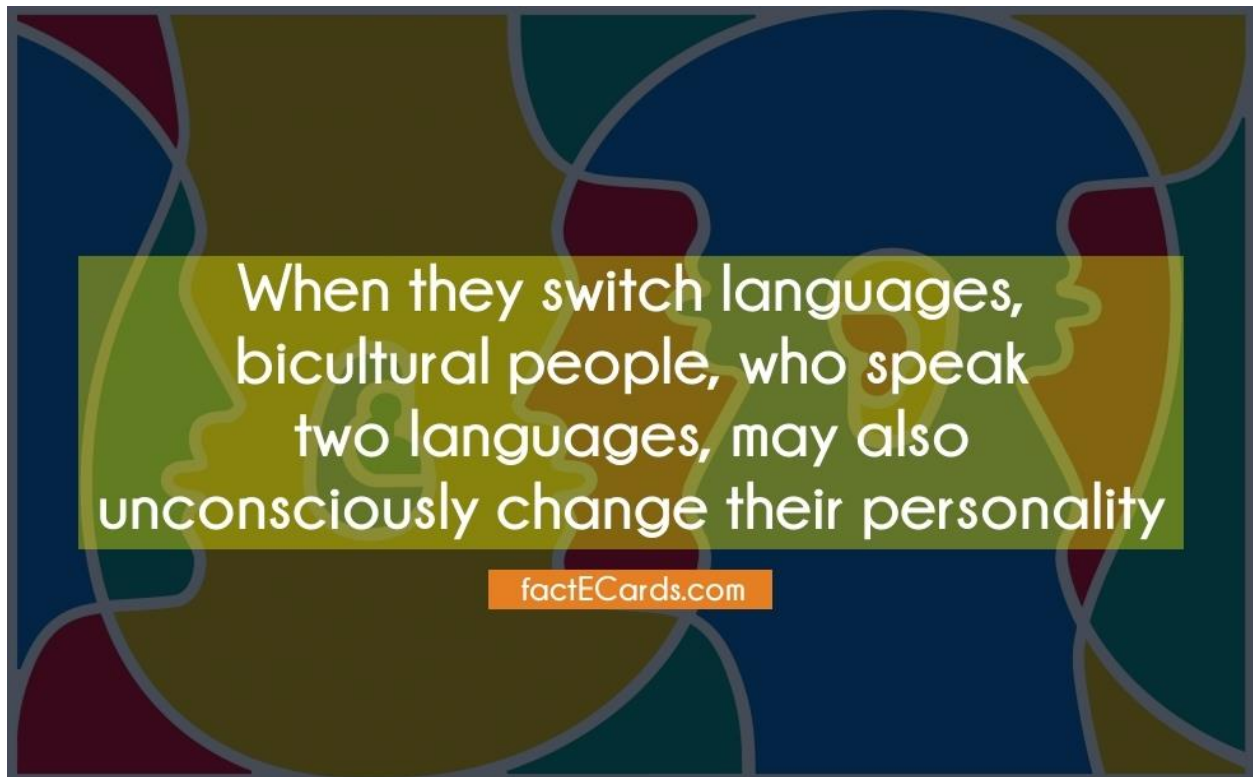
Whenever I visit someone who doesn't know me in New Mexico, they will ask me for the names of my parents and grandparents to see how we are related. Then they expect me to sit down and eat because

they are already serving me some food. It is very disrespectful not to eat. If you don't eat, you are offending them.

When I visit someone I know in New Mexico, one of the first things they will do is offer me something to drink and eat. Usually they are already putting food on the table.

At family events such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, they are all three day events with lots of food for everyone.

Do you remember some of these phrases: la mollera caida, le díó el ojo, esta empachado, toca la lira, etc.



FROM MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE



I attended a training in Visalia in the late 70s on the sounds in English based on a color coded chart by a researcher from the Sahari Desert. He matched some of the English sounds to multiple shades of brown and green that I couldn't even see.

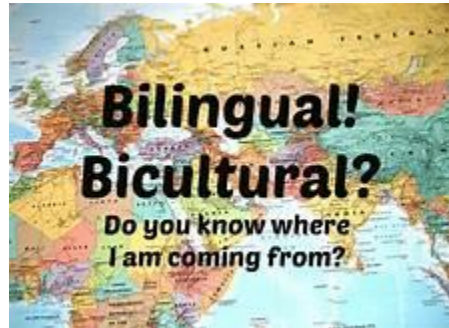
In preparation to teach in a high intensive language training we were told the story of a Junior High male teacher and a female student from Venezuela. The student came to talk to him about school and stood very close to him. He backed up to maintain what he instinctively felt was the appropriate personal distance. The girl got closer and the teacher kept backing up until the teacher had his back to the wall. The teacher was maintaining the personal distance his culture dictated. The student was maintaining the personal distance her culture dictated. Neither the teacher nor the student were aware of what they were doing. The appropriate distance between a male adult and the female student in the English language culture is different from the appropriate distance between a male adult and a female student in the Spanish language culture.

Dr Leonard Holguin in Shuck Loves Churly said the reason that Spanish speakers have trouble learning English is because they don't know how to breathe in English. He demonstrated this fact by hanging a tissue in front of his mouth while speaking English and Spanish. The tissue moved significantly in English and hardly moved in Spanish. He made the point clearer by saying "put" in a soft voice and then yelling "perro."

In the Teatro ATM in Las Cruces, New Mexico we joked that Spanish speakers didn't need to use mouth wash because they used very little air when speaking.

The appropriate speaking distance varies from culture to culture. In China and Japan people stand far apart. You can approximate this distance by bowing to each other. In the United States people stand closer. You can approximate this distance by shaking hands. Tejanos tend to stand very close to each other when talking. Think about the abrazo when greeting someone and saying goodbye to someone.

IN CONCLUSION



Please share other examples where your language and culture are different from your language and culture.

Pay close attention to the language used by your students and how their language reflects their culture.

What many people refer to as dialects, regional differences, nonstandard language, minority language, etc., are examples of their attempts to marginalize the language and culture of others. The language that the child brings to school reflects the culture of his/her family and community and needs to be acknowledged and valued.

Two of my teachers in New Mexico told us that we spoke a language different from the rest of the world and that we were going to learn how other people spoke Spanish. That way we could adjust how we spoke to match the language of those in front of us. We could show our respect.

Show your respect to your students every day!

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