

1 Title: **Reaching across the cultural border**

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4 **Abstract**

5 This paper examines cross-cultural communication in the United States, focusing on the growing Hispanic
6 population's impact, particularly in agriculture. Through personal anecdotes and cultural analysis, it explores the
7 complexities of navigating linguistic and cultural differences. Key topics include the prevalence of Spanish
8 speakers, cultural awareness, and the distinction between ignorance and arrogance in cross-cultural contexts. The
9 study addresses terminology debates (Hispanic/Latino/Latinx) and the significance of cultural holidays. Central to
10 the discussion is the concept of "meeting in the middle" - encouraging mutual effort in language learning and
11 cultural appreciation. This approach is proposed as a means to foster respect and build stronger communities. The
12 paper aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by cultural diversity, offering practical
13 suggestions for bridging cultural divides in increasingly multicultural environments.

14 Keywords: culture, arrogance, ignorance, Spanish, Hispanic

15 **Prevalence of Spanish speakers in the United States**

16 The demographic landscape of the United States is undergoing significant changes, with the Hispanic
17 community playing a major role in population growth. From 2010 to 2022, Hispanics contributed to over half of the
18 nation's population increase. This shift is particularly noticeable in the agricultural sector, where nearly four out of
19 five workers are Spanish speakers. These demographic trends highlight an increasing need for effective cross-
20 cultural communication in American agriculture, including the field of veterinary medicine.

21 Katherine Dotterer brings a unique set of qualifications to address this need for cross-cultural
22 communication training. Her background combines hands-on agricultural experience as a former dairy farmer with

23 academic qualifications in Business Management and Secondary Education, specializing in Spanish. She also holds
24 certification in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

25 Dotterer's expertise in cross-cultural communication within agricultural contexts has been honed through
26 over 15 years of engagement with Spanish-speaking individuals in the industry. Her understanding is further
27 enriched by study abroad experiences in Panama, Mexico, and Cuba. Additionally, she has demonstrated her
28 proficiency by developing and teaching online Spanish courses specifically designed for professionals in agriculture,
29 showcasing her ability to bridge language gaps in specialized work environments.

30 Cultural awareness

31 Cultural awareness is the understanding of differences in attitudes and values between oneself and people
32 from diverse backgrounds. It encompasses language, behavior, food, art, music, and religion, among other aspects.
33 While often associated with foreign countries, cultural diversity exists within national borders as well. During the
34 presentation, I will demonstrate this through an informal polling exercise. I will ask the audience “what do you call a
35 carbonated beverage”, expecting a subset of the audience responding with “pop” and a subset responding with
36 “soda”. Similarly, I will ask the audience “what do you call the apparatus that runs over carpets to pick up dirt?”,
37 expecting a subset of the audience responding with “vacuum” and a subset responding with “sweeper”. This
38 diversity manifests in regional linguistic variations, as exemplified by differing terms for carbonated beverages
39 (“soda” vs. “pop”) or cleaning devices (“vacuum” vs. “sweeper”) across the United States. These variations highlight
40 the existence of subcultures shaped by geographical, familial, and environmental factors, even within a seemingly
41 homogeneous national culture. Recognizing these nuances is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication,
42 particularly in professional settings where diverse populations intersect.

43 Ignorance vs. Arrogance

44 While often conflated, ignorance and arrogance are distinct concepts with different implications for cultural
45 understanding. Ignorance is defined as a lack of knowledge or awareness, often unintentional and rectifiable through
46 education and exposure to new information¹, while arrogance is defined as an attitude of superiority or self-
47 importance, resistant to new ideas or perspectives.² Einstein's assertion that "the only thing more dangerous than

48 ignorance is arrogance" underscores the peril of closed-mindedness in intercultural contexts.³ Arrogance can
49 perpetuate misunderstandings and hinder effective communication, even in the face of new information. Ignorance
50 can be rectified more simply and generally requires a willingness to learn and an open mindset. Overcoming
51 arrogance, however, necessitates a more fundamental shift in attitude, involving self-reflection and humility.

52 Ignorance is common in most people, and I experienced it myself as I immersed myself in learning about
53 the swine and poultry industries in the US to build Spanish curriculum for non-native English speakers in these
54 industries. Aware of my inexperience with these industries, I openly shared my lack of knowledge when reaching
55 out to people in these industries to learn more about the inter-workings of the industries but also about the Spanish
56 communication that is used daily within the industries. My open mindset and curiosity allowed clear communication
57 and learning and ultimately improved the effectiveness of the curriculum I developed. To genuinely improve inter-
58 cultural communication, the principle of "normalizing changing your opinion when presented with new information"
59 is crucial. This approach fosters continuous learning, adaptability, and respect for diverse perspectives, essential
60 qualities in navigating cross-cultural interactions.

61 Don't be an arrogant jerk

62 Common phrases encountered by the author in the agricultural industry demonstrate cultural insensitivity or
63 arrogance. These expressions, while often unintentionally offensive, can create barriers to effective cross-cultural
64 communication and cooperation. Examples of problematic statements include: "We have Mexicans", "The Spanish
65 come here to cash their checks", "They should speak American/English", "They speak Mexican". By characterizing
66 all non-native employees as Mexicans, one incorrectly homogenizes diverse Latin American nationalities and
67 implies ownership, reminiscent of indentured servitude. Similarly, by characterizing a population as "Spanish", one
68 misuses "Spanish" as a catch-all term for Spanish-speakers, disregarding diverse nationalities. By stating non-native
69 English speakers should "speak American" one conflates nationality with language, ignoring the multicultural nature
70 of American society and by incorrectly identifying "Mexican" as a language, one incorrectly identifies Mexicanas a
71 separate language based on nationality. These examples highlight the need for increased cultural awareness and
72 sensitivity in agricultural settings. By critically examining such phrases, we can promote more thoughtful, respectful
73 communication and foster an inclusive work environment.

74 Now that one's curiosity is piqued and one has a genuine interest to acknowledge their ignorance and a
75 willingness to learn, I will present pertinent facts about Spanish-speaking countries and appropriate identifying
76 terminology.

77 Spanish-speaking countries

78 During the presentation, I will ask the audience the number of countries they think have Spanish identified
79 as an official language. Typical responses range from 10 to 100 countries, indicating the lack of knowledge
80 surrounding Spanish-speaking countries in the general US population. Many audience members are surprised to
81 learn there are 21 countries where Spanish is an official language.⁴ This diversity underscores the importance of
82 recognizing the distinct cultural identities within the Spanish-speaking world, particularly in agricultural settings
83 where workers may come from various nations. To highlight this fact, I revisit my experience developing Spanish
84 curriculum for the swine and poultry industries, of which I was not familiar prior to developing this curriculum.
85 Throughout my research and informal learning experiences, I identified six different translations for "piglet", and
86 the various words were not only country-specific, but were sub-country specific, originating from specific regions
87 within a country.

88 Terminology to identify non-native English speakers

89 Understanding the diversity of the Spanish-speaking countries of the world can aid in understanding how to
90 select the appropriate terminology to identify non-native English speakers. The use of appropriate terminology is
91 crucial for respectful and accurate communication. Generally, there are three terms that can be used identify non-
92 native English speakers:

- 93 1. Hispanic: Refers to individuals from Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain, emphasizing linguistic
94 connection. This term does not include Brazil, as the country is part of the South America and speaks
95 Portuguese.
- 96 2. Latino/Latina: Refers to individuals from Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil but not Spain.
97 Traditionally, "Latino" was used as a masculine or gender-neutral term, while "Latina" was specifically
98 feminine, reflecting the gendered nature of Romance languages.

99 3. Latinx: A gender-neutral alternative that has emerged to be more inclusive, avoiding the binary implications
100 of Latino/Latina. Its usage aims to encompass all gender identities within Latin American communities.⁵

101 Selection of the appropriate terminology begs the question, “how might one know how to correctly identify a non-
102 native English speaker if their country of origin is unknown”? The first step for effective communication may be to
103 ask the person their country of origin in order to correctly identify them. The awareness of these nuances and a
104 willingness to question and learn promotes more inclusive and respectful communication in diverse agricultural
105 environments.

106 Cultural significance of holidays

107 Holidays play a crucial role in Latino culture, offering insights into values, traditions, and historical
108 perspectives. Understanding and respecting these celebrations can significantly enhance cross-cultural relationships
109 in diverse agricultural settings. Key examples of holidays with major cultural significance include:

- 110 1. Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos): A Mexican tradition honoring deceased loved ones on November 1st
111 and 2nd, emphasizing the cultural value placed on family connections that transcend death. This holiday is
112 often misinterpreted in the U.S. as “Mexican Halloween”, when it can be interpreted as a celebration of
113 grieving. The comparison of a solemn holiday to the American celebration of Halloween can display
114 cultural insensitivity.
- 115 2. Cinco de Mayo (May 5th): Often misunderstood in the U.S. as Mexican Independence Day, this holiday
116 actually commemorates the Mexican army's victory over France at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. It is only
117 celebrated in the tiny town of Puebla in the state of Puebla in Mexico and nowhere else in Latin America,
118 despite its commercialization as a national holiday in the U.S.
- 119 3. Pascua (Easter): While similar to Easter celebrations in other Christian traditions, Pascua in Latino cultures
120 often incorporates unique customs and rituals that reflect the blending of indigenous and Catholic traditions.

121 When we demonstrate willingness to recognize differences and respect the significance of these holidays to
122 non-native English speakers, we demonstrate cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, improve employer-employee
123 relationships, enhance understanding of diverse perspectives within the workforce, and foster a more inclusive and

124 respectful work environment. Employers and colleagues who acknowledge these cultural celebrations show respect
125 for their Latino workers' heritage, leading to improved workplace dynamics and cultural integration. Showing
126 curiosity about others' traditions creates new windows for conversation. Discovering commonalities cross-culturally
127 demonstrates a willingness to correct ignorance and learn more about another culture.

128 Learning Spanish, teaching English: a journey in cultural understanding

129 In our increasingly diverse society, understanding and bridging cultural differences is paramount,
130 particularly given the growing Hispanic population in the United States. As a white American fluent in Spanish, I've
131 experienced unexpected reactions when speaking the language in predominantly Hispanic settings, highlighting the
132 prevalence of appearance-based assumptions. This personal experience informs my approach to teaching English as
133 a Second Language (ESL), where I emphasize the importance of mutual effort in language learning. While many
134 Hispanic immigrants are eager to learn English, it is equally crucial for English speakers to make efforts to learn and
135 appreciate Spanish. This reciprocal approach fosters respect and understanding, even without achieving full fluency.
136 By meeting in the middle linguistically, we can effectively bridge cultural divides, creating a more inclusive and
137 harmonious society that values diverse perspectives and experiences.

138 Language learning

139 Transforming established practices requires a shift in attitudes, perspectives, and interpersonal dynamics
140 through active engagement in language learning. Even rudimentary language skills can markedly enhance
141 communication and convey respect. This initiative often inspires Spanish speakers to reciprocate by learning
142 English, while also encouraging confidence in using simplified language or a blend of Spanish and English. The
143 mutual respect that develops from these efforts strengthens professional relationships and overall communication
144 efficacy.

145 Feedback from participants in my "Spanish for Agriculture" courses suggests that professional relationships
146 between native and non-native English speakers improve when there's an effort to learn Spanish for better
147 communication. Students have recounted various instances where small language efforts made significant impacts.
148 For example, a Spanish-speaking employee was elated when his English-speaking employer used Spanish numbers

149 to sort cows. In another case, a veteran milk tester, who was a native English speaker, gained considerable respect
150 during a single shift by using basic Spanish words with Spanish-speaking staff.

151 The recurring theme in this feedback is that even minimal efforts to bridge communication gaps can yield
152 substantial positive outcomes. This underscores the importance of challenging entrenched attitudes and highlights
153 the benefits of adopting a growth mindset in cross-cultural communication.

154 Conclusion

155 The growing Hispanic population in the United States, especially in agriculture, calls for enhanced cultural
156 understanding. This paper has explored terminology nuances, cultural holidays, and the critical difference between
157 ignorance and arrogance in cross-cultural interactions. Personal experiences of language barriers highlight broader
158 communication challenges. However, these challenges present opportunities for growth. By promoting cultural
159 awareness and advocating for mutual language learning, we can foster reciprocal respect and understanding. This
160 "meeting in the middle" approach facilitates better communication and builds community bridges. Reaching across
161 cultural borders requires effort and empathy, but each step taken in appreciating each other's languages and cultures
162 brings us closer to a truly integrated society. The journey towards cultural understanding is ongoing, but essential for
163 creating a harmonious multicultural community.

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