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#### ABSTRACT

A study conducted in a predominantly black university investigated the ways in which African American students of Spanish described Hispanics, and changes in these perceptions across Spanish language instructional levels. Subjects were 26 students in Spanish 101, 25 in Spanish 102, and 26 in Spanish 201. Measures used were a semantic differential technique (Osgood, Suci, Tannenbaum, 1957) for ethnic descriptions and a Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925). Results indicate that Spanish 101 students characterized Hispanics as poor, impulsive, excitable, good, sociable, dishonest, proud, aggressive, and clean. Spanish 102 students saw them as good, excitable, graceful, happy, kind, proud, generous, sociable, strong, and humorous. Spanish 201 students perceived Hispanics as good, strong, sociable, poor, excitable, clean, proud, and graceful. Early learners appear to deduce the concept "Hispanic" from stereotypes; later learners armed with knowledge and experience attribute fewer stereotypical characteristics. Semantic differential results suggest that increased language study and/or cultural exposure does not increase positive concepts of Hispanics. Possible explanations for these apparently contradictory results are offered, and areas for further research are outlined. Data tabulations are appended. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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## CULTURAL DESCRIPTORS OF HISPANICS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF SPANISH

by

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11 August 1997

Hampton University Modern Foreign Languages Hampton, Virginia

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# Cultural Descriptors of Hispanics by African American University Students of Spanish

Spanish instructors have long assumed that foreign language students would eventually interact with members of the target lan-Researchers in applied linguistics have therefore endeavored to explain how individuals come to acquire a foreign language and how students might interact with members of another The shift from knowledge about language to the notion of culture. communicative competence has been orchestrated by researchers such as Asher (1986), Higgs (1984), James (1985), Krashen (1982), Omaggio (1986), Savignon (1983) and Terrell (1986). Conversely, studies have been conducted investigating the relationship between attitude and motivation of second language achievement (Gardner, 1990; Gardner, Smythe and Brunet, 1977; Giles and Byrne, 1982; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). Virtually all studies to date have been conducted using mostly white secondary and university students with minority opinions subsumed in the sample (e.g. Clavijo, 1984; Cooke, 1970; Hall and Ramirez, 1993; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Mantle-Bromley and Miller, 1991; Nocon, 1991, 1995; Robinson, 1988). Hall and Ramirez (1993) report a study in which three suburban high schools participated. All subjects (N = 180) were white middle-class Americans with little or no Hispanic contact. The most frequently used descriptors of Hispanics were: dark, fast-talking, interesting, poor, goodlooking, intelligent, weird dressers and drugs. One interesting



conclusion derived from this study is that subjects identified with the dominant group in power and status, and that Hispanics represent a minority group with less power and status. Mantle-Bromley (1995) provides another example of the tendency to subsume minority samples. This investigation was conducted in a large suburban school district outside Kansas City, Kansas (N = 114) with middle school students of Spanish. The treatment group participated in culture related lessons and attitude change designs. Experimental group means were significantly greater on the test batteries (Attitude and Motivation, and Beliefs about Language Learning). Minority population in the school district was reported as just over 7%.

It is clear that the scarcity of research in applied linguistics using African Americans comes from problems of definition. The term "minority student" imposes a uniform reality on clearly heterogeneous groups. In most cases, research centers on individual minority group reaction to culture, socioeconomic status, values, linguistic characteristics, literacy and testing. At any rate, research using African American students and their reactions to another minority group whose language is the number one modern foreign language studied is defensible and appropriate now. It is also incumbent upon historically Black colleges and universities which represent more than 230,000 students to investigate and to clarify African American and Hispanic American relationships (U.S. News and World Report, 1996, 62).



The present study will concern the application of the semantic differential technique (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957) to the assessment of African American university students' reactions to Hispanic Americans and to Spanish. This investigation will also employ a Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925) to determine the extend of social distance, actual and desired, between African American university students and Hispanics. By determining the relationship of these two large minority groups, it may be possible to clarify attitudinal reactions and propensities and to ascribe characteristics to Hispanics. Also, this study offers a contrast to majority population studies in applied linguistics.

Last of all, this investigation will explore the concept of attitude change from Spanish 101 (Elementary Spanish I), Spanish 102 (Elementary Spanish II) and Spanish 201 (Intermediate Spanish I).

# African American and Hispanic Ethnic Styles A Brief Review of the Literature

Numerous studies have established a clear pattern of ways in which African and Hispanic Americans process information from their environments. African American studies have produced investigations by Adams (1996), Jackson (1996) and Young (1996) in which extraordinary individuals in art, science, literature, business, education, politics and women's studies have been listed. Topics in African culture and its historical significance, and the vision of the past, present and future have been chronicled. Specific to



African American psychology, Hilliard (1976) suggests that they tend to view things in their entirety rather in isolation, and prefer to attend to people rather than nonsocial stimuli and rely upon nonverbal as well as verbal communication. Shade (1982) adds that many African Americans approach their environment with caution in order to avoid becoming victims. Suspicion and apprehension may pervade the community in its relation to majority views and institutions. In addition, African American kinship network s appear to maintain this apprehension by diverting attention away from Euro-American discrimination. The multigenerational network provides support and inspires collective responsibility.

Hispanic culture exhibits many of the same characteristic coping styles as African Americans, yet differs significantly in others. The Hispanic experience was not one of slavery, but one of conquest. The transition from Mexican rule in the Southwest to English-speaking majorities subjugated the Mexican population. Europeans assumed possession of the Southwest with no intention of adopting the established Spanish and Mexican cultures. The separation of the ethnic groups and language differences produced two groups without equality. The Spanish language, an obvious facet of cultural maintenance, became a symbol of Hispanic reality and a barrier to complete Anglo penetration. The Hispanic community in the Southwest, and by analogy Cuban and Puerto Rican societies, became a refuge from feelings of Anglo hostility. The Hispanic enclave gave its inhabitants a feeling of identification



and tradition, and exacerbated Anglo suspicion (García, 1996; Oster, 1990).

Hispanics exhibit certain fundamental traits that may or may not conflict with Anglo societies. Attitude toward change, family values, power and individuality shape Hispanic destiny. In Hispanic culture, family relationships supersede other relationships. To side with an outsider over one's parents is regarded as high disrespect. Multigenerational members often live under the same roof; family ties remain strong. Responsibility is often to the family first. All familiar values and perceptions are reinforced at home (Stavans, 1996). Campa (1991) adds that Hispanic individualism is a revolt against the incursion of collectivity, a measure of resistance to standardization in order to achieve individual freedom. Suarez-Richard (1983) reports that the outside world represents hostile forces and an incursion upon individualism, yet the family is always loyal. Hispanics always choose the familiar and cultivate close ties within the multigenerational family and with close friends.

No discussion of Hispanic and African Americans excludes the role of the Church. Religious fervor and the belief that the will of God prevails upon all human beings remain widespread among both groups. African American Protestants and Hispanic Catholics believe in the influence of divine will and the power of Christ and God. Hispanics, however, may believe in the intervention of saints, the Virgin Mary and the power of the crucifix. Supernatural visions, miracles and spiritualism may permeate many sects.

African and Hispanic Americans often report personal communication



with the Divine to ask for cures and favors. Religion becomes a formal system of moral principles to make life bearable in a hostile world. In addition, there is a belief system that marries Africa and Catholicism. Caribbean Hispanics continue to maintain cults based upon the supernatural powers of African deities and Catholic saints.

Last of all, African and Hispanic Americans inherited an activist politics and Church. Militant priests and activist Protestant ministers share with the activist politician the desire for equality and economic progress. Both minority groups accept the fact that the Church and the politician must struggle with the parish and the majority population to uproot discrimination and economic exploitation, and to aid those who live in misery. Both Protestants and Catholics condemn the use of violence, yet many priests and some ministers have been assassinated because of their activism.

This brief survey of literature seems to contain many unresolved problems specific to this investigation:

- 1. What types of ethnic descriptors and perceptions of Hispanics are evident in African Americans?
- 2. Does Spanish study reduce bias and stereotyping of Hispanics?



#### Procedures

### Sampling Procedures

The sample consisted of Spanish students in three randomly selected classes at three levels (Spanish 101, 102 and 201) in a university with 90% African American enrollment. All classes in this investigation had 100% African American enrollment. instructors were informed by mail and by a visit from the investigator. Instructors and subjects were informed that any information or data collected would be strictly confidential. Data would be coded and subjects' names or other identifying information would not be used. Access to data would be limited to persons directly involved in conducting this investigation. would be no penalties for not participating in this study and no course grades would be affected. The subjects (N = 77) were represented by 26 students in Spanish 101 (Elementary Spanish I), 25 subjects in Spanish 102 (Elementary Spanish II), and 26 students in Spanish 201 (Intermediate Spanish I). The semantic differential and the Social Distance Scale were administered during regular class periods.

# Data-gathering Instruments

One set of research data consisted of student scores on the semantic differential, a set of bipolar adjectives separated by a seven-step scale. The 20 bipolar adjectives (positive and negative) followed the concept invented by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) and used to measure connative meanings of concepts. Adjective pairs were randomly reversed in polarity to control the response set.



Coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated by SPSS reliability procedure using a preliminary sample (N = 84). Testretest reliability range was .84 and the SPSS reliability procedure resulted in a .78 coefficient alpha.

Scores on the semantic differential were tested for polarity or extremity of attitudes using a two-tailed  $\underline{t}$ -test:

with N - 1 degrees of freedom. Ethnic descriptions by subjects assumed deviation from the neutral mean ( $\mu$  = 4). The absolute value or the number <u>a</u> and <u>-a</u> on a number line which lies the same distance from the neutral mean, but on opposite sides of it, was used to rank items or ethnic descriptors. Coefficient alpha was .79 for semantic differential data (N = 77).

A second set of data consisted of student scores on a Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925) in order to arrive at an index of social distance between African and Hispanic Americans. The score was calculated by counting categories from which African Americans exclude members from various Hispanic groups. Maximum social distance was zero and minimum social distance was seven, indicating total inclusion. The problem of response sets or the tendency to respond in socially desirable ways was minimized by including non-Hispanic groups in the scale. Coefficient alpha was .83 for the Social Distance Scale (N = 60).



### Statistical Treatment

The purpose of the present investigation was to rank the extremity of judgments of the concept "Hispanic" by African American university students and to gauge social distance between both ethnic groups. The semantic differential produced means, standard deviations and t- distributions in order to rank the bipolar adjectives. The Social Distance Scale produced mean scores. The semantic differential and the Social Distance Scale served as dependent variables; therefore, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the null hypothesis that the groups of means or vectors were the same for the independent variable. Following routine univariate and correlational information, the substantive information of the MANOVA followed. The Wilks Lambda Criterion for equal mean vectors tested the null hypotheses. Values near zero would be deemed significant.

#### Results

The following results summarize the collected data and the statistical treatment. Spanish 101 subjects reported that Hispanics tended to be poor, impulsive, excitable, good, sociable, dishonest, proud, aggressive and clean. Spanish 102 perceived Hispanics as good, excitable, graceful, happy, kind, proud, generous, sociable, strong and humorous. The Spanish 201 sample classified Hispanics as good, strong, sociable, poor, excitable, kind, clean, proud and graceful. Tables 1-3 summarize extremity of judgments for all 20 scales by means of the <u>t</u>-distribution.



The analysis of variance using three group means as independent variables indicated no significant effect,  $\underline{F}$  (2,57) = 0.45, p < .05. On the other hand, univariate  $\underline{F}$ -tests on the Social Distance Scale using means 4.55 for Spanish 101, 5.45 for Spanish 102 and 6.25 for Spanish revealed a significant effect,  $\underline{F}$  (2, 57) = 17.31,  $\underline{p} < .05$ . The Duncan Range Test, a multiple comparison procedure, indicated that population means for all groups were different ( $\underline{p} < .05$ ). The data appear to indicate decreasing social distance among African American university students of Spanish who enroll in additional language study.

The Wilks Lambda Criterion for equal mean vectors exhibited no significant effect. Wilks Lambda (4,112) was 0.608510 with  $\underline{F}$ -ratio testing Wilks Lambda at 7.89. The  $\underline{F}$  approximation to Wilks Lambda Criterion was exact in this investigation.

#### Discussion

George A. Kelly (1963) postulates that a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he/she anticipates events. In short, we look at our world, culture and other cultures through personal constructs which we create and then attempt to fit our reality. Obviously these patterns are not fixed; they constantly change subject to many personal explorations and discoveries. Kelly reiterates that a person's thinking is not completely fluid, it is channelized. Following channels that a person lays out and recombining old channels, individuals create new ones. Kelly suggests that these channels rotate the axes of our thinking and often limit access to other cultures and/or ideas.



Kelly contends that "anticipating events" means that patterns or constructs of personal interpretations help to anticipate and to predict another's behavior, and make sense out of the world. It is just from those series of false anticipations and preditions that stereotypes emerge.

Curiously, African American students in the first two semester courses perceive the "Hispanic" as impulsive, excitable and happy. Third semester subjects prefer the following concepts: good, strong and sociable. Early learners appear to exhibit the same reactions to Hispanics as white learners of Spanish. Early learners appear to deduce the concept "Hispanic" from stereotype; later learners armed with knowlege and experience attribute fewer stereotypes. The semantic differential data from this investigation indicates no significant difference among groups. Specifically, there appears to be a negation of the notion that increased language study and/or exposure to another culture increases positive concepts toward Hispanics. However, the F-test on the Social Distance Scale reveals a significant effect; all groups are different and display decreasing social distance with increasing semesters of exposure to language study.

Possible explanations for these contradictory results may be because of the construction of African American experiences and cross-cultural awareness. First, there are events from African American casual contact with Hispanics which may impede positive concepts. Mass media bombard African American consumers with tales of drug trafficking, illegal aliens and mayhem in Hispanic



communities. Second, construction of experience relates to self-awareness and personal constructs (Kelly, 1963). It is axiomatic that African Americans cannot define foreign cultures without an awareness of African American dynamics of culture. The task at hand is to construct apparent and observable interpretations of one's culture. Next, there must be a constant series of events in the environment in which African and Hispanic American differences and similarities are analyzed. In a non-threatening atmosphere, organized relationships must be built. A well organized program of experiences may teach students to make inferences about themselves and Hispanic Americans. At any rate, our two largest minorities have a role in the American landscape. Cross-cultural understanding must be a continuous process among African and Hispanic American communities.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This investigation outlines a framework for understanding and researching ethnic descriptions of Hispanics by African American students. Furthermore, using insights gained from this study, several initiatives might facilitate more positive descriptions through a process of thinking about one's ethnicity, Hispanic ethnicity and culture in general. Through reflective practice and explications of African and Hispanic coherent systems, African American students might begin to achieve positive exchange and negotiation with Hispanics. These negotiations are an imperative in the twenty-first century.



Further recommendations for research include:

- 1. Further research using multivariate techniques to measure differences between African American male and female subjects on ethnocentrism scales.
- 2. Additional research on ethnic descriptors of African Americans by Hispanics.
- 3. Additional research in the field of cultural anthropology and the differences and similarities between African and Hispanic Americans.
- 4. Research in nonverbal communication or kinesics to help African and Hispanic Americans interpret facial expressions, gestures and nonspeech sounds.
- 5. Additional replications and cross validation of cross-cultural research with reliable, unbiased differences.



Table I Spanish 101 Semantic Differential Data

Adjectives	Means	Stnd Dev.	Tests	Ranking
Unsociable/				
Sociable	5.0	0.89	t=5.88	6 5
Good/Bad	3.35	0.56	t=-5.91	
Cruel/Kind	4.0	0.63	t=0	20
Happy/Sad <sup>*</sup>	3.58	0.76	t=-2.8	12
Altruistic/				
Egotistic	4.04	0.53	t=0.4	19
Beautiful/				
Ugly	3.88	0.95	t=-0.63	15
Clean/Dirty	4.31	0.55	t = 2.82	11
Awkward/				
Graceful	5.31	1.12	t=5.95	4
Foolish/Wise	4.31	0.97	t=1.63	13
Strong/Weak	3.88	0.99	t=-0.63	15
Poor/Rich	2.35	0.98	t = -8.68	1
Serious/Humorous	4.81	1.02	t=4.05	9
Generous/Stingy	4.04	0.34	t=0.57	17
Proud/Humble	3.43	0.58	t = -5.27	8 3
Excitable/Calm	2.88	0.86	t=-6.59	3
Conservative/				
Impulsive	5.50	0.99	t=7.89	2 7
Honest/Dishonest	5.11	0.95	t=5.84	
Usual/Unusual	4.15	1.08	t=0.71	14
Boring/				
Interesting	3.92	0.74	t=-0.57	17.
Aggressive/				
Defensive	3.61	0.57	t=-3.54	10

Grand Mean = 4.073



Table II Spanish 102 Semantic Differential Data

Adjectives	Means	Stnd Dev	Tests	Ranking
Unsociable/ Sociable	5.52	1.19	t=5.88	8
Good/Bad	2.88	0.44	t=-12.44	
Cruel/Kind	4.28	0.68	t=7.35	1 5 4
Happy/Sad	3.04	0.67	t = -7.38	4
Altruistic/	3.04	0.07	0 , 1 3 0	·
Egotistic	3.76	0.88	t=-1.33	17
Beautiful/				
Ugly	3.88	0.52	t=-1.15	18
Clean/Dirty	3.48	1.04	t=-2.48	15
Awkward/				
Graceful	5.68	1.03	t=8.00	3
Foolish/Wise	3.88	0.66	t = -0.91	20
Strong/Weak	2.84	1.03	t=-5.52	9
Poor/Rich	2.92	1.22	t=-4.50	12
Serious/Humorous	4.52	0.51	t=5.20	10
Generous/Stingy	3.28	0.61	t = -5.90	7
Proud/Humble	2.80	0.87	t=-6.90	6 2
Excitable/Calm	2.84	0.69	t = -8, 28	2
Conservative/		,		
Impulsive	4.40	0.50	t=4.00	13
Honest/Dishonest	4.24	1.16	t=1.04	19
Usual/Unusual	3.68	0.94	t=-1.68	16
Boring/Interesting Agressive/	4.80	1.12	t=3.64	14
Defensive	4.12	0.44	t=4.89	11

Grand Mean = 3.842



Table III Spanish 201 Semantic Differential Data

Adjectives	Means	Stnd Dev	Tests	Ranking
Unsociable/				
Sociable	5.85	1.05	t=9.25	3
Good/Bad	2.65	0.63	t=-11.25	1
Cruel/Kind	5.15	0.88	t=6.76	1 6 7
Happy/Sad	2.73	1.04	t=-6.35	7
Altruistic/				
Egotistic	3.54	0.51	t = -4.60	12
Beautiful/Ugly	3.65	0.48	t = -3.89	14
Clean/Dirty	2.85	0.97	t=-6.05	8
Awkward/				
Graceful	5.81	1.13	t = 5.00	11
Foolish/Wise	4.92	1.05	t=4.60	12
Strong/Weak	2/31	0.93	t=-9.39	2
Poor/Weak	2.42	1.10	t=-7.52	4
Serious/Humorous	3.81	0.57	t=-1.73	18
Generous/Stingy	3.65	0.56	t=-3.18	15
Proud/Humble	3.04	0.82	t=-6.00	9 5
Excitable/Calm	2.92	0.84	t=-6.75	5
Conservative/				
Impulsive	4.04	0.44	t=0.44	20
Honest/Dishonest	4.23	1.07	t=1.09	19
Usual/Unusual	3.65	0.93	t=-1.94	17
Boring/Interesting Aggressive/	4.96	0.82	t=6.00	9
Defensive	4.35	0.69	t=2.69	16

Grand Mean = 3.8265



# Revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale

Put an  $\underline{X}$  in the block after each statement with which you agree. Remember to give your first feelings or reactions in every case.

as a visitor to my country	as a citizen of my country	as a member of my church	as a classmate in my school	as a neighbor on my street	as a member of "my" crowd	into kinship by marriage
						;
	as a visitor to my	as a visitor to my as a citizen of my	as a visitor to my as a citizen of my as a member of my c	as a visitor to my co as a citizen of my co as a member of my chu as a classmate in my	las a visitor to my co las a citizen of my co as a member of my chu as a classmate in my as a neighbor on my s	las a visitor to my co las a citizen of my co as a member of my chu as a neighbor on my s as a member of "my" c



#### Consent Letter

Date:

TO: PARTICIPANTS IN THE ETHNIC ATTITUDES STUDY

FROM: Dr. Carl L. Garrott
Associate Professor

Modern Foreign Languages

We are requesting your help with an investigation in which you will indicate on a scale your judgents of Hispanics by looking at adjective pairs. This scale or semantic differential permits investigators to build a concept "Hispanic" as seen by African Americans. Normal research protocol will be observed.

- 1. Information or data collected will be strictly confidential.
- 2. Access to the data will be limited to persons directly involved in the investigation.
- 3. No penalties for not participating in the study.
- 4. No course grades will be affected.



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