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ON DOING RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA:
An Exercise in Intercultural Communication

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we are concerned with how the difficulties intrinsic to intercultural communication compound the problems of doing research in another culture, and the ways in which research in another culture exacerbate the difficulties intrinsic to intercultural communication. The primary experiences we draw upon are from the three research projects we have completed in Costa Rica.

The paper is divided into four parts, each dealing with a different type of research problem. The first is concerned with the research bias one brings to one's research in another culture; that is, the expectations one has of how research should be carried out in terms of time, subjects, procedures, and colleagues. The second is that of research facilities. What does one expect in the way of computers, communication systems, and physical facilities? The third centers around language problems, both from a translation and a usage point of view. The fourth deals with cultural values and how these confound the expectations one has of one's ability to do research in another culture. Suggestions are given for researcher behavior in each of the four areas.

ON DOING RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA:

An Exercise in Intercultural Communication

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Jean M. Tanner

Kerlinger [1] defines Scientific Research as a "systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena." He goes on to say that "When we say that scientific research is systematic and controlled, we mean, in effect that scientific investigation is so ordered that investigators can have critical confidence in research outcomes." To obtain this order behavioral scientists have developed what one might call a "formal" language of research, e.g., hypothesis, operationalization, significance, etc. As with all learning part of one's research education is the acquisition of the language of research.

When one looks at the behavioral science research process, regardless of what type one chooses, one quickly sees that a key to good research is the precision of the communication taking place during this process. The communicative precision of the research language permeates all facets of this process from the wording of the research question to the creation of the instruments, through data collection, analysis, and the reporting of results. Precise communication may mean the difference between Kerlinger's "critical confidence" and a reader's "critical disdain."

Although the bulk of our everyday communication is not scrutinized as closely as that taking place in the research process, we realize that precise communication is a key to being understood in any communication event. The fact that most of our communication takes place with persons of like cultural background allows us to relax the rigor with which we communicate verbally.

Thus, when faced with the situation of communicating with persons from a background other than our own, cultural differences become sharply apparent. As with ordinary everyday communication so with the communication taking place within the research act. A common cultural heritage diminishes many of our problems in both informal and formal communication since people will know what we mean regardless of what we say--we hope.

Beltran [2] has shown that there is more than language to be understood. He criticizes diffusion research for its blindness to social structure.

"If a researcher, in attempting to study the social behavior of ants, denied the influence on them of their environment, he would be seriously criticized by his colleagues for his obvious blindness--the gross artificiality of his optics. Yet when a researcher studies the communication behavior of humans with an almost total disregard for the determinant influence of the organizational factors of their society, few of his colleagues condemn him. Is this way of conducting research realistic, logical, and scientific?"

Of course the answer to his question is an emphatic "No!" for it should be obvious that one's acculturation, whether into a school of research, a particular society, or culture gives one a way of seeing things that becomes very difficult to transcend. Milton Rokeach [3] calls the cognitive structures we develop through our acculturation "attitudinal frames of reference" and indicates how basic they are to our everyday behavior. Daryl Bem [4] refers to them as "nonconscious ideologies" and shows how difficult it is to raise them to the conscious level. This "way of seeing" the world is evident not only in the way we communicate verbally but also in our cognitive style, the expectations we develop as to how one is to behave in given situations, and one's use of cultural artifacts, e.g., time, space and money. Rogers [5] points out that,

The assumptions about human behavior that a researcher may hold are so implicit that it is difficult to bring them to the surface when faced with a culture where human behavior changes may result from vastly different stimuli.

If one understands some of the difficulties intrinsic to intercultural communication on a personal level, one can appreciate the fact that these difficulties are compounded when one tries to carry out research in another culture. In this paper we shall speak to a number of these difficulties. Although we will use the research we have been doing for the past two summers in Costa Rica as the basis for this paper, we will be able to generalize most of the findings to Latin America in general through previous experiences in other countries or documented experiences of others.

THE BASIS FOR THIS REPORT:

There are essentially three research activities that constitute the basis for this paper. The first was a purely exploratory study of the communication needs of La Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED) of San Jose, Costa Rica. UNED is a nonconventional university patterned after the Open University of England, and its leaders expressed a desire to increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of its distance learning system. We spent two months during the summer of 1979 interviewing its employees and studying its educational system.[6]

The second research project was an impact study of UNED on the educational needs of Costa Rica. There were three facets to this study: 1) verifying that UNED was indeed developing the educational programs it had been established to do; 2) doing a statistical analysis of its students comparing them with those of the three conventional universities; 3) doing a behavioral and opinion survey of the effects UNED was having on the outlying regions of Costa Rica. For the first we needed only to read documents, for the second we needed to obtain the relevant statistics, and for the third we had to interview 250 opinion leaders from ten centers in the outlying regions of Costa Rica. To

accomplish facets two and three we consulted with several of Costa Rica's professional researchers and hired local Costa Ricans to do the interviewing and statistical searches.[7]

The third research project was a survey of the opinions about UNED of three populations: conventional university students, employers in the areas of UNED's academic programs, and UNED students. Since these opinions were to be compared with opinions obtained in the United States about a similar institution, this involved developing a cross-cultural survey instrument in Spanish and English, administering it to diverse groups of students, and doing a mail survey of Costa Rican employers. The mail survey was complicated by the involvement of a Costa Rican student in the planning and execution of the survey.[8]

To further set the stage for this report we should say that although Dr. Borden has been working at learning the Spanish language for the past year and a half, he is still far below the minimal level of adequate communicative skills in a Spanish-speaking culture. On the other hand, Ms. Tanner was chosen for the project because she has above average facility in the Spanish language and was just beginning her Master's program in International Public Relations when this project began. The opinion studies we will discuss here were part of her Master's Thesis research. Our backgrounds and preparation for this cross-cultural research experience are probably not too different from most researchers who become involved in such programs. We were both keenly aware of the intercultural problems that might arise and were well prepared to deal with them--we thought.

ANALYSIS:

Our analysis is divided into four sections, each dealing with a different type of research problem. The first is concerned with the research bias one brings to one's research in another culture, that is, the expectations one has of how research should be carried out in terms of time, subjects, procedures, and colleagues. The second is that of research facilities. What does one expect in the way of computers, communication systems, and physical facilities? The third centers around language problems, both from a translation and a usage point of view. The fourth deals with cultural values and how these confound the expectations one has of one's ability to do research in another culture. We must mention that our concern is not with research on intercultural communication but rather how the difficulties intrinsic to intercultural communication compound the problems of doing research in another culture, and the ways in which research in another culture exacerbate the difficulties intrinsic to intercultural communication.

Research Bias:

As part of our acculturation into a scientific research subculture we develop ways of doing things that soon become standard and essential to "good" research. When one tries to impose one's research biases upon another culture one finds problems in interpreting the results one obtains.[9] This is true primarily because of the cultural intangibles--why does the subject behave that way? Cole & Scribner [10] give a good account of the problems inherent in trying to use one culture's research tools in another culture. In our case, we thought our research designs were rather simple and easy to follow. As added insurance we worked closely with some, and consulted with several other, Costa

Rican researchers. This had both positive and negative results, but revealed a number of the intercultural communication difficulties we will discuss.

Time: In almost every culture in which one works one finds it difficult to adjust to their use of time. One's use of time is so thoroughly inculturated that even though one knows what the cultural differences are, one is still often frustrated by them. In Latin America the "Manana Syndrome" is really more pronounced than one can imagine. We thought we had become acculturated to this lack of punctuality, as we define it, during our first summer when we had no real deadlines. However, when we were still getting the response in August that we had gotten in June, i.e., "I will get you that information before you leave." we did become a bit concerned.

Of course punctuality is essential to most of our research methods where human subjects are concerned. This is particularly true in interviewing, but we carry it into all aspects of our research process. Few, if any, Latin American cultures have our need for punctuality. When we mentioned this to our research colleagues in Costa Rica, they agreed that we had a problem, but went on to say that the Venezuelans gave them the same problem. The senior author of this paper has consulted on two educational research projects in Brazil. He received his payment for the first project two years after its completion and is still waiting for the payment for the second one which was completed in 1976. Occasionally he gets a letter from the principal investigator assuring him that he will get his money.

Subjects: We found an eagerness on the part of the Costa Ricans to become involved in our studies. They are quite open and willing to communicate about practically anything. However, as we shall detail later, one must be very careful as to how one elicits information, for they are much more adept at

telling you what you want to hear than our U.S. subjects. If you are used to doing your research with high school or college students you must be prepared for a much older population than in the U.S. Many more of these students are female and/or are from upper income levels. The economic necessities in a developing country demand that most students work, and thus, one finds a large number of part-time or night-time students in both high schools and universities.

The fact that the immediate is much more important than what is waiting causes one to feel that there is little commitment or responsibility to a project on the part of the Latin Americans. This is not true, from their perspective, but it does cause concern on the part of North Americans. Appointments are made and broken very easily. Their love for dialogue also makes it difficult to administer inventories or opinion scales as they find it difficult not to equivocate. Their need for feedback makes it difficult to do follow-up studies that are not biased by the results of the first study, e.g., we had many subjects refuse to fill out questionnaires because they had not seen the results of the previous ones.

Procedures: As you will see, none of the categories we are using in this paper are mutually exclusive. As indicated above, longitudinal studies may suffer from the need to release information. All studies may suffer from the difficulties of timing. However, there are other procedural problems as well. We found it almost impossible to use the summated rating method of scale construction. The reasons for this will be discussed later, but the point here is that one must be extremely careful in setting up one's research procedures. We were advised to consult with in-country researchers to obtain their expert opinions. This works, to a point, but must also be used sparingly for two reasons: 1) they may attempt to change your research design under the guise

that your way of doing things is impossible (to be read "we have never done anything like this before."), and 2) they may want to become involved in your research to the point that you lose control and/or important variables are confounded.

Our in-country consultant said that it would be impossible to do the 250 interviews we needed from opinion leaders in the outlying regions of Costa Rica for a whole host of reasons ranging from lack of qualified interviewers, to lack of transportation, to unavailability of subjects. After considerable negotiation he conceded to let us try it and even let us use his professional interviewers. Another phase of the study involved a statistical comparison of the students attending the four universities. Our consultants said there would be no problem in obtaining these data as they had just completed several surveys of the students in two universities and the same material was available for all universities. When we began this phase of the study we found that most of the data were not available to us, and that those that were were inconsistent in terms of the years in which they were obtained and the base lines around which they were structured, e.g., age groupings, civil status categories, and income level groupings. We ended up hiring a Costa Rican economics student who knew his way around the bureaucracy and was able to get the statistics we needed.

Colleagues: We have already touched on some of the problems of using colleagues from the culture in which you are doing your research. Although their assumptions that you are extremely naive about doing research in their culture may be true; the corollary to this that you need to be guided in all aspects of your research is usually not true. Their willingness to help often puts obstacles in the way of your finishing your research. For example, in the mail survey of employers, one of our consultants wanted a student of his to help us, ostensibly to get the experience, but also because he did not think we knew

the culture well enough to do what was required. It was a very kind gesture on his part and since he had been generous with his time we agreed to this arrangement. The addition of one person to the project, and the continual need to coordinate her schedule with ours made it impossible to finish the project before we left Costa Rica.

There are probably two overwhelming research biases that we North Americans bring to our research efforts in Latin America. One is that we can structure a research project as we would in the U.S. and plan on it being implemented within our limits of acceptability in terms of the timing of research events and the types of behaviors we ask our subjects to perform--their understanding of the research instruments and the need for individual responses is generally not the same as in the U.S. The other is the interpersonal trust we have in our fellow team members. It is easy to develop ill feelings about the research sophistication of our Latin American colleagues (in terms of objectivity and rigor). However, much more of this stems from the difficulties of intercultural communication than it does from incompetence.

Research Facilities

We in the U.S. have grown quite accustomed to research facilities which include a fully stocked library within a reasonable traveling distance or acquisition time, some kind of computer facilities, perhaps keypunching help, research assistance, and typing. Sometimes there are even research funds to draw upon for the unexpected expenses encountered in the course of doing our research. The use of computer readable data forms, well equipped laboratories with audio and video recorders, one-way mirrors, and on-line computer systems to monitor, stimulate and record human actions make the type of research we have grown used to doing far beyond the research of most Latin American cultures.

Computers: Merritt & Rokkan [11] write that in cross-national research "the development of the electronic computer has brought about a revolution in comparative research." In a very limited sense this is true. However, in Latin America the computer revolution is still waiting to happen where research is concerned. The expertise and money required to operate such a facility for the purposes of behavioral research have not yet arrived in most of these countries. Costa Rica, one of the most stable, literate and forward looking countries in Latin America, is just now coming to grips with the computer needs of its researchers in the governmental, industrial and educational areas.

Perhaps an example will illustrate the problem. The Costa Rican's are very keen on collecting data. They are insightful, creative and energetic when it comes to keeping records, inquiring into reasons for things being as they are, or developing new directions in educational or industrial growth. Today they have storehouses full of raw data, records that have been kept for years but have never been put into a form in which they can be analyzed. This is not for want of a computer. There are many of them there and IBM has a fully equipped international office in San Jose. The bottleneck seems to be the means of getting this information into computer-readable form.

Three years ago the University of Costa Rica purchased an optical scanner for their computer system. It worked for a month; but, since maintenance is often neglected and there are few electronic specialists, when it needed to be repaired there was no one to do it. They were told that if they would send it to Miami it would be fixed and returned (all at U.C.R. expense). They shipped it to Miami and told them to keep it. The director of their computer center flew to the University of Iowa with 30,000 student data sheets to have them read onto magnetic tape. At present the only optical readers are in Guatemala City, Guatemala, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Barbados. So, although the data are there

and the computers are there, the means of getting them together are not. Computers are being used almost exclusively as accounting machines and even this is just beginning to gain acceptability.

Communication Systems: It has long been recognized that communication facilities in Latin America are inefficient by U.S. standards.[12] This certainly does not make the task of the researcher any easier, but prior knowledge of this fact may help to eliminate some frustrations. What turned out to be an amusing incident will illustrate one communication problem.

When we sent our interviewers out we asked them to call in upon arrival and at the end of each day. On the morning of the third day we received a phone call from a female interviewer C, who was not in her assigned destination, but in another one of the prescribed communities. There was a great deal of static on the line and only one thing could be understood: C and the woman who had been assigned to that community, L, were leaving because L was afraid. Then the line went dead. After several attempts we were able to hold a complete conversation with the interviewer and found out that C went with L to L's destination because L had never interviewed by herself before and was afraid to do so (even though we had been told by our Costa Rican consultant that these were all professional interviewers!). C and L were both leaving for C's destination, and they would have all the interviews completed in the allotted time.

The communication problems do not stop with the electronic systems. One should also learn not to rely too heavily on the postal systems in Latin America. In a study conducted in Atioquia, Colombia, it took 30 to 40 days for surveys to reach a destination only 60 kilometers away.[13] In Costa Rica the mail services are somewhat better but most important mail is still sent by

messenger. Of course, this is also hazardous in most countries because of the poor roads, climatic conditions, and the ever present manana syndrome.

Other differences in the communication systems of Latin America and the U.S. illustrate the difficulties a researcher may have in doing some kinds of research in Latin America. If the researcher is likely to be doing some in-country traveling, one should keep in mind that in some countries streets may not have names and houses and other buildings may not have numbers. As we shall see from the following example the seemingly simple task of asking for directions turns into an intercultural communication problem when one is not familiar with the system.

In the cities of Costa Rica streets have names but most buildings and houses do not have numbers. One day during our first summer in Costa Rica it was necessary to get from one university building to another, which was approximately five blocks away. Upon asking a friend how to do so he looked puzzled. "I don't know how to tell you," he said. "You have to know the neighborhood." As the summer passed this became increasingly evident. Names of streets are never used; directions are given by blocks or meters with some landmark as a referent. Thus, it is common to see a business card:

IRT
500 Meters So. Coca Cola
200 Meters West.

To further complicate matters, sometimes landmarks are used that no longer exist. For example, one might say, "Turn right at the old church," but the church in reference may have been replaced by a bank 20 years ago. Indeed one must know the neighborhood. It would not be surprising that such a system arose due to the culture's strong emphasis on the personalization of all interpersonal interactions.[14] Maps and road signs have little value in a society where the

only way to find out how to arrive at your destination is to communicate with the inhabitants.

Physical Facilities: A brief sojourn in most any Latin American country will make one realize how spoiled we have become with the research facilities we have in the U.S. Our libraries, laboratories and data banks are generally unequaled in Latin America. It may be true, however, that they give one access to more subject pools than we have in the U.S. Two notes of caution should be made about these subject pools. One is that although they are there and freely offered, they may be inaccessible because of one or more of the intercultural communication difficulties mentioned elsewhere in this paper.

The other note of caution is that one must be very concerned about the ethics one is employing in one's use of human subjects. If your research is funded by the U.S. government certain precautions are mandated. If it is funded by some other agency, or by yourself, these precautions may be unspecified. In either case the temptation may be there to use these subjects in a way that could harm them psychologically or biologically, since these precautions are generally not made explicit by the Latin Americans. However, the results of such research behavior can only be detrimental to the researcher and to the U.S. image abroad. Both of these are major concerns of intercultural communication. Hamnett [15] raises a number of other ethical concerns but we will not go into them here.

Language Problems:

In conducting our research several difficulties were encountered which fall under the broad rubric of "language problems." These include such problems as how language is commonly used and interpreted, connotative meanings of words, and difficulties involved in translations. It can also be extended to embrace the area of cognitive style; how one thinks and one's ability to abstract. In this section we will discuss these problems, relating them to the broader context of intercultural communication.

Language per se: In the field of linguistics, one often hears the ongoing debate between proponents of the "weak" and "strong" Whorfian hypotheses [16]. Essentially, the "weak" theory posits that language is perceived and experienced differently in different cultures, societies, etc., while the "strong" theory contends that language itself helps to shape the cognitive structure of individuals in that culture. If one accepts either of these two hypotheses as being true then one would agree that a researcher's language can affect his/her perception of cross-cultural research problems. Thus, research questions may take shape according to the rules of the language by which the researcher has been taught to express himself/herself, although they may be totally irrelevant in another culture.

As stated earlier one of the research projects we had in Costa Rica was a part of the study of the attitudes of employers and students toward the Open University as a form of higher education in Costa Rica and the United States. A close look at some of these terms reveals some cross-cultural discrepancies. For example, "higher education" in Costa Rica does not only refer to university degrees. Technical education, and in some cases, even secondary schooling may

be perceived as "higher education." Thus, it had to be made explicitly clear that we were referring only to university education.

In pursuing one of the above research projects, the method of summated ratings was used to construct and validate the research instrument. In using summated ratings a large number of attitude statements (120-150) are generated about the research topic. Subjects are then asked to rate the statements according to whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. It should be noted that whether the subject agrees or disagrees with the statement is of no significance at this stage. The ratings of the statements are then "summed" to determine which statements subjects generally agree are positive, negative, or neutral [17]. Those statements with the highest agreement are selected for the final survey instrument with the provision that half of the statements are positive and half are negative.

As the final survey was to be administered to both English-speaking North Americans and Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans, the instrument had to be valid in both cultures. We felt that the summated rating method of scale construction would be most appropriate because of its facility in detecting the subjective meanings of words. As we shall see however the method has both advantages and disadvantages.

In the English version, statements containing the word "average" were rated as being neutral statements. In the Spanish version, however, statements with the word "promedio," a Spanish equivalent of average, were rated as being negative. When the researchers discussed this finding with several educated Costa Ricans they said that "promedio" carried a negative connotation because, "if you or something you do is average, that is bad." They suggested replacing the term "promedio" with the term "normal" but even when this was done, the

statements were still given more negative ratings than those in the English version.

Problems encountered in translating can be illustrated by the following situation: In working with several Costa Ricans on the translation of the statement, "The Open University tutors have average professional qualifications," it was learned that the word "qualifications" could not be directly translated. For the Costa Ricans "qualifications" bring to mind concrete references such as the grades the tutor received while he/she was being educated. Naturally, the respondents would not have access to such information and therefore would be unable to pass judgement on such a statement were it to appear on the final survey.

One further note about translations--most of the translating we did was checked by a professor of Spanish at the University of Delaware before we went to Costa Rica. He happens to be Cuban with an exceptionally strong background in the many Spanish speaking cultures in Latin America. However, before using any of our translations in Costa Rica we had them checked by some of our bilingual Costa Rican colleagues. In almost every case, they changed some important part of the translation. Further, we found that our Chilean, Bolivian, Argentinian, and Colombian friends would all make different changes. The point being made is that although most Latin Americans speak Spanish. no two cultures speak the same Spanish. Research instruments must be validated for each culture.

Cognitive Style: One of the most frequently heard phrases in Costa Rica is "Por ejemplo" (for example). Their need for a referent when they are talking about anything makes it very difficult to use abstract concepts in your research instruments. This difficulty was exemplified in our attempt to use the summated

rating method to create the cross-cultural research instrument. The reader may recall that in responding to the original items the subject is asked to rate the statements as to whether they are positive, negative or neutral. In administering this exercise to a group of university students we discovered that the Costa Ricans were generally unable to carry out these instructions. A native Costa Rican (who was also bilingual) explained the procedure, but it was obvious after his explanation that the respondents were still confused. In an effort to make the procedure more concrete he continued with an example:

Suppose that you just picked up the newspaper and saw this statement as the headline: AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY THE STUDENT RECEIVES A GOOD EDUCATION. Would you think that this headline was saying something good, something bad, or something neutral about the Open University?

Even after repeated explanations, the results clearly demonstrated that the Costa Ricans were unable to make the abstraction of rating the statements themselves; instead they responded according to their own experience and therefore their own feelings about the Open University. For example the following statement is clearly a positive one, whether in Spanish or English:

"The Open University uses quality learning materials."

However, students gave this a negative rating. They were responding as though they were disagreeing with the statement, not giving it a positive or negative rating. In order to use the method of summated rating in this culture, we finally administered the Spanish version of the scale to Costa Ricans who were very well educated and most of whom were bilingual in Spanish and English. However, even some of them found this to be a very difficult task.

The tendency of a culture to view reality in abstract or concrete terms has been discussed by many communication scholars. As Condon and Yousef [18] point out, a student in the United States has some idea about things he cannot see,

i.e., germs. A woman in Africa knows all too well about sickness but doubts there are germs because she cannot see them. Thus, as in the case of the Costa Rican students, "reality" emanates only from direct experience.

Cultural Values

In the preceding sections several kinds of problems associated with communication have been discussed. These problems are closely intertwined with those emanating from differences in cultural values, for cultural values certainly affect behavior and/or communication. Much has been written on this aspect of intercultural communication, so we will only mention four value orientations and indicate how they may effect one's research in a Latin American culture.

The Manana Syndrome: The Latin American concept of time in contrast to that of the North Americans has been discussed by many communication scholars. Hall and Whyte [19] warn that the North American businessman should not bring his culture's time expectations with him on a trip to Mexico for, "a 45 minute wait is not unusual--no more unusual than a five-minute wait would be in the United States." We experienced many situations similar to this one during our two summers in Costa Rica. It was expected that people would be "late" by North American standards, and in fact, we got to the place where it was no longer surprising nor offensive when they did not make their appointments at all.

Gillin [20] attempted to interpret the "manana syndrome" within the context of the modern Latin American culture. He characterized some of the basic goals of the culture as being the:

. . . realization of the potentialities of the individual soul:
 personal adaption to and/or manipulation of an established
 hierarchical structure; and satisfying contact with something beyond
 this life of mundane existence.

He goes on to say that for such a culture pragmatic and technological approaches (i.e., the North American concept of time) do not offer much appeal. This difference in one's concept of time plays a major role in the intercultural communication difficulties one experiences while doing research in Latin America (as we have indicated previously).

Words vs. Actions: In conducting our research we also observed that the Latin Americans place a great deal of emphasis on words rather than actions. This characteristic was so striking that we began to question whether or not the Costa Ricans were in fact able to distinguish between doing something and talking about doing something. On one occasion we had been promised that letters containing the details of one of our research projects would be delivered to local project administrators within two days. Two weeks later the messenger was still "talking about" delivering them but he had not even begun to do so.

Another example of this phenomena is mentioned by Stewart [21]. While working overseas an American was speaking with a Bolivian who contended that Bolivia had one of the most advanced systems of social welfare in the world. He referred to his country's constitution as proof. The American objected, pointing out that in practice, the individual does not receive these benefits. To the Bolivian it was the authorization that was important, while to the North American it was the actual benefits the individual received.

We had a similar experience in Costa Rica. In trying to find out if a student of UNED would receive as good an education as a student of the University of Costa Rica, we asked if the universities had an external accreditation system by which the educational experiences had been compared. The Costa Ricans were shocked that we could ask for such a thing, for since both

universities had been established by the Costa Rican legislature they were automatically equal by law. To question their equality was to question the sanctity of the Costa Rican government. Gillin [22] also recognizes this characteristic of the Latin American culture. He attributes the use of words and creative interpretation to the Latin American's search for something beyond everyday reality.

Avoidance of Negative Expressions: In many cultures the act of expressing negative information is considered inappropriate. Nowhere is this more true than in Japan where the utterance of the word "no" is taboo in most situations. Although not as dramatic as the Japanese situation, it seemed to us that the Costa Ricans are also quite reluctant to convey negative information. For our one project the rationale behind using summated rating scale was that with an equal number of positive and negative statements on the final instrument response bias was more likely to be avoided. After having gone through the very time-consuming process of constructing this survey instrument one of the Costa Ricans we had been working with casually mentioned that the instrument was inappropriate because respondents might not be able to react to negative statements. He went on to say that, in fact, Costa Ricans were not accustomed to completing questionnaires in the first place.

Note that there are two important points here: 1) the Costa Ricans were unable to respond to a survey instrument containing negative statements, and 2) the individual was hesitant to convey this negative information and waited until the last minute to do so. Fortunately for our study the first point appears not to be the case, at least for university students and their employers.

Sex Roles and Intercultural Research: After two summers of conducting research in Costa Rica, it became apparent that it was nearly impossible for a North American woman to function effectively in her role as a professional researcher in Costa Rica. Strong sexual inequality, manifested by the concept of "machismo," precludes a woman from being taken seriously and accepted as a researcher in her own right. Both of us consider ourselves to be "interculturally aware" and certainly did not expect to change or criticize the cultural values of a people. Many authors have rightly criticized researchers for attempting to do so. However, when the values of a particular culture are manifested in such a way that they act to change and endanger the self-concept of a foreigner, the reverse side of the issue must be considered.

The longer we were in Costa Rica the more it became apparent that Ms. Tanner had no identity of her own. Although she was the spokesperson for us and spent much of her time conducting her own research, she was never taken seriously nor introduced when we were both involved in a communication event. Many refused to recognize her as the director of her own research project, but instead directed all of their questions and remarks about it to Dr. Borden. If one couples this with the overt sexual harassment displayed by the young Costa Rican males toward foreign women, one begins to realize a terribly difficult intercultural communication problem.

We discussed this problem with many educated Costa Ricans and other responsible officials in the Costa Rican culture. Many of them were quick to point out that this condition was much worse in other Latin American countries, than in Costa Rica, as though this excused them for their behavior. However, Dr. Guido Del Prado, director of the Peace Corps in Costa Rica had more to say about the woman's place in Latin American culture than that. He related the problems they were having in getting Costa Rican women to go out and get a job

after they had been trained in a skill. A male is always hired over a female and most of the women were so insecure and unassertive it was as though they had no self-concept at all. Many of them could not even see themselves as persons. They only existed for and through the male of the species. Needless to say, the Peace Corps' consciousness raising groups had very mixed acceptance and success.

A woman's ability to function in a supervisory role in a Latin American culture must be given serious consideration by any organization attempting to conduct business or research there. The Open University in England had to replace their female liaison to La Universidad Nacional Abierta in Venezuela with a male because she was unable to function effectively in that culture. Our experience indicates that sexual harassment of females may be a major intercultural communication difficulty for researchers in Latin America.

CONCLUSIONS

We have looked at some of the cultural differences that exist between researchers from the U.S. and the Latin American cultures in which they may be doing their research. The intercultural communication difficulties these cultural differences may trigger off were presented under four broad headings: researcher bias, research facilities, language problems, and cultural values. Each of the four areas may present problems for the researcher that will make his or her research efforts unproductive. In this section we will make some suggestions about how one might overcome these problems.

In the area of researcher bias one must be prepared to alter the design and/or execution of a research project right up until the last data are collected. Scientific rigor may have to be traded for available data with appropriate limitations placed on the conclusions and generalizability of the results. Field studies conducted by educated locals may have the greatest

chance for success, but even here one must deal with their generally relaxed attitudes toward research. Two key concepts for the North American researcher to remember are, "Hang Loose" and "Be Creative."

As for the research facilities one must be prepared to make do. If you expect the least and are prepared to do everything by hand, then you may have some pleasant surprises. However, even if you expect to beat the lack of research facilities by bringing everything with you from the U.S., you must be prepared for the inability and/or reluctance of local help to use these facilities. A case in point: we wanted our interviewers to tape record their interviews. None of them had ever done this and refused to risk it on this project. If we had insisted it would have led to an intercultural communication difficulty.

It seems obvious from what has been said in this paper that one needs to do a great deal of thinking and planning before attempting to create a cross-cultural research instrument. Chu [23] advocates the use of behavioral items rather than attitude scales. He says that attitudes are abstract concepts which natives might not be able to understand. Also, individuals might experience difficulties in trying to verbalize attitudes, because even if they have them, they might not be very well formed or they may not want to admit to them. The idea of constructing a research instrument so that it is well suited to the abilities of its respondents is, of course, a basic premise of research. However, in conducting comparative cross-cultural studies it is easier said than done. Constructing an instrument with an appropriate level of sophistication is indeed a difficult task.

The Costa Ricans' inability to abstract on the one hand, and their love for idealism and the spoken word on the other seem to uncover some cognitive inconsistencies. More precisely, if the Latin Americans cannot abstract and do, in fact, think in terms of their experiences, why do they speak of things they have never experienced, as in the case of the Bolivians' welfare system and the equality of Universities in Costa Rica? This seems to be quite a paradox; perhaps more research is needed in the area of the cognitive structure of the Latin American mind.

When the researcher is faced with a different conception of time, all one can do is be prepared and work with what one has, although other precautions might be added. One of these is to set very open deadlines. Another is to continuously check to see that anyone you are working with is in fact doing their job. By U. S. standards this might seem over cautious, but it is perhaps the only way a researcher has of at least knowing at what point there is a delay.

The tendency of the Costa Ricans and others to avoid transmitting negative information is sometimes a hindrance to the researcher. Their assistance in translation and the pragmatic aspects of research is invaluable, yet their reluctance to tell the researcher when something is wrong can be trying. Perhaps as greater rapport is established between the researcher and the local professionals this characteristic will tend to diminish.

Finally, in dealing with sex role differences we have two suggestions: If you are female and you go to Latin America to conduct research, go with a male and be prepared to fade into the background. If you don't want to do either of these, stay home!

Footnotes

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