

Maggie Peña

Professor Jillian Azevedo

UWP 001

4 December 2016

Mexican Discourse Community

Communication is like a metal chain that locks the doors to a mysterious room. Each metal chain is made up of small oval-shaped links that are intertwined; those links are similar to the conversations that people have with one another. When groups of people continuously have conversations with one another, the links become stronger; and when a new conversation arises, a new link is added to the chain. Eventually, massive amounts of links are connected to form a long and unique strand. Each metal strand is like a distinct discourse community; there are different types of shaped links, lengths, sizes and colors. Similar to the links within a chain, the Mexican community has their own way of connecting with one another. Whether it is their unique terminology, their mannerism, their automatic mental reflexes, or their physical expressions. The Mexican discourse community is a whole chain with its own distinct qualities and objectives.

Like all groups of people, the Mexican community has their own set of terms and phrases that can only be comprehended by the people within this group. The terminology used within the Mexican community is a piece of knowledge that is essential in order to properly converse and understand what is being transmitted. From observations, it is extremely rare to hear people from this community talk in proper and standard Spanish. This has no correlation to the commonly held belief that the Mexican population is uneducated. Improper terms are taught from childhood because it is the everyday language used to interact with everyday people.

For example, common slang terms used by elders to greet a person younger than them are either *m'hijo* or *m'hija*. Which, exactly translated, is “son” or “daughter”. These two words are signs of endearment, usually towards a child or young adult. They are equivalent to the English words “hun”, “dear” or “babe”. If unaware of the meaning of these phrases, it can become confusing to think that a complete stranger is referring to someone as their offspring. Another common remark is the phrase *la bola*, which translates to “the ball” in Spanish. Depending on the context in which this phrase is used, it can mean two distinct things. The first, and the most obvious, is “ball”, which is typically used when speaking to a child. However, as a slang term, it is best known to mean “a group of friends”. Similar to an actual ball, *la bola*, is a close group of friends that are always bunched up (together), much like a toy ball. A third and most commonly known slang word is *aguas*, which literally means “waters” in Spanish. Yet, within the Mexican community, it is best known to mean “be careful” or “watch out”. People are most likely to use this word or encounter it when using any form of public transportation. Although its literal translation has nothing to do with its cultural meaning, it is a saying that is frequently used by the Mexican population to either create links or make them stronger (Peña).

Growing up in any Mexican household, the first things taught to a child (besides how to speak) are mannerisms. Manners are what people in the community judge each other off of. It is like the metal chain that was previously mentioned. Poor manners are like creating weak links- no one wants them. The better manners one has, the more people are going to want to be around them, the stronger the metal connections. Mannerism is a nonverbal way of letting people know what type of person(s) they are interacting with.

For instance, when meeting someone new for the very first time, it is considered to have proper manners if one greets them with a firm handshake and a warm smile. This lets the other

person know that they are happy to have met and are looking forward to a conversation. On the other hand, a loose handshake and weary smile is seen as rude and as an automatic rejection to any possible future conversations (*Meade*). Another form of politeness takes place at the dinner table, restaurant, or where ever a meal may be taking place. For example, dinnertime within the Mexican community is seen as family bonding time. It is courteous to wait for each member of the family to sit down at the table before anyone can start eating. Similar to family dinners, when eating meals with a friend at a restaurant, it is proper manners to wait until every person at the table has had their food delivered to them, before eating. This is a way of letting other people know that they are being respected and are willing to wait for them. A final act of mannerism and perhaps one of the most important is when attending a party or a gathering at a friend's house. Whether someone is being invited to a friend's house for five minutes or five hours, it is well mannered to bring a food. The most common foods to bring are desserts, drinks, appetizers, or a side. This lets the host know that they are not alone in providing for the entire party and creates trust within the group of friends (Peña).

In addition to well known manners, there are certain people, words, laws, brands and songs that everyone automatically knows without giving it much thought. For example, if someone says Queen Bee, without any hesitation, people know they are referring to the queen of pop, Beyoncé. Or if the middle finger is held up, most people will know that it is an offensive gesture within the United States. Similar to this, the Mexican community has many political terms that are also known by a majority of the population, regardless of educational backgrounds. One of the most popular political terms known to the Mexican community is the *DACA* policy passed in 2012 by President Obama (Raices). By stating "DACA" any information dealing with the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival* policy will automatically come into the

minds of the Mexican people. The *DACA* policy is an executive action passed in June of 2012 that states that any undocumented immigrant child brought to the United States before their sixteenth birthday and before June 2007 are eligible to receive a renewable two-year work permit (Immigration). In addition, these people would be exempted from deportation, regardless of documentation status. Due to the fact that many Mexican people residing in the U.S are undocumented, the *DACA* policy has become an action of safety; knowing that many parents no longer have to worry about their children being deported. *DACA* is widely known all throughout the Mexican community and has become a common conversational topic.

A year after *DACA* was passed, a bill requiring the Department of Motor Vehicles to distribute original drivers licenses to any California resident despite them being able to provide evidence of legal residency, was enforced. This bill was named *AB 60* and was passed in October of 2013 (La Cooperativa). Much like *DACA*, *AB 60* became a broadly known bill that was extremely well received by the Mexican community. *AB 60* gave millions of undocumented Latin immigrants the freedom to obtain a license and drive without the fear of being pulled over by an authority. Both the *DACA* policy and the *AB 60* bill developed into strong and immense links within the Mexican chain; evolving into natural terms that connects the Mexican discourse community.

Although verbal communication is extremely important within any discourse community, non-verbal transmission, such as physical expressions, also play a big role within conversations. The Mexican community is known to rely on physical expressions as signals, when engaged in a discussion (World). For the Mexican population, physical expressions are just as important, if not more, than words themselves. They are cues to all people involved in the conversation. These expressions allow people to determine whether they should keep the conversation going, whether

the other person is mad, whether they are trust worthy, etc. Over all, this lets people know what type of person they are dealing with.

For instance, compared to the American culture, Mexican people tend to stand much closer to each other when together, within appropriate distance of course. It is typical to have a little less than an arms length between two people speaking. Ivan Sanchez stated the following about the Mexican discourse community in an interview: “If two people are talking, and one of them backs away or stands further than expected, it is more than likely that the other person will see the others actions as impolite and pretentious” (Sanchez). Much like mannerisms, standing close to one another in the Mexican community is a sign of comfort and confidence. Akin to physical distance, eye contact also plays a vast role in communication. Despite what might seem aggressive in other cultures, strong eye contact whilst communicating in the Mexican population is common and seen as trustworthy. Strong eye contact lets others know the interest and appreciation one might have while discussing (World).

A last and frequent physical expression to the Mexican community is a unique hand and arm movement. If the left arm is bent upwards towards the chest and the right hand touches the bottom of the left arm’s elbow, it literally means “elbow” or *codo* in Spanish; which culturally translates into English as “cheapskate” or “greedy.” This movement is especially used to describe someone that is selfish without being disrespectful and saying it loud. This is one of the many physical expressions used to communicate with one another in the Mexican discourse community (Peña).

The Mexican community is made up of many people that communicate in their own distinct way. Phrases, manners, automatic reflexes, physical expressions, along with many more, are all tiny metal links that make up the colossal metal chain known as the Mexican community.

This culture, like all cultures, has their own unique ways of transmitting information to one another. Whether they communicate verbally or nonverbally, this is only one interpretation of how the world communicates and functions as a whole.

Word Count: 1672

Works Cited

“AB 60: Driver’s Licenses for Undocumented Workers.” *La Cooperativa*.

<http://www.lacooperativa.org/ab-60-drivers-licenses-undocumented-workers/>

14 November, 2016.

“DACA.” *Immigration Equality*.

<http://www.immigrationequality.org/get-legal-help/our-legal-resources/path-to-status-in-the-u-s/daca-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals/>

14 November, 2016.

Meade, Julie. “Everyday Customs & Etiquette in Mexico.” *Moon*. 4 January, 2014.

<http://moon.com/2014/01/everyday-customs-etiquette-in-mexico/>

4 January, 2014. 14 November, 2016.

“Mexican Communication Styles.” *World Business Culture*.

<http://www.worldbusinessculture.com/Mexican-Business-Communication-Style.html>

14 November, 2016.

Peña, Maggie. Personal Interview.

November, 2016

Sanchez, Ivan. Personal Interview.

11 November, 2016.

“The Basics of Executive Action: DACA.” *Raices*.

<https://www.raicestexas.org/pages/faq>

14 November, 2016.