

a Spanish perspective to this discussion.⁸

Hace pocos días tomé un taxi. Al subirme al mismo, dije, como es normal en todo caballero que se estime un poco, «buenos días». Pero el «driver», o conductor, no se inmutó ... Debe ser de los «ensimismados», pensé para mis adentros. Y como no decía nada, le rogué me llevara a Correos y Telégrafos. Tampoco hizo el menor comentario a esta sugerencia o ruego mío. Segura imperturbable. Como cada vez la sociedad, en una plausible iniciativa, busca una adecuada salida laboral para los disminuidos físicos, pensé si se trataría de un mudo que había logrado acceder a un puesto de conductor de taxi. Y juro que me quedé en la duda, pues, al llegar a destino, como vi en el taxímetro lo que valía la carrera, le di lo justo y bajé sin decir ni pío, para no violentarlo psíquicamente, si en verdad era un impedido del habla.

Authentic voices such as these, now available in astounding array via the Internet, not only allow us to hear another perspective, but to join in on the intercultural dialog through a multitude of chat sites (see, for example, Katz; Lee). Use of these voices in the classroom, however, must be accompanied by some caveats: 1) Discrete practices vary greatly across cultures, even within the same country, so that what may be true in Madrid may not hold in Barcelona or Sevilla, for example, or may even be unheard of in a Spanish *aldea*; 2) just as students saw the variation amongst themselves in their greeting habits, many voices are required to express a “norm;” one voice may reflect merely one person’s own interpretation or experience; 3) descriptions of norm, even out of the mouths of so-called “natives,” do not tell the full story, as some notions or practices may be considered so assumed within the cultural community that they do not even merit attention; and 4) to whom the voice is speaking will also color the information, as when educating other groups to the ways of our own group, we will tend to represent ourselves more homogeneously.

Es obvio que a la hora de contarle a “otro” cómo somos “nosotros” utilizamos una serie de referencias que nos definen homogeneizándonos, pero no utilizáramos estas mismas referencias para definirnos a nosotros mismos... cuando nos definimos como grupo frente a otro grupo no invocamos las diferencias que existen en el seno del “nosotros” y que generan la diversidad dentro de él, sino, por el contrario, invocamos las similitudes que nos aproximan.(García Castaño, et al. 3)

Firth likens describing a culture to describing the (incredibly complex) ‘grammar’ of a language in that both are in essence mental realities. However, more than a mental reality, culture is constituted by social action; more than a grammar, a language is the process through which membership in a discourse community is mediated (Kramsch) and grammar is simply a map of this language’s topography: “Like road signs, grammatical structures take on meaning only if they are situated in context in connected discourse” (Aldair Hauck & Cumo-Johansen 37). While textbook offerings provide a quite ample array of such “linguistic maps,” the cultural context of their use remains relatively uncharted. Yet, just as we cannot learn language from verb wheels and dictionaries, we cannot learn culture from capsules. In fact, contends Edward Hall, “there is no way to teach culture in the same way that language is taught” (48). We need, in Geertz’ words, “thick” descriptions (6).

Charting the Course: The Need for Depth Perception

Certainly one of the aims of the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning* was that of lending direction to the teaching of culture in our language classrooms in the belief that “whether the goal is Communication, Connections, Comparisons or Communities, Cultures are the recurring subtext” (Schwartz & Kavanaugh 99). The *Standards* are, in one sense, a type of map, in that they project the consensus of professional leadership regarding the perspectives and priorities of the FL teaching enterprise. However, like any map, the value of the *Standards* lies not in their existence, but in their interpretation and creative use. And, like any map, their “fiction” lies in literal translation and mechanical application.

The *Standards* define “communication” as “knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom” and, in their Executive Summary further state that students “cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs.” Yet, as García (this volume) illustrates, language does not simply “occur”—it is purposefully and imperfectly used by people in what is largely a hit-and-miss effort to strike the chords of shared meaning. And in this undertaking, agreement and consensus are not pre-existent but must be repeatedly renegotiated. Indeed, language cannot be “mastered” in any real sense as, even in our own language, even amongst those of our own culture, and even within our very families we often “can’t find the words;” we misspeak, misconstrue, misjudge actions, misread intentions and situations, mismatch discourse systems. Lest we interpret too literally the sense of the *Standards* then, the “contexts” of our language use—the how, when, why, what and to whom of it—are not identifiable ‘givens’ that can be inventoried, taught, and mimicked by our learners. As Geertz reminds us:

We are not, or at least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that. We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognized. If speaking *for* someone else seems to be a mysterious process... that may be because speaking *to* someone does not seem mysterious enough (13-14).

“Communication” is much more than language; it is much more than tone of delivery, body movement, or territorial behavior; and it is much more than “knowing.” Communication is about doing and, in doing, expanding one’s vision of the world and enlarging the universe of human discourse. Indeed, as Scollon & Scollon remind us, cultures do not talk to each other, individuals do. And as García illustrates (this volume), the assumptions that each individual brings to an encounter, even to a supposedly intracultural encounter, come not only from different readings of shared cultural experiences but from unique personal experiences as well; thus, each context itself is quite singular. As Foucault puts it, “...a statement is always an event that neither the language... nor the meaning can quite exhaust...like every event, it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation... it is linked not only to the situations that provoke it, and the consequences it gives rise to, but...to the statements that precede and follow it (27). With this in mind, we might look at the

how, when, why, what, and to whom of intercultural communication, not as a teachable set of contexts, but rather as the dimensions of an eternal process of way-finding. As we sail the Cs of the Standards, the big mistake that awaits a literal map-reading is that of viewing them as discrete plottings and in so doing, failing to see their depth, their vastness, their dynamic interdependence.

The “C” of Connections, for example, may be considered the mother of all five Cs. Far more than a “unit” on currency conversion that integrates math into language learning, interdisciplinary is what life is really all about—or was, before we “disciplined” it into study compartments. As everything we do in life is multidisciplinary, the FL classroom is, or should be, the place where real life is pondered and enacted. In fact, there is no way to explore a culture without “connecting” to what people do and how they communicate as they do it – in banks as they balance accounts or solicit loans; in jobs as they apply and interview, create and sell products and services, or predict the effect of weather conditions on the market of crops; in their homes as they plan healthy meals, make repairs, balance checkbooks, discuss the news, resolve conflicts; in their stores as they assess quality and negotiate purchases. Science, math, philosophy, psychology, ecology, history, economics—these are the things people talk about, participate in, every day of their lives throughout the world. Connecting to others in this world via the classroom means not simply practicing our own culture’s version of these things through another culture’s language, but seeing and hearing how others do them, why, when, how and with whom. Indeed, without connection, there is no communication. But “Connection” is not just interdisciplinary, it is also intradisciplinary—in our own classrooms it is connecting culture-learnings to expand and deepen the other-culture framework; it is connecting the grammar and vocabulary of the typical classroom menu to the discourses of shared meaning systems. And connection is both internal and external: We connect to other ways of perceiving and expressing the world by connecting to ourselves in heightened personal awareness.

Likewise, the meaning of “Community” is not captured merely “by getting out into it” through museum trips, native-speaker interviews, ethnographic projects and fieldwork data-collection—though these are enormously beneficial learning experiences. “Community” is not only a thing or a place; it is also a feeling of group; a sense of membership, an engagement in shared activity. In this regard, our classrooms, as learning communities, can present a powerful lesson. Through a process of open inquiry and collaboration, students build awareness not only of values and norms that join them in their own various communities of peers, but of the *range of variation* that exists within these communities as part of the dynamic nature of groups of individuals. The sharing of beliefs and points of view among classmates in regard to their own culture illustrates that no community is monolithic and that absolute consensus is not a requirement of membership. Outside the classroom, the Internet, via chat rooms and e-mail strings (Haas and Reardon; Katz; Lee) allows connection to other communities to form new cross-cultural “cyberlands” with unique discourse characteristics. Indeed, as Heusinkveld illustrates through song (this volume), one of the first culture lessons to be discovered is that of why and how people join in communities, how community is evoked and expressed, and how deeply felt is its need. As we will see in the sections that follow, deeply embedded in one’s culture and personal experience is a notion of what community is, what it means to its members, and how it is achieved. While communities are our ties to others, their sense is also,

cross-culturally, one of the greatest sources of our confusion, particularly in our quest to gain understanding of the Hispanic world.

Indeed, it is really only through communities of perspectives and values and belief systems that the C of “Comparisons” can be navigated at all. If we attempt to compare cultures at the level of discrete behaviors and observable customs, the only sense-making framework available to our learners will be that of their own culture, with the result that the other culture’s behaviors will simply defy sense. After all, how does one reconcile a behavior substantially deviant from the only known norm without judging it as “weird,” “wrong,” “unethical,” “uncultured,” “corrupt” “antiquated” –in short, “un-American?” But cultures don’t randomly select behaviors from a universal menu of options (let alone a U.S.-decreed menu); rather, we do what we do the way we learned to do it, the way it is logical to us to do it, the way we prefer to do it, and the way it fits our perspective of the world to do it. Our behaviors may reflect deep, unquestioned beliefs, or they may reflect our culture’s compromise solution in the conflict between powerful values, but they will always make sense to us, within our own system. The U.S. “custom” of eating breakfast or lunch in the car (not to mention that that lunch is some type of *comida chatarra*) will undoubtedly strike others as “wrong,” “uncultured,” “silly,” or even “barbaric,” but it makes perfect sense to us—it represents our solution; it fits the reality we have constructed. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, guiding students to construct another view of the world and a different sense of sense-making to see behaviors as (mostly subconscious) expressions of a different but eminently logical reality is what the notion of “context” is all about.

Rather than interpret the *Standards* as goals or destinations, perhaps we might see them as the texture of our instructional terrain. The *Standards* can indeed guide us to see the dimensions of the culture-teaching mission we embrace as language teachers, as an internal map to aid us in widening our own perspective as teachers. In this sense, then, rather than start with the question of ‘How can I get that Standard in?’ we might start with the voice of a community and ask ourselves what we can do to help learners really hear this voice and connect to both its global and local message. To approach culture study through the realness of its community of members as they communicate among themselves is to approach learning as rich, connected and deeply felt experiences.

Products and Practices: The Signposts of the Territory

While “Culture” is thus implicit in the Cs of Communication, Communities, Connection and Comparison of the *Standards*, it also stands as a separate component, defined through the meaningful interdependence of three concepts: perspectives, practices and products. Of these, “products” best matches what Trompenaars and colleague refer to as the explicit or symbolic culture, the “first layer of the onion”:

What is your first impression of Burundi culture once you enter the airport? It is not “what a nice set of values these people have,” or even “don’t they have an interesting shared system of meaning.” It is the concrete, observable things like language, food or dress. Culture

comes in layers, like an onion. To understand it you have to unpeel it layer by layer. On the outer layer are the products of the culture... These are expressions of deeper values and norms in a society that are not directly visible. (6)

Products are all that a culture conceives, creates or uses to mediate activity, and hence may be material (foods, transportation, fashion, technology, shrines, games, music, art, literature) or abstract (rules, laws, organizational structures). But, like the mother-product language, all products are codified; they arise from and are embedded in their culture's own distinctive "web of significance" (Geertz 5). Therefore, what we see on the surface will tell us little about its essence, its shared meaning within its own community of understanding. Products, in their constant social processes of construction, consumption and negotiation, serve to connect humans to each other within their culture's reality. Indeed, even though we may casually remark that a person is a "product" of his or her culture, we recognize that persons are not merely products of a culture, but also its constructive participants, "actively creating a world that is always in the process of creating them" (Gover & Conway). Foreign eyes on products, however, are quite apt to deceive in a number of ways, all attributable to a mismatch of some sort between the "other's" product and their own frame of reference: 1) misinterpreting the *unfamiliar* in what they see: "There is so much overcrowding here yet so much wasted space in these plazas" or "people are so poor, yet look at the gold on the walls of their churches;" 2) misinterpreting the *familiar* in what they see: "Mexicans can't get enough of our Wal-Marts—they're everywhere;" 3) misinterpreting what they *expect* to see but don't: "My host family must have been sort of poor—they didn't even have a car;" and 4) the most insidious trap of all: being *unable to see* what their own culture has not trained them to see.

Certainly our teaching cannot stop at the product layer of a culture without subjecting our learners to these perceptual traps and to the unfortunate judgments that will arise as they are forced to make sense using the only sense-making system they have. Moreover, learners must be sensitized to the observation/interpretation process itself, to become alert to the fact that they will—consciously or subconsciously—assign meaning to all that they witness or experience, and that "each opinion we voice regarding explicit culture usually says more about where we came from than about the community we are judging" (Trompenaars, et al. 21). In this regard, we can often learn a great deal about others through their impressions and interpretations of our own culture's products—a simple web search for the word *hamburguesa*, for example, in exposing how others see and attach meaning to this U.S. "delicacy," not only opens our eyes to ourselves but reveals much of the values and lifestyles of the outside observer.⁹

Food is, in fact, one of the most obvious and important of all cultural products, as it reaches into all aspects of human life. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss uses cooking as a metaphor for the way the 'raw' images of nature are 'cooked' in culture so that they may be used as part of a symbolic system. Weismantel figures food as the very core of our identity:

It is not only a physiological truism that we are what we eat; what we eat and how we eat it also defines us as social beings. To cook is to speak and to mean, as well as to make and to do. (6)

But if in our FL classes we leave the study of this valuable cultural product at the level of tasting and cooking demonstrations (or "food days," as Moore observes, this volume), we ignore its potential as an entrée into the complex web of significance in which it is embedded. Just at the level of product, "food" offers lessons in geography, economics, commerce, politics, religion, health and medicine, and so on; our foods reveal our culture's meanings of such notions as time, space, aging, gender, beauty, self-image, status, poverty and wealth, human relationships, individualness, nature; the aromas of certain foods evoke memories, images, faces, intense emotions; food is both social bond and ostracism, intimate words and political discourse. The foods we eat, in fact, say much about our norms of right and wrong and our values of good and bad, for what is "food" to us also raises the question of what is *not* food, what violates a culture's learned sensibilities or crosses the line of one's identity. The U.S. food industry, for example, invests huge sums in changing food images and disguising food origins, processing and packaging meat to make it look less like dead animals. Weismantel notes that foods may be highly charged symbols of ethnicity, citing among Ecuadorians the stigmatization of certain indigenous foods as "indian" and hence "unfit for consumption by non-indians" (9). So intimately tied to identity are the foods one eats that, as Mintz observes, "people who eat strikingly different foods or similar foods in strikingly different ways are thought to be strikingly different, perhaps even less than human" (3). Indeed, González points out (this volume) that U.S. students' own assumptions about food can often be a great source of cross-cultural conflict, not only in students' quest for a 'decent hamburger' overseas, but in terms of hosts' impressions of students' reaction toward table offerings. Yet, Moore (this volume) reveals that food may be a source of conflict in our FL classrooms as well—an increasingly delicate topic in a culture preoccupied with body image and in which fifty-five percent of the over-twenty population may be considered overweight or obese by "U.S. standards" (Schlosser).

How might we build both self- and other-awareness through analysis of what a culture consumes? The activity progression that follows was used with a class of Intermediate learners to begin examination of food as culture-product. Phase I was that of *self-awareness*—looking at our own patterns of consumption with an eye toward notions of taste, preference, health and lifestyle, to ultimately view the connectedness of products in practice within our own community of values. [All activities were conducted entirely in Spanish, with linguistic focus on 1) review of *gustar*, *encantar* and like verbs (*apetecer*, *volver loco*, *dar asco*, etc.) and 2) use of present subjunctive.]

Self awareness: *Dime qué comes y te diré quién eres.*

Step 1: *Las preferencias.* We began by brainstorming "favorite foods" as a class, with each student contributing at least two items to the chalkboard list [*a mí me gusta(n)/encanta(n)*]. Students were then called on to summarize class preferences [*Nos gusta(n) más... a dos les gusta(n)...*].

Step 2: *La pirámide.* To generate and expand vocabulary, students were shown the USDA food pyramid on transparency (available on www) and asked to brainstorm as many foods as they could in each category.

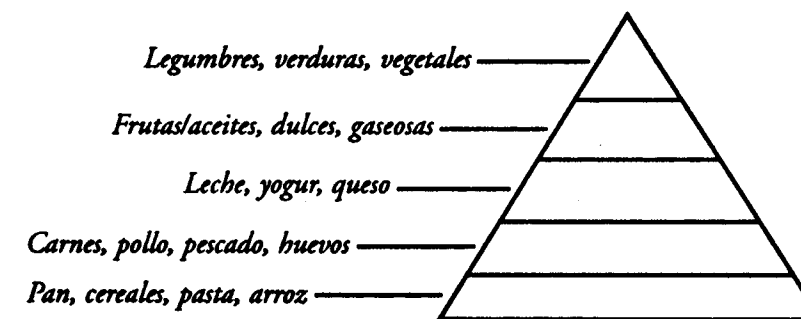
Step 3: El paladar. To explore the issue of ‘taste’ as very much a combination of cultural “programming” and individual experiences and preferences, students were asked to name (or describe through circumlocution) the “weirdest” food they had ever eaten and to explain the circumstances of its consumption a) what does it taste like (*Sabe a...*)/ smell like (*Huele a...*)/ look like, feel like, etc.? b) why did they eat it and how did trying it make them feel about themselves? c) would they recommend others try it and why (*[No] recomiendo que prueben... porque...*). Foods were recorded on transparency with whole class tallies of how many students had tried each. On a separate transparency, we then brainstormed foods students thought they would never try and on a grid checked the reason: 1) was the food unhealthy or dangerous, or 2) did it violate a law or a personal belief, or 3) did it evoke a stereotype, or 4) was it something that their culture does not associate with eating? Summary discussion focused on why we consider some foods “normal” and others “bastante raros”

Step 4: Los patrones. For homework, students listed (truthfully) the actual foods they’d consumed (meals and snacks) within the last 2 days, divided by day. For each dish or food item, they were to indicate how it was prepared (*frito, asado, en microondas*, etc.) and, whenever possible, list ingredients. They were told their assignments would be checked individually, but that they were not to put their names on the paper.

Step 5: Mil preguntas. Students used their food consumption inventories prepared as homework to find out what they had in common with other classmates: Working in pairs, they analyzed their inventories to come up with at least five good survey questions to interview classmates, using a closed-survey format. For example: In a typical week I... a) never; b) once; c) two or three times; d) four or more times. They were advised to keep their questions as global as possible, so as to generate cultural patterns rather than specific food-item inventories. Interviewers then rejoined their partners to compile their data and report back to class with survey responses expressed in percentages (e.g. *Un 50% dice que...*). As they reported, their survey questions were recorded on the board for subsequent use in whole class tallying. This procedure allowed students to create their own avenues of inquiry rather than be confined to an instructor-conceived list.

Step 6: Los perfiles. Students were then asked to circulate their (anonymous) food-consumption inventories (homework papers) by a continued-passing routine (one receives and passes to another who receives and passes to another until time is called) to ensure anonymity. With the USDA pyramid again posted on transparency, students were to create a pyramid-profile for the classmate whose inventory they received. As students reported back, we compiled the data for the class on transparency by tallying beside each pyramid section the number of student rankings. As they reported, students were also required to make healthier recommendations to their anonymous peers (*A esta persona le sugiero/aconsejo que... incluya /disminuya/ mejore/ tome más/ menos...*). [Since nutritionists relate food colors to balanced diet, this could also be done with colors: *Le aconsejo que tome más alimentos*

verdes y menos alimentos...] We then devised a “food pyramid” that reflected the eating habits of the entire class. The class profile looked something like Table 2, with descending levels indicating more frequent consumption.



Approaching the collection of data in this way, from the (anonymous) individual outward, allowed students to maintain their own sense of uniqueness without having their “particulars” brought to full class attention; at the same time, it allowed the class to experience the variation that exists even within their own group, as each individual indirectly contributed to the class composite. Their first observation of the group profile was that it did not correspond to that of the USDA recommendations, being a diet especially slim in the areas of fruits and vegetables and heavily dependent on a mixture of grains and animal products. And the question posed to them was *¿por qué?* To show how products are only the tip of a culture’s iceberg and that underneath the explicit product everything is connected and makes sense, students were asked to brainstorm clause contributions to a series of “*frases infinitas*” in which they could either expand on or explain a previous clause:

Comemos lo que comemos... porque no hay tiempo... y porque el horario es difícil... y porque no vivimos en casa ... y no hay tiempo porque algunos vivimos lejos y hay mucho tráfico... y hay mucho tráfico porque ...

Class discussion revealed how our eating patterns are squeezed into a culture of cars, suburbs, independent lifestyle and hurried schedules. Students noted that what they consume depends primarily on *time* available in one’s schedule, but also on other factors such as *distance* (traffic, being away from home), *cost* (“Cheap meals don’t often include fruits and vegetables;” “McDonald’s has salads—but they just call them salads”) and *convenience/portability* (“It’s easier to just pick up something and go somewhere to study—or watch TV”). All four factors combined to make fast food and quick foods (canned, packaged, frozen-microwaveable) the most popular options. Indeed, Schlosser estimates that in the year 2000 Americans spent more than 110 billion dollars on fast food; on any given day in the United States, about one-quarter of the adult population visits a fast-food restaurant; and every month, more than ninety percent of U.S. children eat at McDonald’s. Schlosser indicates that Americans now spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars; they spend more on fast food than on movies, books, maga-

zines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music combined. Indeed, Goldberg notes that the auto-only design of U.S. urban and suburban areas “locks even the most health-minded parent into a car culture that leans on fast-food meals and erases exercise from daily life” (3).

Students, for the most part, agreed that they did not think too much about what they ate (“I just eat what’s there”), with some adding that they went where the portions were the biggest for the lowest price—the main idea was to ‘fill up’ (“...*hasta que no pueda comer más*”). Most also conceded that they do not eat fixed meals at regular times (“I’m always hungry, but I don’t eat lunch; I eat a snack in class; ‘sometimes I eat at 5:00 pm and sometimes at 11:00 pm—it depends’). Some remarked that hunger was not always the prime motivation—they ate when they were ‘bored’ or ‘depressed.’ According to a 1997 study conducted by *Prevention* magazine, these practices seem to abound in the U.S., where fifty-four percent of consumers say they “clean their plates” even when full; thirty-eight percent dine even if they do not feel hungry; nineteen percent report that they eat until they are “stuffed”; and approximately one-third of Americans eat out of sheer boredom.”

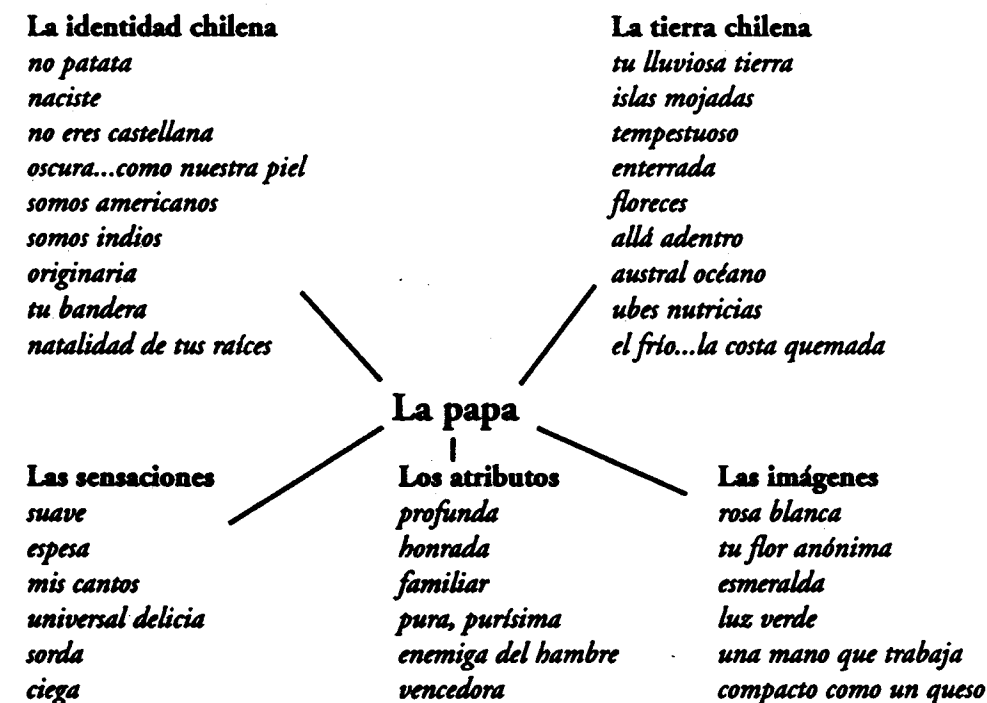
Having looked at the reasons behind our food products and at the web of practices and other products that seem to institutionalize them, we turned our attention to the results of our habits of consumption, using the same *frase infinita* technique, but this time with *por eso* instead of *porque*. In discussing the consequences of their tray-and-paper dining habits, students volunteered ‘that’s why we’re so fat in this country,’ ‘that’s why we spend so much on exercise machinery,’ ‘that’s why we’re always dieting,’ and so on. Questioned as to why this culture obsesses about diets and thinness while seeming to promote the opposite through fast-food chains on every corner, students offered a number of theories from ‘because you always want what you can’t have’ to ‘thin is good because it shows discipline’ to the rather intriguing ‘thin is good because it shows you’re too busy to eat.’ The role of food in U.S. culture is indeed a rather conflicted one. To conclude this self-awareness phase of their analysis, a two-pronged reflective essay question was posed—in part directed to the individual and in part directed to the institutionalized culture level: 1) How can you, personally, improve your diet? and 2) If you could change one aspect of your society or U.S. lifestyle that would be most beneficial to you in this regard, what would it be?

Exposing and exploring their own concept of food-as-product—how what we eat is intrinsically connected to the how and why of it—opened the door to the idea that other cultures may have different concepts of food-as-product. Students were shown two other nutritional pyramids: 1) *la pirámide latinoamericana* and 2) *la pirámide mediterránea*,¹¹ both of which have been acknowledged by nutritionists to be not only healthier than that of the USDA, but more authentic: While the USDA pyramid is theoretical and, as some analysts note, possibly compromised by the politics of dairy and meat industries, both the Latin American and Mediterranean pyramids represent actual traditional diets from their respective regions and proven cultural models for healthy eating. As a class, we brainstormed healthy menu-planning that would use the Mediterranean pyramid, yet meet the U.S.-student-culture criteria of “fast, accessible, cheap and portable.” Students observed that both menus limit consumption of meats to favor plant proteins, recommend lower intake of dairy products, and emphasize nuts, beans, legumes, fruits and vegetables as the bulk of the diet. There is

a preference for locally grown products (olive oil figures prominently in the Mediterranean pyramid for example), moderate wine consumption, and *daily preparation of meals in the home*—the latter, in contrast to U.S. fast-food preparation, according to Schlosser:

The current methods for preparing fast food are less likely to be found in cookbooks than in trade journals such as *Food Technologist* and *Food Engineering*. Aside from the salad greens and tomatoes, most fast food is delivered to the restaurant already frozen, canned, dehydrated, or freeze-dried. Much of the taste and aroma of American fast food...is now manufactured at a series of large chemical plants off the New Jersey Turnpike. (6)

To begin our exploration of food-as-product in Hispanic cultures, we selected two of Pablo Neruda’s *Odas elementales* for analysis: “*Oda a la papa*” and “*Oda al tomate*.” Using a semantic-map approach to each poem, students extracted words and phrases to place under each of the associative branches of a *palabra clave*, thus revealing how the food item is embedded in its culture’s web of significance. The two poems are quite different in this regard: “*Oda al tomate*” evokes the home, table, and synesthetic pleasures of simple foods; “*Oda a la papa*” evokes the land and people in its association with Chilean values and identity. [See Appendix A for more learner-accessible poetry that conveys the sense of a food’s significance in Hispanic cultures.]



While much the same physical “product,” to students the potato had evoked “chips,” “fries,” and the stuffed-to-overflowing baked version of Wendy’s fame; but the *papa*, symbol of the Andean world, captured different shared meanings, evoking the colors, sounds and tastes of the land and the values of honesty and hard work. To follow up this analysis, students working in pairs chose a food that had significance to them and their own culture and developed an “ode” to their food product that revealed its connectedness and meaning to important aspects of their lives.

Students then selected two regions of the Hispanic world—Spain and Peru—for their cross-cultural journey into food-as-product. The class of twenty-eight students was divided in half, with one half representing Spain and the other Peru. Within each country grouping, pairs of students selected one of the following (overlapping) Ps as a week-long research topic: *Productos y...* 1) *proverbios*; 2) *platos*; 3) *perfiles y preferencias*; 4) *pedidos*; 5) *precios, presupuestos y puntos de venta*; 6) *patrones emergentes*; 7) *el paladar peruano/español*. [*Preparación* could be substituted for any of these, to focus not only on combining ingredients, but on the cultural significance of the act of preparation.] Students were encouraged to do their own web searches; however, each pair of students was given a list of websites that constituted the minimal required reading for their topics (an abbreviated list of these is included in Appendix B). Each pair was given the task of “teaching” the class (not just presenting) how Peruvian and Spanish concepts of food-as-product differ from or resemble those generally manifested in the U.S. All pairs were required to meet with their country group at least once to discuss and coordinate their findings. In class, each pair of students had eight minutes to give its lesson (all were required to make well integrated use of visuals or props, as their aim was to teach) which was to conclude with some provocative question for the class as a whole that would lead to good discussion (in this particular class, students were also required to integrate correctly and appropriately the “passive *se*” and at least ten uses of subjunctive; however, any other structures could easily have been targeted for student practice). *Student as teachers* were required to keep their language as accessible as possible for the comprehension of their listeners and to refrain from citing whole phrases directly from the website texts. *Student listeners* were required to take notes on their classmates’ presentations (in some cases, they would have to use these notes to prepare their own lessons) for use in follow-up activities; student listeners were also required to react to each presentation with at least one favorable comment about a learned point of cross-cultural comparison (*Me gusta/ encanta/ intrigal/ sorprende que los españoles/ peruanos... porque...*). The following is a description of the seven Ps of this product analysis, each of which was assigned to four people: two in Spain and two in Peru. For each, then, Task 1 would be done by one person for Peru and one person for Spain; likewise with Task 2, unless otherwise indicated. Student “lessons” took three (well spent) days of class time.

1. **Proverbios:** What do proverbs tell us about the food preferences of a culture and about the beliefs and values a culture assigns to its food products? Study the list of *refranes* your instructor has provided and 1) choose 3 that reflect the food preferences of Spain or Peru, explain them and tell us something about the importance of these food items; 2) choose 3 that express a significance to food that seems different from that assigned in your own culture’s practice; offer your best-researched explanation of these sayings; and teach the class one you consider most important for understanding the role of food in these cultures.

2. **Platos:** Every region of the world has what it considers its specialties—dishes for which the region is famous. In the websites your instructor has recommended, you see that Peru and Spain are noted for a number of dishes, according to their regions. 1) Teach the class about two dishes of your country of focus: give the ingredients and explain how these dishes correspond to the nutritional pyramid of the area (Mediterranean or Latin American); 2) teach the class about regional variation within a country by explaining how two dishes from your country (Spain or Peru) reflect the different geographies, histories, ethnicities or lifestyles of their regions of origin.

3. **Perfiles:** Many industries and government agencies conduct surveys of eating patterns, food preferences, household food expenditures and the like. Your instructor has provided you several websites for such surveys of *peruanos* and *españoles*. Notice that survey questions themselves often reveal a great deal about the culture. For example, from the question: “*De postre, ¿cuál es tu fruta preferida?*” one might assume that fruits are associated with “desserts” for the population being surveyed. 1) Share with the class the results of the surveys you find on the websites, using the data to illustrate a “typical” consumer profile and compare this profile to both the U.S. profile and the nutritional pyramid for the region under study. 2) Examine the *rubros* of each of these surveys to see how data are gathered in categories (*sexo, edad, clase socioeconómica*) and propose to the class a survey instrument that might gather categories of information in the U.S. in like fashion, on a food-as-product question of your choice.

4. **Pedidos y porciones:** Your task is to look at food as promoted and distributed by restaurants. As you know from experience in your own culture, menus often are quite challenging reading, as proprietors wish to “dress up” their language to present an image or to appeal to the senses of diners. Your instructor has provided you with some restaurant websites from Peru and Spain that present rather straightforward menus. Study these menus to: 1) teach the class the language of menu categories of your target country and describe a common dish associated with each category (research what the dishes are and what ingredients they include); 2) suggest to the class your own *menú del día* based on one of these menus, give its cost and explain how it incorporates the foods of that region’s nutritional pyramid; explain how the concept of *porción* tends to differ from that of the US.

5. **Precios, presupuestos y puntos de venta:** How do people shop for groceries, where do they go, how often and how much do they spend? For Spain, you will 1) visit two on-line supermarkets and teach the class about the products they would find in each section; and 2) search for the ingredients of at least one dish identified as “typical” by your classmates in both supermarkets, compare the prices of these ingredients (use the same brand name), and present the total “bill” to the class, in *pesetas* (or *euros*) and dollars. For Peru, you will 1) teach the class about where families shop, what products comprise the *cesta familiar* and how much is typically spent on food per week; 2) you will make a “virtual visit” to the Peruvian marketplace of Pacasmayo and teach the class about the variety of sights, sounds and aromas of this experience.