



# Quick E-Tips



INTERNATIONAL  
ADVANTAGE

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## **WELCOME! Bienvenu! Bienvenido!**

Enjoy these 2 tips on *business culture and language learning*...

### **Culture/Communication Tip: Stereotypes and Generalizations**

Based on national statistics, if you are American, you...

- ...have no passport.
- ...work more hours than anyone outside of the U.S.
- ...eat fast food twice a week.
- ...are preoccupied with efficiency.
- ...are overweight.

Are they all true for you? These facts, based on national averages, are really stereotypes, and stereotypes, when applied to individuals, are rarely true. Not only are they not true, when you assume the person you are dealing with fits a specific stereotype, you risk offending them and demonstrate your ignorance at the same time. But, while applying stereotypes to an individual can be dangerous, carefully using generalizations when dealing with a culture that you do not completely understand can be a useful tool to help you understand the tendencies of a given group and the dynamics of how they operate and the way they perceive you.

Take, for example, Deputy Defense Secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, who took a cultural stereotype he didn't understand, combined it with a national (and global) tragedy, and offended the very group he was likely most hoping to reach, the Spanish. In an interview on PBS television last Thursday, Wolfowitz said Prime Minister-designate Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's withdrawal from Iraq plan didn't seem very Spanish. "The Spaniards are courageous people. I mean, we know it from their whole culture of bullfighting," Wolfowitz said. "I don't think they run in the face of an enemy...I hope they don't run in the face of these people." (Arizona Republic, 3/19/2004, taken from the Associated Press)

Three tips for Mr. Wolfowitz:

1. Check out your statement with a Spaniard. Does the concept resonate?
2. Avoid making cultural stereotypes about people if you have little familiarity of current cultural predispositions, and especially if the context may evoke emotion.
3. Don't assume that because a part of what you are communicating may seem positive ("Spaniards are courageous people"), that the perceived insult of the stereotype will be diminished. Stereotypes are often based on issues that are sensitive or contentious to the group they describe (Bullfighting is a controversial social issue in modern Spain).

### **Language Tip: Language Evolution 101!**

This month, my tip is for the linguists out there who like to think about language and how it works.

Answer this question aloud: How are you doing today? \_\_\_\_\_

A "prescriptive" approach (think William Saphire, New York Times) would lament the fact that the response "Good" is becoming acceptable, because it is not grammatical. (Grammatically-speaking, you

need a word that functions as an adverb like "Well" or "Fine", not an adjective.) A "prescriptivist" would have opinions about someone's language as being "correct" or "incorrect"

A "descriptive" approach would reflect that the answer to the question "How are you?" could be either "Fine" or "Good". A "descriptivist" approach would say that language is always changing and that prescription does not allow for the growth of a language. The point of language is to get a point across. There are no rules about what is right or wrong, as long as there is communication, this approach would argue.

Taking this idea one step further, it is interesting that distinct languages grow and change differently. So, in Spanish and French, as opposed to English, you cannot answer with the word "good" to the question "Cómo está Ud." or "Comment ça va?" ("bueno" or "bon", respectively). [Disclaimer: Advanced speakers out there know that answering with these adjectives change the nature of the question.]

Another example of language growth from the Spanish language (which is not true for the English language) is that Mexican speakers now play with emphasizing an alternate syllable, particularly in command forms. You might hear Spanish speakers say "Habláme!", instead of "Háblame" (Translated "Speak to me!").

Of course, there is no right or wrong answer on whether language evolution is good ... It is simply a question of personal philosophy.

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### **Recent Recognition**

Lisa Koss was recognized this month by the Phoenix Business Journal as one of five "Women to Watch" during their Women in Business Trade Show and Luncheon at the Point Hilton Squaw Peak on March 18<sup>th</sup>. A big thank you to the clients and colleagues who attended in support!

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*Lisa*

**Lisa Koss**

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