

# NON-AUTHORITY IN NICOLA VALLEY INDIAN CULTURE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

ROBERT STERLING †

Former Education Coordinator,  
Nicola Valley Indian Administration,  
Merritt, British Columbia,  
Canada, V0K 2B0.

and

YVONNE M. HÉBERT,

Faculty of Education,  
University of Regina,  
Regina, Saskatchewan,  
Canada, S4S 0A2.

## ABSTRACT/RESUME

Our hypothesis is that there is an assumption of non-authority underlying the organization of the Indian culture of Nicola Valley, B.C. This is supported by linguistic and social interaction patterns: (1a) the apparent lack of a true causative in the grammar of the Okanagan language, (1b) the requirement that verbal contracts must be made explicit before expectations can be formed of an addressee, and (2) traditional social interaction patterns which show that for A to get B to perform an activity X, it is B who initiates the activity and consents to having A act as authority for that activity. Implications for interactions between teachers and native children are discussed.

Les auteurs prétendent qu'il existe dans la culture indienne de la vallée Nicola (Colombie-Britannique) un principe de non-autorité discernable sous l'enveloppe de son organisation apparente. Leur théorie est fondée sur la perception de certains motifs d'interaction sociale et linguistique perceptibles dans cette société, à savoir: (1a) l'absence notable d'une vraie forme causative dans la grammaire de la langue Okanagan; (1b) l'exigence parmi ce peuple qu'un contrat oral reçoive une forme explicite avant que l'initiateur puisse formuler des prévisions

l'égard du destinataire; et (2) l'existence de motifs traditionnels d'interaction sociale qui révèlent que si A veut que B entreprenne une activité X, c'est toujours B qui amorce l'activité en consentant à ce qu'A joue le rôle d'autorité dans le projet. Finalement, les auteurs étudient les implications de leurs découvertes dans le domaine des relations entre enfants autochtones et enseignants.

## INTRODUCTION

We propose that there is an assumption of non-authority underlying the organization of the Indian culture of Nicola Valley, British Columbia, coupled with a belief in personal freedom of choice. Preliminary evidence to support this hypothesis comes from the grammar and the use of Okanagan, one of the two Indian languages of this valley, and from traditional social interaction patterns common to the valley.<sup>1</sup>

Linguistic data demonstrates (1) that the grammar of Okanagan apparently lacks a true causative construction and (2) that the use of Okanagan requires that a verbal contract must be made explicit between speaker and hearer before a speaker can form expectations of an addressee with respect to directives issued. Traditional social interaction patterns demonstrate (1) that, a leader provides instruction upon request, at the initiative of the learner; (2) that, given a story-telling context, listeners maintain the duration of story-telling; (3) that an individual, even a child, decides who to select as authority figures, when and where; (4) that individuals show great respect and esteem for elders, a key cultural value implicit in the conditions under which A gets B to perform an activity X; and (5) that child-rearing practices encourage youngsters to determine for themselves what action is to be taken.

Some implications for education for Native Canadians, in particular for interactions between teachers and Native children, are the realizations (a) that teachers cannot make Native children perform a particular task; (b) that Native children will determine for themselves when to learn, to respond, and when to stop; and (c) that Native children will decide whether or not to select and respect teachers as authority figures.

## THE LINGUISTIC DATA

The linguistic data is taken from the grammar and use of Okanagan, an Interior Salishan language spoken in Nicola Valley, in the interior of British Columbia. Two syntactic constructions were examined: causatives and directives. The grammar of Okanagan shows that there is apparently no construction which satisfies a definition characterizing the causative situation and which can report that A made B perform an activity X. The use of the language to issue directives requires that a verbal contract be made explicit between director and addressee, e.g., A forms the expectation that B will perform an activity X, as directed, only when B verbally agrees to do so. For a fuller discussion, and examples, see Hébert (1982a, b, c) and Sterling and Hébert (1983).

Following the practice of Searle (1975), we use the term directive for the class of speech acts which include acts of *ordering*, *commanding*, *requesting*, *pleading*, *begging*, *entreating*, *instructing*, *forbidding*, and others. Directives do not of themselves imply whether or not B will perform X and may have a form roughly like the following:

I direct you to do X and you tell me whether or not you will do X.

Social expectations may vary in either of two ways: either B is expected to comply or is not. The Okanagan directives [*cú* (tell), *xy'xy'* (let), *ssiw* (ask), and *lq'm* (convince)] differ in this respect from English. When a native speaker of English directs B to do X, the speaker expects B to do so, unless B specifically states otherwise. For example, when a parent directs an offspring to clean his/her room, the offspring is expected to comply and is considered culpable if compliance is not forthcoming. However, when a native speaker of Okanagan directs B to do X, the speaker has no expectation that B will do so, unless B has agreed to do so. Moreover, it is only when B has agreed to do X, that B is considered culpable and may then be taken to task for not doing so. For example, an elder, such as a favourite aunt, may disapprove of the conduct of a younger adult. This aunt awaits an opportune time, possibly a visit, and discusses the matter with her nephew. The nephew listens, perhaps nodding or "uh-huh-ing" with each reason given, emotion appealed to, point made, or even suggestion that this be for his own good. But it is not until the nephew states that he accepts the aunt's words and will modify his conduct that his aunt actually expects him to do so. At this point, a verbal contract exists and the nephew becomes culpable and may be blamed.

Two Indian languages are spoken in Nicola Valley: Thompson and Okanagan. Although linguistic data was collected in only one language, Okanagan, the expectations that accompany directives and the traditional social interaction patterns discussed below appear to hold for speakers of both languages as they share a common culture. Moreover, linking our work with that of Philips (1970, 1976, 1982) suggests that these traditional interaction patterns may hold more broadly for the Interior Plateau culture area.

## FIVE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL INTERACTION PATTERNS

In this section, we present five patterns of social interaction which are traditional to the Indian people of Nicola Valley. Although the traditional interaction patterns are still pervasive, they are undergoing change, and the present generation of young adults does not manifest all of these.

### Initiating Instruction

Traditionally, an elder or parent provided instruction in specific tasks upon request. As a parent goes about daily and seasonal tasks, a child observes and absorbs. When the child is ready, (s)he requests instruction or aid. When the youngster needs instruction, then (s)he asks for it and it is provided. It may be instruction on how to cut the shape of a birchbark basket in the bark, or on how to perforate the folded bark with a deer bone awl in order to lace it together with strips of cedar root. "Will you show me how to . . . ?" or "I'm having trouble with this." The elder provides the instruction patiently, first by demonstration, then by encouraging the learner to try. Generally, corrections are stated positively: "Try it this way" or "Punch the holes at different places so the bark doesn't crack." First attempts to make a pina? (birchbark basket) may result

in a mishapen product. Nevertheless, the learner is praised for the attempt, and the basket for its good points. Good-natured teasing takes the edge off of a funny-looking basket and leaves the learner willing to attempt another.

By comparison, a non-Indian parent or teacher determines for the learner when it is time to learn and may provide lengthy instructions, before any task is attempted by a learner, during or after. These instructions may be accompanied with critical comments. To a Nicola Valley Indian, such instruction would be considered needless chatter and is termed *mama?cin* (nuisance-mouth, i.e., taking too much), in Okanagan. Lengthy talk is not for instruction, but for discussions, for relating news and events, for meetings, and for story-telling.

### Maintaining the Story-Telling Event

Traditionally, story-telling occurs during evening, stretching into night, and during long-winter months. Sensing the right time and place, and usually with a little coaxing, a story teller begins the narration. The story-telling continues, weaving one motif into another, crafting a tale. The listeners respond to a pause in the narration and to the teller's question: "Are you still there?" If the listeners fail to respond, presumably having fallen asleep, the story stops at that point, to resume the following night from the same point, again by request of the listeners.

Besides sensitivity to context - time, place and situation - we wish to emphasize the role of the listener in maintaining the narrative event. It is the listeners who initiate the narrative by persuading the teller, given the appropriate context, and it is also the listeners who terminate the narrative by ceasing to respond appropriately. Despite an appearance of immobility and passivity, listeners are active participants in a narrative event.

### Selecting Authority Figures and Issuing Imperatives

Having hypothesized an underlying assumption of non-authority in the organization of interaction in the Indian culture of Nicola Valley, we have identified two situations in our preliminary investigations in which a traditional Nicola Valley Indian selects an authority figure and places himself/herself under the command of that authority. One is a crew situation and the other the parental-child situation, the latter within the context of an extended kinship system. Hunting provides a good example of a crew situation. Three identifiable criteria determine the selection of a leader of hunters. The leader is likely to be (i) the most respected individual; (ii) the one in whose territory the crew is hunting; or (iii) in the case of hunting on what is considered common land, the one with whom an individual hunter decides to go hunting.

In the parental-child situation, the parent is clearly the authority figure, telling the young child what to do, when and where. Traditionally, the parental figure is very strict. *Yáya?* (Grannie) would not permit a young child to leave the yard except to go swimming at the creek, and that only when accompanied

and supervised. Moreover, *Y'aya?* would not allow a young child to play at the neighbours unless she herself was visiting. And the child would eat whatever *Y'aya?* cooked, without complaint. When quite young, a child has little say over who the parental figure is. If mother and father are away, working or travelling, and place the child under the care of a relative, such as *Y'aya?* or aunt, that person is the parental authority. When older, in adolescence and even in pre-adolescence, a child is considered capable of selecting the parental figure, and may go to live with another relative: an older sister, the other set of grandparents, an aunt, or an uncle. The extended kinship system provides for numerous parental figures: nurturers and authorities. A child in the care of his/her parents will also obey respected elders within the kinship system, e.g., grandparents, uncle.

In a crew situation and in a parental-child situation, an authority figure may issue commands. These may be in the form of indirect speech. For example, that statement "maybe you should be up there around 9 o'clock" is felicitous when a hunting party is being organized. These commands may also be direct, non-verbal or verbal. Looks and gestures exemplify traditional non-verbal communication: a look from mother to daughter, indicating "You stay where you are!"; a gesture, swift and sharp, of extended index finger and closed fist, indicating "You, go over there!" from leader to a party of hunters ordering them to fan out, or from a day-care supervisor to a child to play in the other room.

The Okanagan language has two degrees of transitive imperatives: a non-emphatic form and an emphatic form. The emphatic Okanagan imperative is felicitous under two conditions: (a) if the command has already been issued (Mattina, 1980) and/or (b) if the commander/speaker wishes the activity performed immediately, i.e., RIGHT NOW (Hébert, 1982b, c). The latter are similar in emphasis to the English "You DO that!" with the recovered underlying subject. There are similarities between imperatives and the directive *tell*. Orders are reported with *tell*, not with ask. As with the *tell* directive, the speaker believes that he has the authority to control the intentional behaviour of B, the addressee, without necessarily having an invested authority. The emphatic form implies that B did not perform activity X, in spite of A's command, a possibility which also exists with *cú* (tell). Thus, it is the case, with imperatives as well as with directives, that B retains control over the activity X.

Thus, we have seen that a Nicola Valley Indian selects authority figures in very specific situations, places him/her self under the direction of that figure but nevertheless still retains a degree of control over the performance of activity X.

### Respecting the Elders

The next two sections discuss how A may obtain B's performance of an activity X, without recourse to coercion, in non-authoritarian situations, among Nicola Valley Indians. Givón (1975) suggested that shared cultural values are essential to the non-coercive manipulation of others and that these shared values

combine to maintain an illusion of control for A over the activity X. For the Indian community in Nicola Valley, this cultural homogeneity is based more specifically on two factors which have been identified to date: (1) the respect for elders and (2) the self-determination of action, the latter based upon a belief in personal freedom and personal responsibility.

The elders of one's kinship system are held in considerable esteem and, regardless of individual virtues or vices, receive the respect of the extended family. A suggestion, innuendo, caution, plea, request, or word of advice from a respected elder is often sufficient for compliance, whereas an order or demand is much more compelling. If elders indicate that U should marry L, that G should go to school, that S and W should not separate or divorce, that chores need to be done and that B should get to work, that it is wrong to steal, that J should accompany the tripe-cleaning group, that M should pack some water, that salmon needs to be contributed to the feast and that K should do so, compliance is usually obtained, even if it entails difficulty for the respondent. The elders have the authority to obtain compliance, but by the mutual consent of the kinship group and the community. Once consent and respect are given, B's control is lessened and may well be illusory.

#### Determining Action for Self

In general, there is a sense of self-determination of action, based on a belief in personal freedom and responsibility, characteristic of the Indian community in Nicola Valley. Indian children acquire this sense to a greater degree and at an earlier age than non-Indian or White middle-class children. Indian children of Nicola Valley need not ask when to be in, need not account for their time, play or work with little adult supervision or direction, accompany their adults on most outings and activities, and form strong bonds of companionship and reciprocity with their kin and their peer group.

These facts are compatible with the findings of Philips (1970, 1983) with respect to the Warm Springs Indian community of Oregon. Her findings are relevant since both that community and Nicola Valley are within the Interior Plateau culture area. Her findings indicate generally that Warm Springs Indian children become accustomed to self-determination of action, accompanied by very little disciplinary control from older relatives, at much younger ages than middle-class White children. More specifically, Warm Springs Indian children are nurtured by older children, by grandparents, uncles and aunts, as well as by their parents. Indian youngsters learn household and outdoor skills earlier than non-Indian children. Pre-adolescents are considered capable of spending time with other children, without accounting for their absence or asking permission. Additionally, these youngsters are considered capable of deciding where they want to live, and may spend weeks and months with one relative or another. Children learn what needs to be done and how to do it by observing their parents or elders. Once internalized, children perform the tasks willingly and responsibly, often at their own instigation.

Thus, given such a finely developed sense of self-responsibility and personal freedom, and of self-determination of action, there is little need for the elders

to speak. When the need is perceived and the time appropriate and an elder speaks, compliance will usually be obtained from respondents who share in these cultural values.

An individual may choose not to perform an activity X, in at least two ways. One, the respondent may refuse to share in those cultural values which are essential to the non-coercive manipulation of others. Or two, the respondent may refuse to cooperate on an individual basis, thus flouting Grice's (1975) general Cooperative Principle: BE COOPERATIVE. An individual may respond with a statement, such as "I'm not going to listen to you; I'm too stubborn", a possible response to the advice of a visiting aunt. An individual may change the topic of conversation; may reply later in the conversation making answering statements, forming indirect objections; may respond with silence; or for a very strong negative response, may turn his/her back, appropriate when someone says something of which the individual disapproves.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Our preliminary investigation has shown for the Indian community of Nicola Valley (I) that one person does not make another do anything; (2) that expectations for compliance to directives in the Okanagan language are dependent upon the establishment of a verbal contract between the parties concerned; (3) that a child or learner initiates instruction by request; (4) that, given a story-telling context, listeners maintain the duration of story-telling by responding appropriately and by initially persuading the teller; (5) that an individual, even a child, is very specific about who (s)he allows to tell him/her what to do and when; (6) that individuals show great respect and esteem for elders; (7) that child-rearing practices encourage Indian children to determine for themselves what action is to be taken; and (8) that the cultural values embodied in (6) and (7) above combine to facilitate the non-coercive manipulation of others, permitting A to obtain B's compliance in the performance of an activity X.

From these facts follow some very real implications for the education of Nicola Valley Indian children, and to the extent that these facts may be generalized, for Native Canadian children. It may be said that the authority of the teacher is basic to the classroom situation. However, the teacher in a public school classroom is unlikely to be either a respected elder, a parental figure or a leader of a crew, in the terms of reference of a Native child. Hence it is necessary to realize that teachers cannot make Native children perform a particular task.

A non-Indian teacher is unlikely to share or to have experienced child-rearing practices traditional to the Nicola Valley and other Indian communities. A teacher often expects to be able to tell a child what to do, to form expectations for compliance whether or not the Native child overtly agrees, to provide detailed instructions without awaiting a request, to expect to receive the respect of Native students, simply as a consequence of the role and position of being a teacher. Hence it is necessary to realize also that, traditionally, Native children

determine for themselves when to learn, to respond, and when to stop, and that Native children will decide for themselves how far to select and respect any particular teacher as authority figure.

#### NOTES

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IN MEMORIAM: Robert W. Sterling (1937-1983) was a well-known spokesman and leader in the field of Indian Education in British Columbia.

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