

Regional Tongues

When I moved from southeast New Mexico to the east coast in the mid-1960s, I discovered my use of the native tongue was not the same as the language spoken by the folks in what westerners called Yankee land. Never mind that I had moved to Virginia, which was not a Yankee enclave. Virginia was as southern as a Rebel yell. It made no difference. New Mexicans labeled anything east of Texas as Yankee.

Southeast New Mexico was known as cowboy country. It fit the label. The primary industries revolved around cattle and sheep, secondarily cotton, and later oil. The culture included Stetson hats, Levis, boots, and big belt buckles---along with horses and rodeos. I rode a horse before I rode a bicycle. (Truth in bragging: tricycle jaunts preceded my horse rides.)

This setting in the high plains of America's southwest reminds me of the laconic Gary Cooper in the movie "High Noon." Not many words came from Mr. Cooper's mouth. Not many words came out of the cowboys in southeast New Mexico either. I recall standing behind my father while he played dominoes at the local domino parlor. In hindsight, when I witness today's verbose Twitter and Facebook cultures, the men at the domino table were reminiscent of a funeral crowd.

I was the talkative one. That is, until dad said, "Be quiet, son." I did.

I settled into Arlington, Virginia, a short distance from my job in Washington, DC. I found the people there were not much different from my friends and relatives in the southwest, as friendly to me as I was to them. But the east coast men dressed differently: khaki pants instead of Levis, pull over golf sweaters instead of long sleeve buttoned shirts, penny loafers instead of boots. They spoke strange English, at least to my ears.

I will compose this story using east coast terms, and place the southeast New Mexico equivalent term in parentheses. Let's proceed (cut to the chase):

The first difference I noticed quickly (real soon) was a greeting between two people. They went through a time consuming, "Good morning" when a simple, "Mornin' " would have sufficed (done the job). Get to it and say what you mean, or don't say it.

Speaking of sufficed, suffice it to say I am preparing (fixin' to) tell you more.

The first few weeks of my immersion into the east coast language culture (the way them folks talk) was their frequent use of, "I'm excited!" I'm excited about this, I'm excited about that. Can you imagine (think about) Gary, facing almost inevitable (sure) death in this upcoming duel (fight) with multitudinous (a whole bunch of) malevolent men (low life) would utter, "I'm excited!?" Au contraire! (Hell, no!) He wouldn't say a thing.

Even more (And listen up, hombre), after defeating (kicking ass) all those evil men (sonza' bitches) do you think for one New York second (a'fore long) that Gary would admit, "I'm exhausted.?" Of course not. (Nope.) He would proclaim (lay it on the line): "I'm plum wore out."

There's more (I'll tell you something else.). Whatever happened to responding to a person with, "Yes"?. Now, we say, "Absolutely!" It's absolutely this, it's absolutely that. Try this test (Give it a go.): Observe (Take a look at) a conversation on a TV talk show. You'll be surprised how many times, "Absolutely!" is uttered (said). Gary would have taken care of it with, "Yep."

Consider (Take into account), “No problem.” That’s one for the books. What happened to, “You’re welcome.”? ...Damn near extinct from the English language. It’s no problem this, it’s no problem that. Even more graceful (better) than, “You’re welcome,” Gary would have said, “My pleasure.”

In “High Noon,” Grace Kelly’s presence in a scene made the male viewers pay more attention. To reemphasize an important point (Like I said), in our modern culture, we proudly proclaim (brag about) enthusiasm on a subject with, “I’m excited.” Once more (I’m beatin’ a dead horse) Can you even think about Gary, gazing (taking a look) at voluptuous (good-lookin’) Grace, thinking, much less uttering (saying), “I’m excited.” Hell no, pardner. He would say, “Lookin’ real fine.”

As for agreeing with someone with, “Absolutely,” Gary’s response would be, “I’ll go along with that.”

“Have a good day.” I came across that phrase upon moving to the east coast. One of my newly acquired friends said goodbye (adios) to me with, “Have a good day.” I was already having a *fine* day.

Seriously consider (Think about it real hard) the word, “super?” Can you visualize in your wildest imagination (conjure up) Gary, upon killing the bad guys (“guys” is next in our linguistic analysis), would say super? For that matter, would anyone west of the Texas/Yankee border ever lower themselves to utter (spill out) such an effete (girly) word?

Imagine Gary’s response to Grace telling him she was amenable to staying (stickin’ around) town. He strums his guitar, “Do not forsake me, oh my darlin’...I know I must be brave.” and proclaims (lets her know) he is happy with her decision with, “That’s super!”

“That’s just fine, honey,” would have sufficed (done the job).

“Guys” was another word that absolutely, and I mean absolutely, astounded me during my introduction to East Coast English Language. It was guys this, it was guys that.

Consider Gary. He walks into the local saloon. With the swinging doors still swingin’ and the “Do not forsake me” melody playing in the background, Gary saunters up to the bar, puts a big boot on the railing, turns around to face the silently hostile, poker-faced assemblage (crowd) and says, “Hey, guys!”

What would Gary have said? Nothing. Maybe “Howdy.”

And that is the essence of this essay (what this talk is all about): Talk English friend (hoss), or don’t talk at all.