



DRSEA INFORMER

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Perdido En La Traducción (Lost In Translation) – Do this simple experiment. Copy a couple of paragraphs from this newsletter and paste into any online translation website (I use Yahoo! Babel Fish) and translate into Spanish. Now take the Spanish translation and translate back into English. Not quite what was originally written, is it? The experiment points out the intrinsic value of people who can accurately translate languages.

With that in mind, I definitely understand many of the comments made recently by White Sox Manager Ozzie Guillen who stated Asian players are provided services that Latino players do not receive. He said Japanese players are given translators when they come to the United States while Latinos do not get the same assistance.

Guillen, who is from Venezuela, said, "Why do we have Japanese interpreters and we don't have a Spanish one? Why do they have that privilege and we don't?" He described going to see his son, Oney, who is playing minor league baseball and says the team has a translator for a Korean prospect who he claims makes more money than the players.



Ozzie Guillen

"Don't take this wrong, but they take advantage of us," Guillen said. "We bring a Japanese player and they are very good and they bring all these privileges to them. We bring a Dominican kid — Go to the minor leagues, good luck. Good luck. And it's always going to be like that. It's never going to change. But that's the way it is."

Given how things can get lost in translation, Guillen's argument makes sense; why don't teams routinely provide translators for Latino players whose primary language, like Asian players, is not English?

A few years ago, a number of Latino sports writers and broadcasters had a beef with the New York Yankees who refused to allow members of the Spanish language media to ask questions in Spanish

to the newly acquired Alex Rodríguez. The Yankees insisted that questions in Spanish be held to the end of the press conference, but anyone who has ever been in a press conference knows that by the end the quotes are old and stale, and players tend to give yes and no responses, which puts the Latino media at a disadvantage.

Julio Pabón, a good friend of mine, said he spoke out about the situation many years ago when he went to spring training and was often asked to act as translator for non Spanish speaking reporters who wanted to question Latino players, noting even then that Asian players had their own interpreters. That, and the situation with the Yankees, led to the creation of the Latino Sports Writers and Broadcasters Association (LSWBA). The LSWBA met with both the Yankees and the Mets and, as a result, both teams now hold monthly press conferences in Spanish, but do not provide translators in the dugout or at post game interviews.



Julio Pabón

Pabón, who is president of the association, insists that the absence of Spanish language interpreters is because teams “do not understand Latino players, or the Latino community; they are taken for granted and the end result is a lack of respect for both. Teams have a ready-made source of players in the Dominican Republic, in Venezuela, and Latin American, so they do not feel they have to do anything special because of the abundance of players.

“Japan, China, the Orient are new markets with billions of people. It is not about the players, but the expansion of the market into the global economy so they will do anything for these players. It is all about the money, and Latinos are considered cheap and because it is economically cheap, that is the way they treat us. There are no supportive services.”

He added that what is provided Asian players goes beyond translators, that they are assigned what amounts to personal assistants who “help them transition into a new culture, into a new society, helping to acclimate them. They are babysitting them in their transition as players and you do not see that with Latino players. The Japanese player, he is totally foreign to the environment. They are assuming that the Latino player is not, that he will be okay, and that is not fair.”

Guillen also criticized Major League Baseball over what he says is the lack of steroid education provided Latino players, saying, "I'm the only one to teach the Latinos about [what] not to use. I'm the only one and Major League Baseball doesn't care."

MLB released a statement refuting the charge. “We spend more time and effort educating our Latin players about PED (performance enhancing drug) use than we do our domestic players in the United States,” said spokesman Rich Levin. Baseball has instituted a drug education program for all teams in the Dominican Republic.

Apenas Usted Y Dios (Just You And God) – One of my closest friends and allies in the Dominican Republic is César Gerónimo, the former major league great who was part of the Big Red Machine with the Cincinnati Reds back in the 1970's. Besides being a quintessential gentleman, he has opened doors I wouldn't have been able to budge alone, helping to move the Dominican Republic Sports & Education Academy closer and closer to reality.

As a former baseball player, he understands the system and what it is like to be a Dominican faced with all the pressure and dreams heaped on the shoulders of young boys in this country, and shares my deep belief and conviction that education will be the salvation, not only of these boys, but also for his country.

We often talk baseball when we are together, but he never dwells on his career. “That was my job, and I hope I did it well, but now is now,” he says. “There are more important things in life than baseball.” As a former seminary student, I know he has a strong belief in God, family and country that has set his moral compass and he is an inspiration to me every day.

Recently, Gerónimo invited me to join his wife, Linda, and daughter, Elizabeth, for a few days at their getaway in Cabrera, a town in *María Trinidad Sánchez* province. It is located at the eastern end of the county's north coast, at the western extreme of the *Bahía Escocesa*, 130 kilometers north of Santo Domingo. It is a small town that remains unspoiled by tourism; its main income is from cattle, meat and milk, with coconuts and rice included in the agricultural mix.

It is also breathtakingly beautiful.

Located facing the Atlantic Ocean, Cabrera has spectacular vistas that include pristine beaches, rivers, exotic vegetation and many natural attractions. A national park is located in *El Breton*, in a small section of Cabrera call *Cabo Frances Viejo*. In the park, high above the ocean, are the ruins of a lighthouse believed to be the first in the New World.

Directly across the bay of *Cabo Frances* is where Gerónimo built his tranquility center, atop a hill overlooking the ocean and set where the adjacent cliff helps create the inlet at its base. The view from his veranda is awesome.

The house is simplistic in design and function, but could easily make the pages of any architectural digest. High ceilings dominate the home that is inviting to both the eyes and the soul. It is called *Punta Blanca Villa* because of two huge white rocks in the waters nearby.

I sit smoking a cigar into the evening as the sun starts to set. Small buzzards soar on the updrafts that rise from the sea; their habitat is the national park across the bay where the jagged lighthouse remnants are silhouetted against the sky. I am at peace with myself and the world from my perch that is the perfect convergence of sky, sea, and terrain.

“It is just you and God here,” Gerónimo tells me, which instantly explains why he built on this spot and returns every chance he gets. He says that historians believe Columbus sailed past this point on at least one of his voyages and I picture a Taino Indian, one of the original inhabitants of the island, standing where I am standing more than 500 years ago and seeing a ship in full sail, unaware that his world – the whole world – was about to change. With his “discovery,” Columbus also brought death and destruction by either disease or direct slaughter of the entire Taino population.

While the original Taino Indian population was decimated, many modern day Dominicans trace their ancestry back to the tribe; historians believe that inter-relations between Europeans, Tainos, and the slaves brought from Africa are what gives the country its ethnic diversity.

Gerónimo takes me sightseeing one day, showing me the diverse topography that is Cabrera. Homes atop the hills and cliffs have astounding ocean views, but tend to be hidden from view behind gates and lush vegetation. This is by design, Gerónimo says, as the inhabitants enjoy their privacy and guard it zealously. Cabrera is mostly undiscovered by tourists and residents and appreciative visitors want to keep it that way. I am loath to incorporate too many photos of Cabrera here for fear I will contribute to its being “discovered” once again and decimated by the over-commercialization that ultimately will follow.

One photo I will share is that of *Playa Grande*, cited by many as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. On the day we visit, it is almost deserted, but Gerónimo tells me that on big holidays the beach is a major destination because of its vast white sand and friendly surf.



Playa Grande

We also visit *El Caletón de Dario* (Orchid Bay Beach), where Gerónimo cautions me to walk among the palm trees while looking up. The reason, he assures me, is that the human skull will always lose a battle with a falling coconut.



El Caletón de Dario

We also go to an off-the-path water hole that includes a waterfall that cascades into a pool at the bottom. To my horror, a young man at the top leaps 100 feet into the pool, but thankfully emerges unscathed.

It is here I attend my first American style barbeque, but then again it is American only in that people are grilling over a charcoal pit constructed of a metal tank someone has skillfully sawed in half and added a chimney to the roof. But here is where the similarity ends.

For one thing, much of the grill is covered with ripe plantains that expand and burst from the heat, exposing the yellow flesh made even sweeter by the smoke that permeates through and through. There are no utensils; a sharpened stick is used to turn the plantains, as well as an assortment of chicken, sausage, pork and beef. This is all placed on paper plates where people simply grab, tear and consume. It is delicious.

I wonder why people choose this location over the wide variety of beaches with crystal clear blue-green waters available in Cabrera, what with the frigid, grayish water that flows down from the mountain top. But then I see people smearing themselves with the gray mud from the river banks and it becomes clear that this is a place not only to swim and frolic, but also a natural spa. People cover themselves in the mud, often creating designs on their skin with hand prints and drawings. As I see one young man holding a stick in spear fashion, I am reminded of William Golding's *Lord Of The Flies* and the primeval face paint the characters applied to liberate their inner savages.

As I again sit on Gerónimo's veranda watching the sun set with purple majesty, I am once more struck by the tranquility and peace that Cabrera offers. I take a swim in the pentagon-shaped pool; at the infinity point you can look out onto the now placid sea. A lone boat crosses the horizon.

It is at that moment that I realize why the pool is a pentagon – just like home plate – fitting for the house of a great baseball player.

As Gerónimo takes me to the bus station for the trip back to Santo Domingo, he muses that he fears that in a few years Cabrera will be a town of hotels, condos and resorts that cater to tourists. That would spoil, perhaps destroy this jewel of the Dominican Republic.

I pray to God that will not happen, both for Gerónimo's sake and mine.

Vacaciones De Familia (Family Vacation) – I have no family with me in the Dominican Republic, so when my Uncle Donald took a vacation in Puerto Plata with his girlfriend, there was no way I was going to let him come here without spending some time with him. He turned 89 recently, and, as my mother's last surviving sibling, he is special to me.

I made the four-hour trek to Puerto Plata by bus, but it is a pleasant ride over the mountains, though the bus strained several times in its ascent. As I descended into Puerto Plata, I am reminded of Atlantic City and the tourist Mecca I fear Cabrera could become.

Don't get me wrong. The Dominican Republic's top industry is tourism so the dollars, euros and yen visitors bring into the country are essential to the economy. But Puerto Plata is a tourist destination and operates like any other tourist location in the world – primarily with the goal of separating you from your money. I think what also bugs me are the people who tell me they have visited the Dominican Republic and when I ask where, they tell me Puerto Plata or Punta Cana. Both a nice places to vacation, but trust me, they really didn't visit the Dominican Republic. You can't experience this country by going to a resort that is designed to cater to your vacation needs and doesn't reflect the true character of the country.

And I knew I was in a tourist trap as soon as I asked a cabbie to take me to the resort where my uncle was staying. He overcharged me by a third – very typical of what a tourist with a presumed pocketful of cash is charged. I chastised him that “*No soy un turista,*” but paid the freight anyway to quickly get to the resort.

I had not seen Uncle Donald in a couple of years and while he walks slowly with the help of a cane, there is still determination in his stride and the old twinkle in his eyes. He, of course, looks like my mother, with the same kind smile and soft timbre in his voice, so I find myself looking into his face and seeing her.



Uncle Donald



My mother

My uncle recounts how he and his girlfriend, Barbara, were picked up at the airport by helicopter and whisked to the all-inclusive resort, which is so huge that vans and golf carts transport guests from location to location, and offers vacation opportunities for those on a shoestring and those to whom money is no object – from villas, to condos, to small hotel rooms to huge suites. A vacation

to fit any budget. My uncle is staying in a friend's time-share; the one-bedroom suite has a large living room and full kitchen, with a pull-out bed and separate bathroom, providing me with my own space for the overnight visit.

We eat dinner at a seafood restaurant on the ocean's edge, but Barbara doesn't like the food. I think the reason is that her choice – salmon – is not the deep-pink fleshed fish she recognizes from the U.S; it is a local catch with a lighter color and denser flavor that may offend some taste buds. But the company and conversation are lively and engaging.

The next morning, we sat poolside in a cabana where I offer my uncle one of my prized Cuban cigars. He had given up cigar smoking many years ago, but accepts my offer and the enjoyment that registers on his face is worth the look Barbara casts in my direction.

This was the first time Barbara and I had spent time together and I feel happy for Uncle Donald that he has her in his life. She is genuinely fond of him and he of her; they make a good couple.

Both say they want to return to the Dominican Republic sometime soon and I hope they do, providing me with a chance to show them more of the real Dominican Republic.

Perhaps Cabrera?

Jovenes Poderosos (Young Guns) – Congratulations to the Santo Domingo Junior Division team of 14- and 15-year-olds for capturing the division championship at the 18th Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) World Series in Jupiter, FL, for the first time in the history of their program. Santo Domingo won the championship with a 4-1 win against Washington, DC. The irony is that I helped create the DC RBI program back in the 1990's. The RBI program was established to increase African American participation in baseball but has expanded to other countries.



Dominican team celebrating an RBI victory

Charles S. Farrell

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