

The Latin Grammys and the ALMAs: Awards Programs, Cultural Epideictic, and Intercultural Pedagogy

Alberto González and Amy N. Heuman

Bowling Green State University

This article is not about Latino educators, nor is it about Latinos-as-students in educational settings. Our concern is Latino peoples and cultures as a curricular object—*Latino/as as course content*. This article examines 2 media texts, the Latin Grammy Awards and the ALMA Awards. We argue that the awards programs, and their didactic qualities, arise from and are a reaction to a profound social realization of the Latino presence. We begin by outlining our critical reformulation of epideictic rhetoric. Second, we provide background on the 2 programs and interpret their import as epideictic discourse. Finally, we offer some preliminary guides as instructional materials on Latino cultures.

The only thing I want to teach is what I want to learn. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 68)

This article is not about Latino educators, nor is it about Latinos-as-students in educational settings. Our concern is Latino peoples and cultures as a curricular object—*Latino/as as course content*. The focus of our critique is, as Anzaldúa (2000) intimates in the previous quotation, an occurrence of Latinos and Latinas teaching what they want to learn about themselves as a people. They teach on a stage rather than a classroom. Yet the honoring of their work in the entertainment industry is available as media texts that can be used as an instructional tool in the intercultural communication course. Our critical method is a rhetorical examination of two media texts, the Latino Grammys and the ALMA (American Latino Media Arts) Awards.

Our goal in engaging in cultural criticism is to illustrate and understand how an ethnic identity comes to life through its symbolic expressions, or more broadly, how it lives through the negotiation of its symbols. In our view, nowhere in the current social scene do we see meanings so intensely created, enacted, and contested, than among Latinos and Latinas generally, and in Latino/a media texts specifically. The intensity of play surrounding meanings in Latino cultures has rich implications for educators who rightly choose to expand student awareness and knowledge about Latino/as.

This article examines two media texts, the Latin Grammy Awards and the ALMA Awards. We argue that the awards programs, and their didactic qualities, arise from and are a reaction to a profound social realization of the Latino presence. The first section of this article outlines our critical reformulation of epideictic rhetoric. The second section provides background on the two programs and interprets their import as epideictic discourse. The final section provides some preliminary guides for the inclusion of awards shows as instructional materials on Latino cultures.

EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC AT THE LATINO GRAMMYS AND THE ALMAS

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (1932) describes three kinds of discourse—deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. Deliberative rhetoric considers the pros and cons of particular policy options and is future oriented. Forensic rhetoric weighs the guilt or innocence of an individual and concerns past events. Epideictic rhetoric directs praise or blame to an individual or condition and is very much set in the present. Epideictic rhetoric is rooted in ceremony and ritual and is relevant to cultural criticism because this oratory most closely relies upon the common knowledge and values held between speaker and audience.

According to Sheard (1996), epideictic “initially meant simply ‘lecture’ and denoted discourse appropriate within pedagogical or ritual contexts” (p. 766). We continue the association of epideictic with pedagogy. But because speeches of praise or blame focused so centrally on existing values, epideictic rhetoric became associated with a kind of speechmaking “whose principle of operation is amplification” (Poulakos, 1987, p. 324). Music award ceremonies amplify the talents and accomplishments of award recipients. At the Latino Grammy and ALMA awards not only are the performers praised, ethnic identity is amplified as well.

Aristotle viewed rhetoric primarily as a tool for persuasion, whereas we view rhetoric from a perspective that accommodates differences and fragmentation (McKerrow, 1989), as well as the possibility of *communitas* (Turner, 1982). For us, rhetorical communication is the symbolic attempt to facilitate any number of surface goals—adaptation, negotiation, mediation, participation—with the deeper

goal of renewing, (re)creating, opposing, or preserving the “sacred centers” of the culture: identity, community, motive, power, and value. Hence, the Latino Grammys and the ALMAs are able to achieve at least three important rhetorical goals—participate in, or perform, Latino identity to preserve it; mediate Latino identities to the non-Latino audiences; and call into question mainstream media practices that exclude Latinos and perpetuate negative stereotypes about Latinos. Simultaneously, the award programs create teaching materials by which educators can present Latino cultural sensibilities in the classroom.

Finally, we view education as a display of epideictic rhetoric. Giroux (1992) observes that “the sphere of higher education represents an important public culture that cultivates and produces stories of how to live ethically and politically; its institutions reproduce selected values” (p. 91). These “stories” are celebrations (or amplifications) not only of canonical endurance but of cultural emphasis. By what gets included and excluded, education symbolically directs praise to particular methods of discovery and analysis (and their products) and blame to others.

LATIN GRAMMYS AND THE ALMAS: OPPORTUNITY AND DISCORD

At the 42nd Annual Grammy Awards in February 2000, actor Jimmy Smits announced that the first-ever Latino Grammy Awards would be televised by CBS in September. Under the auspices of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, Inc., the Latino Grammys would include 40 award categories that would both parallel and depart from the familiar Grammy awards.

On one level, the Latin Grammys display many similarities to the traditional Grammy Awards. The basic structure is maintained. Participation is restricted to Latin Academy members. Hosts facilitate introductions of presenters and supply transitional commentary before and after commercial breaks. The hosts provide comic relief. In the case of the Latin Grammys, Jimmy Smits, Andy Garcia, and Gloria Estefan engage in typical entertainment industry hyperbole (“music will always unite us,” says Jennifer Lopez), frequently used the word *hot*, and traded sexually suggestive comments. Grammy winners had one minute to thank their God, their fans, family, and management firms. Those that attempted to speak longer, like Celia Cruz and Shakira, were musically interrupted.

But on another level, resistance and disjuncture remain possible. José Limón (1998) often isolates collisions between hegemonic norms and artistic expression. As he articulates an emerging postmodernity in South Texas through an interpretation of the late Tejana singer, Selena, he states,

Conjunto has been celebrated for its “resistive” stance against Anglo America and what has been seen as a “colluding” Mexican middle class, and Selena’s performance

of it always contained a gender contradiction, since this musical form traditionally features (almost exclusively) men as performers, male-centered lyrics, and male-dominated dancing. (p. 179)

If Selena's performances of Tejano music contain gender contradictions, then the Latin Grammys and the ALMAs contain ethnic contradictions. Early in the Latin Grammys, the three hosts are introduced, and while Smits and Estefan are clearly exuberant, Garcia remarks that, at CBS, Latinos were only known as "You gave the 'Survivor' timeslot to who?" In that moment, Garcia emphasizes the rarity of the show and their roles as hosts.

The Latin Grammy premiere draws 7.5 million viewers (compared to 28 million viewers for the Grammy Awards broadcast in February), and ranks 9th of 11 shows rated in that timeslot. It is the highest rated show for that evening among viewers 18 to 34, and the show draws strong audiences in Miami, San Antonio, and Los Angeles (Ocaña, 2000, p. 16). Further, it draws over three times as many viewers as the leading Spanish-language awards program, Univision's "*Premio lo Nuestro*" ("Battlin' Latin Music Awards").

Several months after Smits's announcement at the Grammys, in April, the ALMA awards show is recorded. The ALMA Awards is broadcast on June 17, 2000. ALMA was formed by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) to recognize Latinos in English-language television and film (NCLR, 2000). The ALMA Awards (formerly called the Bravo Awards) were first broadcast on ABC in 1998.

The social significance of these awards programs is not lost on industry observers and content producers. Raul Yzaguirre, 1998 president of the NCLR, states that the ALMA Award program "is not just for Hispanics. We're saying, 'This is who we are as a people,' and it behooves Joe Average to know the Hispanic community, because we're going to be your neighbor, your employee, your customer" (Doss, 1998, p. F47). The *Daily News* calls the Latin Grammys "groundbreaking" and congratulates CBS for airing the program live and including commercials that are completely in Spanish (Kissell, 2000). *Billboard* notes that, even though the Latin Grammys "fell short on several counts," the show is an experiment that "had interesting flares of diversity" (Cobo, 2000, p. 55).

These programs, however, are not without critics. For example, even as the Latin Grammy show is formally announced, some artists voice a fear of segregation within the media arts industry (Valdes-Rodriguez, 1999). It does not go unnoticed that when Jimmy Smits announced at the "regular" Grammy Awards that the Latin Grammys would occur, this was part of an introduction to the Latin segment of the show, a segment in which two of its performers, Marc Anthony and Ricky Martin, were nominated in mainstream pop categories, not Latin categories.

Many oppose the pop-dominated performances. Delgado (2000) comments that the song selection for pop diva Christina Aguilera is inappropriate for the show. She writes that, "The imposition of that style on Latin standards is a trav-

esty" (p. 2). Carlos Bermudez, a producer for Telemundo, complains that the ALMAs recognize work only in English-language media (Beltran, 2000). Further, some critics observe that the paucity of Latino performers makes for repeat and predictable winners, which makes for uninteresting viewing. One such critic, Bianco (1999), in *USA Today*, states, "The ALMA Awards plays more like an unintended exposé of TV's shameful treatment of Hispanic actors and audiences" (p. 12D).

A major conflict occurs when Mexican artists associated with Fonovisa boycott the Latin Grammys. They claim that the Grammys fail to recognize Mexican styles both in nominations and in invitations to perform at the ceremony. Though Fonovisa garnered three Grammy wins, the awards were refused (Snow, 2000; Werner, 2000).

Others think that the Latin Grammys are a vehicle to promote Latin music empresario Emilio Estefan, Jr. Gilbert Moreno, general manager of Fonovisa, states that the Latin Grammys "is a party between Emilio Estefan and Sony ... The Latin Grammys definitely don't represent Latin artists at all" (Valdes-Rodriguez, 2000, p. F3). Estefan was nominated for six awards. Controversy surrounds a \$25,000-a-table fund-raiser held by C. Michael Greene, then head of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, when donors discovered that funds are not tax-deductible and that the Academy does not support charitable causes (Associated Press, 2000). The "Person of the Year" honoree at the fund-raiser was Emilio Estefan (Philips, 2000).

It is clear that the Latin Grammys and the ALMAs are an important development in the entertainment industry. Set against the backdrop of ongoing accusations against the major television networks that they mis- and underrepresent Latino/as, the phenomenal successes of several Latino and Latina performers, and the 2000 U.S. Census, these award shows were poised to create awareness and change perceptions in the ways Latinos and their allies had long anticipated.

EPIDEICTIC DISCOURSES AT THE LATIN GRAMMYS AND THE ALMAS

The two programs make possible the expressions of nostalgia, nationalistic pride, and affirmations of ethnic identity. For example, Celia Cruz thanks the late Tito Puente and others as she accepts her award and invokes a magical and inspired Havana. After receiving an award, Juan Luis Guerra acknowledges his native Dominican Republic. Shakira acknowledges that Columbia is racked by unrest. She states, "I dedicate this award to that country that is going through difficult times right now, but that never, never forgets how to smile. *Para ti, Colombia!*"

Two major discourses emerge that compose the epideictic rhetoric at the Latin Grammys and the ALMAs: the discourse of unity and the discourse of difference.

Discourse of Unity

Early in the ALMAs, Jennifer Lopez states, "The Latino culture has always been here. Our culture is not a fad. We have always been here and we will always be here." In one respect this statement reveals a unified presence or coming together of Latinos while also serving as a reference to the underrepresentation of Latino/as within the media and U.S. culture. This performative moment reminds us of the historical context that surrounds the emergence of Latino award shows on prime time television.

Similarly, early in the Latin Grammys, Antonio Banderas lists many Central and South American countries represented by the evening's nominees. They are, he says, "As Americans would say, 'Latinos.'" The Latinos, he continues, "Are all joined by a common passion—sex." He quickly corrects himself, "Music! Music!" It is the sound, he concludes, "That celebrates what it means to be Latino."

Whether it is Reba McEntire and Jon Secada singing Anne Murray's hit song, "We're All Alone" or Edward James Olmos calling for unity among all people, the 2000 ALMA Awards serves as a performative stage for a discourse of unity. As Reba sings in English and Secada sings in Spanish the coming together of Anglo and Latino cultures is a symbolic blending aimed at unity not only among Latino cultures but also among non-Latino and Latino cultures. This point is made clear as Edward James Olmos says, "There's only one race and that's the human race. The rest is culture."

Actress Denise Richards also engages in discourse that aims to unify yet also magnifies the differences among cultural groups. She says, "The millenium was known for many things. Most significantly for turning a vastly diverse planet into a thriving global village." She goes on to note key roles and diverse occupations that Latino actors have played. Then, she encourages us to come together by saying, "The members [Latino actors] gave us much more than a memorable performance. They point us to a future where we embrace our differences as much as the similarities." Statements such as this, in our view, appear to be culturally sensitive on the surface yet this view tends to gloss over the differences rather than "embrace" them. In this sense, this discourse suggests a particular kind of unity based upon mainstream standards of blending together as one world.

In contrast, talk show host Cristina calls for Latinos to come together as one people for political activism. As Smits quotes her, "We are a diverse culture with great pride in our respective countries of origin. But it will be our ability to unite through common ground issues like education, health, and immigration that will strengthen our position as members of mainstream America. It can happen, it must happen." Both Richards and Cristina invoke visions of unity even as they locate unifying motives in social unity and political unity, respectively.

Discourse of Difference

The discourse of difference operates on two levels. Latinos magnify differences among Latinos and differences from non-Latinos. For example, Jimmy Smits and Gloria Estefan describe the differences between the Latin Grammys and the “February” Grammys. “At the Latin Grammys, you see Christina Aguilera’s belly button,” says Estefan. “At the February Grammys, you see Luciano Pavorati’s belly button,” responds Smits. “At the Latin Grammys, you have the best congas money can buy,” continues Estefan. “At the February Grammys,” says Smits, “you have Britney Spears.” The differences between the Spanish and English speaking communities are further emphasized when Smits renames the CBS network, “*Con Bilingual Savor*.”

At the same time, differences among Latinos are emphasized. Smits references the “spectrum of Latin artists from around the world.” Before several of the categories are announced, the celebrity performers list the countries represented by the nominees.

Hector Elizondo, of the television series *Chicago Hope*, is quite clear in highlighting how he sees his Latino heritage as being “different.” He states, “I am a Latin from Manhattan. A *Nuyorican*.” This playful expression serves as an introduction to his acceptance speech in which he foregrounds the importance of cultural values. He mentions that he learned these values in his home, in his neighborhood, and he thanks his culture for instilling these values in him. He notes that these three—culture, neighborhood, and family—have all informed the values that he holds close. About this he says, “Life is not fair, don’t be a victim, whatever happens success is really measured by your capacity to love, if you don’t have that you don’t have anything, be useful and give back, and no matter what happens have good posture.” In this moment, he affirms his identity as a *Nuyorican* and amplifies the distinctiveness of this identity.

In this same way, Laura Cerón of the television series *ER*, highlights the difference between Latinos and non-Latinos by amplifying the strong bond she has with her family. In one way this is stereotypic, yet she communicates this with sincerity and appreciation. She thanks her father, mother, brothers, and sisters—“David, Rosa, Victor, Gabi, and Marina”—and then all of her nieces and nephews by name. As she thanks each family member by name the crowd laughs in recognition of offering gratitude to *la familia* as they relate to her desire to do so. She also thanks and makes mention of her neighborhood and home town of Elgin, Illinois. Both acknowledgments point to her unique experiences yet connected experiences as a Latina woman, while Christina Aguilera’s acceptance speech, on the other hand, does not have any culturally specific moments of recognition.

Moreover, Laura Cerón offers up a critique of the industry (as do many actors) as she thanks the NCLR. She quips about the industry’s lack of Latino/a representation by saying, “Even if they run out of people to nominate” (referring to NCLR). She then quickly notes that that will change as long as we (Latino/a actors) keep working.

A similar critique pointing to difference can be found in the opening skit of the ALMA awards. Paul Rodriguez and another man, referred to as a "Puerto Rican boy from the Bronx," opened the 2000 ALMA Awards with a *Fantasy Island* skit. Rodriguez is Mr. Roark and the other guy is Tattoo. At one point, Rodriguez says that he feels like he is in a "fantasy world" and Tattoo responds by saying that this is the real world. Rodriguez banters back by saying that it feels like a fantasy world because Latinos are on prime time television. This is clearly a critique of the industry's lack of representation when it comes to Latinos in the media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY

According to Clark (1996), critical rhetoric is located in "some current, local contingency" (p. 111). The course on Intercultural Communication (IC) is our current, local contingency. In this section, we share some precautions and opportunities for the use of Latino awards programs as a teaching tool in the IC course.

While course objectives vary, the goals of the IC course typically are to apply communication theories to understanding intercultural interaction and enhance skills for communicating in intercultural contexts. Topics in the course usually include: language differences, nonverbal differences, ethics for IC, intercultural conflict, dealing with culture shock, meaning, worldview, and so forth. Course activities usually include role-playing, listening to guest speakers, presenting on cultures other than one's own, and watching videos.

Though the course has fairly identifiable goals and content, the delivery of this content varies widely. There is no orthodoxy for the IC course. Many of us who teach IC courses reflect on a variety of issues: What elements in our own experiences shape how we present the cultural Other? What authors are "credible" interpreters of culture? How do we counter the (often unexpressed) goal of most of our students, namely, to gain intercultural knowledge for economic gain? (We often call this the, "How can I understand you so that I can sell to you" motive.) What do we really want our students to do after having taken the IC course?

As a pedagogical tool, the award shows provide occasions for us to think beyond stereotypes or expedient constructions of Latino/as. Since the representations of Latino identities within the programs are historical, contradictory and complex, aiming for a nuanced, pluralistic view of Latino cultures is one way to move beyond stereotypes. At the same time, the programs present a nostalgic, glamorized depiction of Latino/as that has little to do with how Latino/as actually live and with who they might think they are.

Given these polar tendencies, the thoughtful IC instructor might decide that use of the videos is too risky. How does one teach cultural acceptance and interactional compatibility with an artifact that is so incredibly flawed? How does an instructor,

after all, get past Andy Garcia telling Jimmy Smits that he will take Gloria Estefan offstage and “show her my bongos”?

Our solution returns to epideictic rhetoric. The instructor is a performer of values and a conductor of emphasis who can see the advantage to these polar tendencies. As Conquergood (1985) states of the cultural performance: “The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite” (p. 9). With this insight, we offer the following questions that might be helpful when considering Latino epideictic rhetoric in the IC course:

- What interpretations of Latino/a experiences are conveyed through this performance text? How do these interpretations cohere or contradict and what do these imply about Latino cultures?
- What does the performance text make possible for participants? What does the program allow the participants to do that is important to them?
- What are the distinctive ways that Latino/as amplify or magnify as they honor one another?
- What historical and political context have you provided for understanding and discussing struggles surrounding language, migration, education, class mobility, and inclusion in political and media systems?
- Are you prepared to discuss language loyalty and strategic bilingualism?
- What Latino/a cultural meanings appear to be renewed, (re)created, opposed, or preserved?
- What concepts are needed to understand the performance text from within its Latino/a sensibility?

For IC instructors as well as instructors who bring a cultural focus to other disciplines, these considerations are necessary if they are to address these issues in responsible and ethical ways. As a starting point, an IC instructor should ask her/himself these questions as a means of accessing their own preparedness in engaging with these materials. Another option is for the IC instructor to utilize several of these questions as springboards into class discussion upon viewing these award shows. Both options allow for an exploration and discussion of ethnic identities that recognize the multifaceted nature of Latino identities and cultures. Being prepared for such as discussion, through exploring the above considerations should be the goal of an instructor who desires to bring this course content into their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Like the creation of this journal, the Latino Grammys and the ALMA awards are responses to intense curiosity about Latinos and Latinas. The shows function as

epideictic rhetoric because their primary purpose is to honor various film and musical artists and performers. As we have illustrated, the key strategies for amplification are expressions of unity and difference.

Educators also are implicated in epideictic since their work largely honors academic disciplines (just as in this article we honor communication studies) and their methods of discovery and analysis. In this sense, educators must examine the ways in which they are engaging in course materials within their fields of study. Part of this examination requires asking questions of ourselves as well as our students as a means of engaging this course content in responsible and ethical ways.

The use of Latino/a epideictic rhetoric in the IC classroom should be approached with an appreciation of history and a disregard for coherence. Latino/as as course content must never be finalized, but always must remain an open dialogue. It is our hope that we have provided an entry point for such dialogue.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2000). *Interviews/entrevistas*. New York: Routledge.
- Aristotle. (1932). *The rhetoric* (L. Cooper, Trans.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Associated Press. (2000, September 13). *Fund-raising tactics for Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Science questioned*. Retrieved from http://web.lexisnexis.com/universe/doc...1&_md5=31ca5ea4a22435e7e6db1a38e36c9a0c
- Beltran, C. R. (2000, April 24). Counterpunch: Shows in Spanish also deserve ALMA notice. *Los Angeles Times*, p. F3.
- Bianco, R. (1999, June 3). Critic's corner. *USA Today*, p. 12D.
- Clark, N. (1996). The critical servant: An Isocratean contribution to critical rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82, 111-124.
- Cobo, L. (2000, September 23). Latin Grammys have everyone talking. *Billboard*, 55-56.
- Conquergood, D. (1985). Performing as a moral act: Ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance. *Literature in Performance*, 5, 1-13.
- Cossette, P. (Executive Producer). (2000, September 13). *First Annual Latin Grammy Awards*. New York: Columbia Broadcast System.
- Delgado, C. F. (2000, September 21). Double cross: Is prime time really ready for Latin music? *Miami New Times*. Retrieved March 18, 2001, from <http://web.lexisnexis.com/universe/doc...1&md5=f92126093e8f26c158f67222afad1381>
- Doss, Y. C. (1998, June 4). Latino awards battle stereotypes. *Los Angeles Times*, p. F47.
- Ehrlich, K., & Yzaguirre, R. (Executive Producers). (2000, June 17). *The 2000 American Latino Media Arts Awards*. New York: American Broadcast Company.
- Giroux, H. A. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Kissell, R. (2000, Sept. 15). Latin Grammys bow with bland ratings. *Daily Variety*, p. 4.
- Limón, J. E. (1998). *American encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States and the erotics of culture*. Boston: Beacon.
- McKerrow, R. E. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. *Communication Monographs*, 56, 91-111.
- National Council of La Raza. (2000). Retrieved March 20, 2001, from <http://www.nclr.org>.

- Ocaña, D. (2000, November). Latin Grammys premiere: Will more Hispanic related shows appeal to a large audience? *Hispanic*, 13, 16.
- Philips, C. (2000, September 13). Latin Grammy fund raising puts spotlight on academy; music industry: Proceeds from a \$25,000-a-table benefit will not go to charity but to the group controlled by C. Michael Greene. *Los Angeles Times*, Financial Desk A1.
- Poulakos, T. (1987). Isocrates' use of narrative in the Evagoras: Epideictic rhetoric and moral action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73, 317-328.
- Sheard, C. M. (1996). The public value of epideictic rhetoric. *College English*, 58, 765-787.
- Snow, S. (2000, September 29). Morning Report. *Los Angeles Times*, p. F2.
- Valdes-Rodriguez, A. (1999, June 25). New Latin Grammys introduced. *Los Angeles Times*, p. F2.
- Valdes-Rodriguez, A. (2000, August 30). Controversy over Latin Grammy nominees: Awards independent label claims academy shuns Mexican regional artists. *Los Angeles Times*, p. F3.
- Werner, E. (2000, September 13). *Some artists boycott inaugural Latin Grammys to protest perceived bias*. Retrieved March 12, 2001, from <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/doc...1&-smd5=468c5475f9d6d480df69f6fb11e654b>

