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There is Virtue and Variation in the Expression of Politeness

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Abstract

This paper combines two conference presentations of 2019: “The Virtuous Politeness” at the 29th Christian Association of World Languages (CAWL) Conference at Baylor University and “When One Size Does Not Fit All: Teaching Variation in the Use of Politeness” at the Kuyers/International Network for Christian Higher Education (INCHE) Conference at Calvin University. In light of studies of politeness as a social practice and a virtue, the author conducted a small survey of adults at institutions of higher education in and around two places: Orange City, Iowa, USA and Bahía Blanca, Argentina. The survey results not only reinforce already-existing evidence that politeness is present in everyday life, affecting the way we relate to others, it is also situational and culturally dependent. Politeness is applied and interpreted according to norms and conventions that vary not only between English- and Spanish-speaking cultures but even within the Spanish-speaking world. Gonzalez concludes that it is important to offer United States students of the Spanish language a wider view of politeness that will better prepare them for encountering diverse forms and expressions that could be interpreted as polite or impolite when studying or living abroad.

About the Author

Dr. Diana Gonzalez' main interests revolve around how languages function and behave, especially in fields related to language in society and meaning. She has presented on those topics at national conferences of the North American Christian Foreign Language Association. Prior to joining Northwestern's faculty, Dr. Gonzalez served with Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, teaching at the Ricardo Palma University in Lima, Perú. Originally from Argentina, she also taught Spanish and German at Dordt College, as well as graduate and undergraduate linguistic courses at the universities of Chihuahua and Zacatecas in Mexico, and worked as an editor for a publishing ministry in Costa Rica.

There is Virtue and Variation in the Expression of Politeness

by Diana Gonzalez, Ph.D.

*Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*
Proverbs 16:24 (NRSV)

Introduction

Koko was a gorilla—and a very unusual one, who learned American Sign Language. Her teacher was Penny Patterson, who started the process of teaching her as her Ph.D. project. With time, Koko was able to learn about one thousand words in sign language and understand almost two thousand spoken words. Sometimes people wrote to Patterson with questions they would like Koko to answer. One of those questions was about the meaning of life. When she finally asked Koko this question, Koko signed the following answer: “People be polite,” “People have goodness.”

Politeness research has received a lot of attention in the last thirty years, and it has especially intensified in the Spanish-speaking world in the last two decades. During the winter semester of 2017 and spring semester of 2018, I was on sabbatical in Argentina, where I carried out research contrasting politeness between the city of Orange City in northwest Iowa and the city of Bahía Blanca in southeast Argentina.

In Bahía Blanca, at the Universidad Nacional del Sur, I participated in an ongoing research project about “communicative styles and pragmatic variation in verbal interaction in Bonaerense Spanish: constructing identities, values, and beliefs.”

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When I returned to Northwestern in the fall of 2018, it was my turn to teach Spanish 377 “Enhancing the Study Abroad Experience.” This class takes place online during students’ study-abroad semester with the intention of helping them reflect on their experiences, especially in relation to faith and vocation. In her final project, one student commented about her very negative impression of a waiter in a café when she first started attending that coffee shop. However, this changed after a humorous situation involving her and a good friend. Immediately after reading her story, my readings at that time led me to think of what Henk Haverkate had referred to in his writings about culture in Spain. Spanish culture does not ascribe too much value to the particular formulae for expressing gratitude as answers to routine acts which are performed as part of a pre-established interactional pattern. Good examples of this are the interactions between waiters and customers, conductors and passengers, and shop assistants and shoppers (Haverkate, 2003).

I was aware that in previous years my students and I never had talked specifically about politeness or how it is expressed differently in different Spanish-speaking countries. Students were mostly used to the ways in which interactions took place in their own culture or their experiences with Mexican restaurant owners and employees in the area. How could they have expected a different behavior in Spain?

This reflection provided me the idea for this paper and the intention of incorporating aspects of my research into future classes.

What is politeness?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, politeness is “behavior that is respectful and considerate of other people.” The suggested synonyms are “courtesy, civility, respect, deference, good breeding, manners, good manners, chivalry, gallantry, gentility, cultivation, grace, urbanity” (2019).

In this sense, Bravo (2005) affirms:

Politeness is a communicative activity that fosters a positive interpersonal relation between interlocutors. This activity follows norms and social codes that, supposedly, are known by speakers and considers in all contexts a benefit for the interlocutor. The effect of this activity in interaction is interpersonally positive. (pp. 33-34)

Culpeper (2011) sees it as an interpersonal attitude:

Politeness involves (a) an attitude comprised of particular positive evaluative beliefs about particular behaviours in particular social contexts, b) the activation of that attitude by those particular in-context behaviours, and c) the actual or potential description of those in-context-behaviours and/or person who produce them as *polite, courteous, considerate*, etc. (p. 421)

Leech (2014) observes that to be polite is “to speak or behave in such a way as to (appear to) give benefit or value not to yourself but to the other person(s), especially the person(s) you are conversing with” and adds that politeness is “communicative altruism” (p. 3).

Hernández Flores (2004) states that politeness not only intends to benefit the hearer's image, but also the speaker's, since being polite confirms both images.

According to Haverkate (1994), politeness largely depends on the hearer's interpretation, independent of the communicative intention of the speaker. Consequently, cultural differences could cause a misunderstanding of the other person's intentions (Wierzbicka, 1985; Fant, 1989).

As expressed above, politeness does not reside specifically in linguistic forms and behaviors of interlocutors but rather in the interpretation of these; they are not idiosyncratic but based on a moral order, “a set of expectancies through which social actions and meanings are recognizable as such” and open to moral evaluation (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 7). Thus, politeness may be considered a social practice.

In this regard, Bourdieu says in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* that social practices are a product of *habitus* and, therefore, to some extent intelligible, foreseeable, and taken for granted (1977, p. 80). Human behavior in the social world, i.e. the social practice, can be understood as a dynamic relationship between individual actions, rules, and practices in different areas of culture (Beames & Telford, 2013).

In relation to assumptions and practices taken for granted, Schein (1984) affirms that,

To really understand a culture and to ascertain more completely the group's values and overt behaviour, it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious but actually determine how group members perceive, think and feel. (p. 4)

Since culture is transmitted from parents to their children and is learned as the person

increases their socialization, this becomes part of that person's identity and is noticed in their use of language as well as in their interpretation of politeness, which is culturally specific, as Kádár and Haugh (2013) affirm: “Since values, perceptions, and the like appear to vary across cultures, politeness also seems to be a culture-specific phenomenon” (p. 231). Likewise, Barros García (2011) states that politeness is the adaptation of our communicative acts tied to the expectations created by a culture for that particular situation.

For this reason, even different groups inside the same culture can have different views of what it means to be polite. Kádár and Haugh (2013) mention that if you asked someone to identify some manifestations of politeness, you would collect answers like “remembering to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ (e.g. in many varieties of English), using honorifics (e.g. in Japanese), or calling people by familial titles when greeting them (e.g. in Chinese)” (p. 251).

It is also important to address the concept of cultural premise here. Diana Bravo established that it is part of the speaker's cultural competence, and it signals the knowledge of social rules and conventions that are current in that community. Furthermore, she affirms that members of different linguistic communities share a knowledge of the world which can be noticed in their social image (Bravo, 1999). Therefore, evaluating a behavior as polite or impolite is tied to expectations and behaviors shared in that particular society about how an interaction must take place and how interpersonal relations need to be, namely the sociocultural hypothesis (Bravo, 2003).

The concept of face.

According to Erving Goffman (1967), *face* can be defined as “the positive social value

a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated [*sic*] in terms of approved social attributes” (p. 5). He continues by saying that “A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which the contact with others allows him” (p. 5). In this way, if his expectations are fulfilled, he ‘feels good;’ if not, he ‘feels bad’ or ‘feels hurt’ (p. 6).

This notion of *face* relates to individual as well as social identity. On the one hand, it is the qualities characterizing a person; on the other hand, it is a series of perceptions about who that person is in relation to others and the social system. *Face* includes the desires to be satisfied through other peoples' actions. Consequently, because of its fragility, cooperation among the interactants is necessary. It is essential, then, that each interlocutor collaborates in preserving *face* and avoiding its damage in order to prevent generating a conflict. For this reason, politeness has played a substantial role in preserving *face*.

Based on the concept of *face*, Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a theory about how this can be affected positively or negatively, which has been influential in the study of politeness. Positive face represents the speaker's desire to be appreciated, approved, and favored by others; negative face corresponds to the speaker's desire of suffering no impositions, nobody interfering in his private affairs, and not being bothered or abused. In consequence, positive politeness relates to favoring the interlocutor's positive face, and negative politeness has to do with issues that affect his negative face and acknowledging the presence of face-threatening acts.

Brown and Levinson presented their theory as universal since speakers have the need

of protecting their image. However, their model received a large amount of criticism for its ethnocentrism. For example, Bravo (1996) proposed to replace positive and negative politeness with categories of *autonomy* and *affiliation*, which take into account different sociocultural contexts. In addition, these categories are initially empty and are being filled with appropriate sociocultural content. The author defines them as follows:

1. ***autonomy***: It refers to those behaviours relative to how a person wishes to see him or herself and to be seen by others as an individual with a “contour” of its own within a group.
2. ***affiliation***: It refers to those behaviours relative to how a person wishes to see him or herself and be seen by others with features that identify him or her with the group.

In some communities, wishes of freedom of action and non-imposition that, according to Brown and Levinson, are part of the negative face, would be placed in the autonomy category, and those of approval and appreciation would be located in the affiliation category.

Scollon and Scollon, in their book *Intercultural Communications* (2001), replace the terms positive and negative with the terms *involvement* and *independence*, since positive and negative could be associated with good and bad, respectively. *Involvement* refers to the interlocutors’ “right and need to be considered a normal, contributing or supporting member of society” (p. 48). Instances of involvement are asserting reciprocity and closeness to other members of the society, attending to others’ interests and wants, using in-group identity markers, etc. *Independence* highlights the individual nature of interlocutors. Instances of

independence are formality, indirectness, providing the interlocutor with options, etc.

Proximity and distance cultures.

Among others, Haverkate (2004) refers to the difference between proximity and distance cultures. During communicative interactions, cultures of proximity prefer the use of positive or enhancing/appreciation politeness, while cultures of distance prefer the use of negative or mitigation politeness. It could be said, then, that in proximity cultures affiliation, or “confianza” (mutual trust) are more important while in the distance ones, mitigation and similar strategies prevail.

However, it is necessary to talk about different degrees regarding proximity and distance. For this reason, Briz (2010) states that this distinction can be understood not as opposition but as a gradual continuum. For example, when mitigation is used as a strategy to approach another person, distance between both interlocutors exists already or is established at that moment. Therefore, mitigation as a polite strategy is more frequent in cultures of lesser proximity. Examples of mitigation are predicates that refer to mental states, like “I think...;” modal adverbs like “probably” and “maybe;” degree modifiers like “a kind of;” and tag questions like “isn't it?”

Another characteristic differentiating both cultures is favoring or rejecting simultaneous speech. In cultures where distance predominates, turn-taking is respected and simultaneous speech is considered an interruption, that is, a manifestation of impoliteness. However, in cultures where proximity is more valued, simultaneous speech is seen as a token of solidarity and collaboration (Haverkate, 2004; Briz, 2010).

Briz (2010) insists on a continuum between proximity and distance and says that those are not discrete concepts but gradual and relative. They are gradual because in between both types of cultures there are intermediate degrees of distance and proximity, and they are relative because they vary according to communicative situation, use, and user.

Methodology

To collect data for my research in both communities considered for this study, I used the testing of social habits. This type of instrument is commonly used to survey data when studying politeness (Hernández Flores, 2003; Boretti, 2003; Piatti, 2003; Barros García, 2011; Julián, 2015).

Moreno Fernández (1990) classified these tests among strategies of indirect surveying, since their purpose is to collect data that speakers unknowingly provide. In (im)politeness research, they are used to gather information regarding what the speaker conceives as (im)politeness and contexts in which this occurs in order to get descriptions and interpretations of it. Answers by themselves cannot be considered equal to what the speaker would say in that situation or how he or she would behave, but they express what they consider it is right to say (Hernández Flores, 2003).

However, the information collected is valuable to establish premises about sociocultural characteristics of the material gathered and is an important complement for its interpretation. Perceptions of speakers regarding utterances and behavior which they consider (im)polite constitute important guidelines to understand social values and their hierarchy. As Wiertzicka

(1985) affirms, “different pragmatic norms reflect different hierarchies of values characteristic of different cultures” (p. 173).

For this research, questionnaires were composed in English first and then translated into Spanish. In Orange City, they were distributed online and answered in English; in Bahía Blanca, they were distributed on paper and answered in Spanish.

Those who answered the survey in Orange City were students or faculty of Northwestern College and a small group from Dordt College. In Bahía Blanca, most people surveyed were students or faculty at the Universidad del Sur and the School of Nursing.

The first part of the questionnaire registered demographic data: age, gender, city of residence, studies, workplace; the second one asked a set of questions about what the person surveyed considered as (im)politeness, how they defined it, concrete examples of polite/impolite behavior, and if they believed politeness to be necessary in society and why; the third one presented a series of scenarios in which the surveyed is asked to write exactly what they would say if they were in that situation.

Scenarios were related to different types of speech acts. According to John Searle's (1976) classification, speech acts can be representative, assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. For my research, I focused on expressive, directive, and commissive speech acts:

- **Expressive speech acts** express how the speaker feels about the situation. For example: thanks, compliments, complaints.

- **Directive speech acts** try to make the addressee perform an action. For example: petitions, invitations.
- **Commissive speech acts** commit the speaker to doing something in the future. For example: invitations, refusals.

Regarding the characteristics of the two communities where the survey was given, Orange City is a town of about 6200 residents located in Sioux County, in the northwest region of the state of Iowa, United States of America. The city was founded by Dutch immigrant colonists in 1870. The town’s Dutch origins can be noticed in many family names and in the annual Tulip Festival. This is a celebration in which almost the whole community takes part and the city receives thousands of visitors. Also, the influence of Protestant religiosity has permeated the culture, and it is visible in the considerable number of churches in relation to the number of residents, as well as in the presence of Northwestern College and Christian primary and secondary schools alongside public schools. The city of Bahía Blanca is located in the southwest of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It has over 300,000 residents and was founded in the nineteenth century. Its population consolidated around 1880 with a great influx of immigrants of different nationalities, mostly Italians, but also Spaniards, Britons, French, Jews, Greeks, etc. Occasionally, collectivities of immigrant descent participate in civic celebrations representing their countries or regions of origin. The main religion in Bahía Blanca is Roman Catholic, but there is a growing number of churches of other confessions. In addition, there are religious educational institutions at all levels, but these are greatly outnumbered by public educational institutions.

Results of Politeness Research in Consideration to the Definition of Politeness and its Expression in Diverse Scenarios in Orange City and Bahía Blanca

Before referring to the expression of politeness in diverse scenarios, I would like to mention some aspects regarding the definition of politeness and why it is necessary which I collected for the first part of my study. According to answers gathered in Orange City as well as in Bahía Blanca, politeness could be considered a virtue.

Samples of answers collected in Orange City:

- *Showing unconditional respect towards other.*
- *The ability to act thoughtfully and carefully with other's best interest in mind.*
- *Politeness is being respectful to the feelings and beliefs of other people.*
- *Acting/speaking in a way that puts thought of other before oneself.*
- *Without respect people's feelings get hurt; also demonstrates to a person that they matter in this world and are worth talking/interacting with in an honorable way.*
- *It is a show of respect that the other person is a valued member of society. Plus, we are told in God's Word to love our neighbors as ourselves and I believe politeness is part of that love.*
- *We should show a consideration for every human being, as Christians and humanitarians.*

Sample of answers collected in Bahía Blanca:¹

- *Ser amable y atento con otras personas.* [Being kind and attentive to others.]
- *Es una forma de trato amable con las demás personas.* [It is a kind way of treating others.]
- *Tener buenos modales, ser amable en el trato.* [To have manners, to be kind in the way you treat others.]
- *Actitud amable de una persona hacia otra.* [To be nice to others.]
- *La cortesía es una virtud.* [Politeness is a virtue.]
- *Es necesaria para mantener la armonía.* [It is necessary for keeping the peace.]
- *Porque todos debemos tener bondad y amabilidad para con el otro.* [Because we should be good and kind to others.]
- *Para lograr un buen trato entre las personas.* [So that people treat each other well.]
- *Para mantener valores.* [To uphold values.]
- *Es necesaria para un mundo mejor.* [It is needed for a better world.]

Virtue is defined as good moral habits, a disposition to the good, being for the good, which politeness is also considered to be: a habit of “communicative altruism,” beneficial for the interlocutors or, as the answers collected defined it, “It helps people feel valued and makes sure

¹ The translation into English of the answers collected in Bahía Banca was done in collaboration with students of Spanish 337: Advanced Translation II.

that people are looking out for others and caring about those people and their feelings,” “We should show a consideration for every human being, as Christians and humanitarians.”

Aquinas states that virtue disposes the subject to good acts. The same is expressed in answers collected in both communities affirming that politeness is being friendly, attentive to others, and necessary because we all should have goodness and be kind to the other. It is “the ability to act thoughtfully and carefully with other’s best interest in mind,” “being both passively and actively considerate to someone” (Floyd).

Virtue is defined as well as "behaviour showing high moral standards" (Oxford English Dictionary), which implies an idea of moral obligation. The same can be observed in the following answers: “We should show a consideration for every human being, as Christians and humanitarians,” and “...we are told in God's Word to love our neighbors as ourselves and I believe politeness is part of that love.”

As mentioned before in this paper, politeness is a social practice and, as such, a product of habit that implies moral evaluation and a set of expectancies whose purpose is mainly to be of benefit for the hearer but also for the speaker. It cares for a positive communicative interaction and to maintain harmonious relationships in society.

In addition, politeness intentionality is promoting good in interactions, values, and attitudes, since it is grounded in showing respect and amiability to the other.

Therefore, there is virtue in being polite.

Expression of politeness in diverse scenarios in Orange City and Bahía Blanca.

Scenario 1: You are invited to dinner. You don't like the food, but you eat it anyway.

The hostess offers you more... what would you say?

Sample of answers in Orange City:

- *No, thank you.*
- *I am full, thank you, it was delicious.*
- *Thank you very much but I have had enough.*
- *I couldn't eat another bite. I'm so full.*
- *No, but thank you very much. I appreciate your hospitality but I'm full.*

Sample of answers in Bahía Blanca:

- *No gracias. [No, thank you.]*
- *No gracias, estaba muy rico pero estoy llena. [No, thank you; it was really good but I'm full.]*
- *Gracias pero comí demasiado. [Thanks, but I already ate too much.]*
- *Te agradezco, pero estoy satisfecho. [Thank you, but I'm full.]*
- *Excelente la comida pero estoy satisfecha. [Excellent food, but I'm full.]*

Scenario 2: After a very nice meal at your friends' home, you prepare to leave and say goodbye to them. What would you say?

Sample of answers in Orange City:

- *Thank you for inviting me to dinner. The meal was delicious. I absolutely loved being able to spend some time together. Have a good night!*

- *Thank you for the nice evening and the delicious meal.*
- *Thank you so much for the wonderful meal. You put so much preparation into this. We appreciate it so much. Next time, we will host.*
- *Thank you so much for the food. It was phenomenal, but I should probably head out.*

Sample of answers in Bahía Blanca:

- *Adiós, gracias por la invitación.* [Bye, thanks for the invitation.]
- *Gracias por la cena, la pasé muy bien, nos vemos pronto.* [Thanks for the meal, I had a great time, see you soon.]
- *Es muy tarde y tengo que madrugar.* [It's late and I have to be up early tomorrow.]
- *Gracias por todo.* [Thanks for everything.]
- *Gracias. Lo pasé bárbaro, genial.* [Thanks. I had a great time.]
- *Gente, yo me voy... estuvo buenisimo!* [People, I am leaving... It was great!]

Scenario 3: You want to organize a barbeque for the weekend, and you call two good friends to invite them. What would you say?

Sample of answers in Orange City:

- *Hi! How are you? [Then I would talk about their day.] Well the reason I called is I am hosting a barbeque, and I was wondering if you would like to come?*
- *I was just calling to see if you had any plans for the weekend. If not, we were thinking of grilling. Would you like to join us?*
- *Hello ___! How would you like to get together at our house this weekend for a*

barbeque? I was going to invite ____ to come as well. If you cannot give me an answer right away, I'll let you check your calendar and get back to me. I certainly hope you can come!

Sample of answers in Bahía Blanca:

- *¿Nos juntamos el finde? [Are we getting together this weekend?]*
- *Este finde hago una cena y me gustaría que vengas, cualquier cosa avísame. [I'm making dinner this weekend and I would like you to come; just let me know.]*
- *Queridos, el finde asado en casa. [Hey, barbecue at my place this weekend.]*
- *Hola, cómo estás? El finde tenía pensado organizar una comida en casa, ¿quieres venir? [Hi, how you been? Was thinking of having a meal at my house this weekend. Wanna come?]*
- *Mañana en casa. Asado. Mediodía. ¿Vienen? [Tomorrow. Noon. My place. Barbecue. Coming?]*

Scenario 4: You go to a restaurant. When they bring you the food, it is cold and tastes odd. What would you do? What would you say?

Sample of answers in Orange City:

- *Excuse me, waiter, the food I ordered is cold. Is there any chance that you could heat it up for me?*
- *Excuse me, I'm sorry but my food is cold and does not taste like it normally does. Would it be possible for you to bring me a new one?*

- *Excuse me, this is unfortunately cold and has an odd taste to it, can I get something else?*
- *I hate to ask this, but my meal is not warm and tastes different. Could I replace it with another order? I am so sorry...*

Sample of answers in Bahía Blanca:

- *Disculpe, ¿hay posibilidad de cambiar el plato? No es de mi agrado.* [Excuse me, is there any chance you could change my order? It's not quite to my liking.]
- *Disculpame, pero esto está frío y el gusto no sé, es raro, me lo podés cambiar?* [Excuse me, but this is cold and the taste, I don't know, it's kind of weird, can you change it?]
- *Por favor me cambia el plato. Tiene un gusto raro y está frío. Gracias.* [Please, can I get a different one? This tastes weird and it's cold.]
- *Disculpe, está algo frío y el sabor es raro. ¿Podría cambiarlo?* [Excuse me, this is a little cold, and the taste is strange. Could you change it?]

Scenario 5: You received a certificate from an institution of secondary/higher education that contains wrong information. You approach the front desk to make a complaint. What would you say?

Sample of answers in Orange City:

- *Hello. I wonder if you could help me. I received this document in which my name is spelled incorrectly (or whatever the problem is). Is there someone I could speak to who would be able to make the change and print a new certificate for me?*

- *Would you please update this certificate so it contains the correct information for me?*
- *Good morning! I hope you can help me with something. I received this certificate and the information is incorrect. Can you help me or direct me to the person who can?*
- *I received my certificate and my information is incorrect. I hate to ask this, but could I get the certificate replaced with correct information? Thank you so much!*

Sample of answers in Bahía Blanca:

- *Acá hay un error. ¿Lo puede chequear, por favor?* [There is a mistake right here. Can you take a look, please?]
- *Disculpe, está incorrecta la información. ¿Podrían cambiarla lo antes posible? Gracias.* [Excuse me, the information is wrong. Could you change it ASAP?]
- *Disculpame, esta parte está incorrecta. ¿La podrías corregir, por favor?* [Excuse me, this part is wrong. Could you correct it please?]
- *Perdón, pero el certificado que acaba de darme está mal. ¿No podría corregirlo o hacerme uno nuevo?* [Excuse me, but the certificate you just gave me is wrong. Could you correct it or make me a new one?]
- *Buen día! Mirá, me enviaron esta certificación pero tiene un error. Fijate. Necesito que la hagan nuevamente.* [Good morning, look... they sent me this certificate but it has a mistake. Look. I need you to make a new one.]

Differences between Orange City and Bahía Blanca.

Using Scollon and Scollon's (2001) terminology, it is possible to consider that people in Orange City make use of a deference politeness system (-power, +distance) while in Bahía Blanca they utilize a solidarity politeness system (-power, -distance). Therefore, in Orange City interlocutors utilize expressions that favor independence and reduce face threats; in Bahía Blanca, they prefer strategies that assume or express reciprocity or claim a common point of view. These observations coincide with Félix-Brasdefer's (2006) findings. This author states that the use of direct strategies is remarkably higher in a solidarity politeness system than in a deference one.

Most strategies used in Orange City for saying good-bye after dinner at a friend's home try to emphasize the positive value of the interaction and flatter the interlocutor's face, highlighting their effort and valuing their hospitality, the time and the attention received, since these limit freedom of action of the hosts in a culture that values freedom and time. On the contrary, a culture that prefers “confianza” and proximity, devoting time and making an effort are not perceived as threatening or an imposition on the other person (Haverkate, 2004).

In a solidarity culture, in which positive politeness and a sense of “confianza” prevail, invitations are not perceived as a threat to an individual freedom of action and, therefore, the use of mitigation is not required. On the other hand, in a deference culture, the act of inviting can be perceived as a threat, since the speaker's intention is that the hearer do something; for this reason, it is necessary to mitigate that act by using justification, questions, indirect discourse, and conditional mood.

When positive politeness strategies are used, the person who invites is convinced that her interlocutor approves her action and coincides with her wishes (Bella, 2009). Therefore, the inviter uses direct language and even can limit the interlocutors' options of rejecting the invitation. This can be seen clearly in Bahía Blanca, a community that values proximity and “confianza.”

It is important to highlight a different orientation regarding cultural values in the communities studied. In Orange City one can appreciate the prevalence of a deference politeness system while in Bahía Blanca a solidarity politeness system dominates. A deference politeness system tries to avoid face threatening acts like limiting other people's freedoms by making impositions, while a solidarity politeness system favors closeness and a sense of mutual trust, not considering invitations to be face threatening acts.

For that reason, the use of indirect style, mitigation strategies, and conditional mood are more frequent in Orange City, while a more direct style, the use of indicative mood, and even the imperative predominate in Bahía Blanca.

Regional variation in Spanish.

Cultural premises are a part of cultural competence and unconscious knowledge that is shared by members of a group (Barros García, 2011).

Several authors considered the following as cultural premises for peninsular Spanish (Bravo, 1999; Briz, 2003, 2005; Bernal, 2007):

- 1) Originality and awareness. These characteristics are present in the image of autonomy, which refers to auto-affirmation of the individual inside a group. It is related to a sense of pride and favors direct discourse styles.
- 2) Honor. It is part of an ideal social personality and, if questioned, the individual must defend it.
- 3) Freedom of expression and tolerance to divergent opinions.
- 4) Delight in confrontational discourse. For this reason, with certain frequency, conflicts do not generate a threat for interpersonal relations, but rather strengthens them.
- 5) Appreciation for others. Thus, what can be observed in daily conversation is the use of models of “confianza” and principles of avoiding interpersonal offence that are typical in friends and family interactions.
- 6) Friendship and availability are highly valued as an extension of the familial relationship.
- 7) Conversation is desirable and pleasant, a place for interpersonal meetings.

The terms *autonomy* and *affiliation* regarding the Spanish culture are not always equivalent to negative and positive politeness in the English culture. Affiliation in Spain is more closely related to looking for proximity and affection rather than social esteem.

In comparison with British culture, Hickey (as cited in Barros García, 2011) states,

We postulate that Spaniards are more tolerant of, or less sensitive to, intrusions of their privacy, their notional territories, their physical rights and their ability to do what they like, including the prerogative not to cooperate with others in a given

situation, than members of a corresponding British group would be. This is manifested in an obvious way in their different, though not less “polite” use of formulas like *Por favor* and *Gracias*, which tend to be used in their literal sense, that is, in asking or giving thanks for a personal favour, as distinct from a service that is part of one’s duty, such as a shop assistant’s duty to serve, and a customer’s duty to pay for an article purchased. (p. 4)

Regional variation in politeness use in Spanish speaking countries.

Félix-Brasdefer (2008) explains,

Involvement may occur between participants where there is *confianza* (‘trust’), solidarity, or affiliation between the interlocutors, that is, being able to express the speaker’s true intentions without offending or imposing on the interlocutor (e.g., a direct request or an insistence to an invitation). On the other hand, *independence* reflects the fact that a person may behave with some degree of autonomy, give options or alternatives to the interlocutor, apologize to the interlocutor for not complying with an invitation, a request, or a suggestion, express uncertainty through indefinite replies or mitigated responses, and/or convey minimal assumptions about the interlocutor’s wants by means of reasons or explanations. (pp. 87-88)

In addition, using terminology of Scollon and Scollon (2001), he affirms that general varieties of peninsular, Venezuelan, Dominican, and Columbian Spanish show preferences for *involvement*, that is the expression, of solidarity, proximity, and affiliation among members of a

group. On the other hand, varieties of Chilean, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Mexican, and Uruguayan Spanish tend to show *independence*, investing in efforts of expressing respect and using formal language and indirect style.

Márquez Reiter and Placencia offer the following diagram regarding negative and positive politeness, negative relating to independence or deference, and positive relating to involvement or proximity:

Negative Politeness	Positive Politeness
Spanish of Mexico Ecuador & Peru	Spanish of Chile & Uruguay
	Spanish of Argentina Spain & Venezuela

(Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005, p. 190)

The following example from Barranquilla, Colombia is a perfect illustration of *involvement*. It shows the interaction between a university student who asks for a proof of studies, and a secretary.

A (Estudiante): Oye, Tomasita, esteee... *necesito que me hagas... la constancia*

B (Secretaria): Constancias hasta que no se elaboren las listas, mi amor

A: ¡Ya, ya! Oye, pero Tomasita... mira, ve.

B: Pero, ¿qué hago yo mi amor, [si apenas te estás matriculando?]

A: [Sí... Sí, sí, pero ya me matriculé.] *Yo necesito la constancia para trabajar, eh, Tomasita.*

(Escamilla Morales et al., 2004, p. 209)

Translation²

A (Student): Hey, Tomasita, ummmm... *I need you to get me... the certificate*

B (Secretaria): Certificates once we get the lists, hon

A: I know. Hey, but look, Tomasita... com' on.

B: But, what can I do, hon? [if you are just now getting registered?]

A: [I know... but I'm already registered]. *I need the certificate to work, com' on, Tomasita, OK?*

There are regional differences in the Spanish-speaking world on a continuum of solidarity and informality to deference and formality. For example, Spaniards (Madrid, Barcelona) use a direct style for requests and refusals, informal personal pronouns (“tuteo”), and less mitigation compared with Ecuadorians, Mexicans (Mexico City), Chileans (Santiago) and Puerto Ricans (San Juan), who prefer indirect styles, higher level of formality, and pronouns of deference (“usted”). On the other hand, Argentineans (Buenos Aires), Dominicans (Santiago) and Venezuelans (Caracas) are at an intermediate level between Spaniards and Mexicans, with a lesser degree of direct requests (Félix-Brasdefer, 2019).

Examples.

Example 1: Requests in the context of shopkeeper and customer interactions.

[MS] (Madrileño Spanish) (C=Customer; SK= Shopkeeper)

SK hola

C **dame tres barras de bandeja**

² The translation into English was done in collaboration with students of Spanish 337: Advanced Translation II.

[QS] (Quiteño Spanish)

C buenas tardes señora Luisina

SK señora Teresita buenas tardes cómo le va cómo lo ha pasado
cómo está usted

C muerta de frío (risas) bien muchas gracias

SK estos días sí hace frío

C **regáleme unas tres lechecitas por favor**

(Placencia, 2005, p. 584)

Translation³

[MS] (Madrileño Spanish)

(C=Customer; SK= Shopkeeper)

SK hi

C **give me three loaves of bread**

[QS] (Quiteño Spanish)

C good afternoon Ms Luisina

SK Ms Teresita good afternoon; how is it going? what's up?

how have you been?

C I'm freezing (laughs); good thank you

SK these days are super cold

C **give me three small milks please**

³ The translation into English was done in collaboration with students of Spanish 337: Advanced Translation II.

The Madrileño example is clearly a direct request; in the Quiteño example, we can notice first the building of rapport and the use of mitigation in the request.

Example 2: Refusals to invitations

Argentinean Spanish

(A stands for Argentinean; M for male)

- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| Neighbor | 1 | bien, ¡qué bueno encontrarte! justo este sábado es mi cumpleaños y |
| | 2 | vamos a hacer una fiesta, así que venite. |
| AM | 3 | —che, mirá, vos sabés que no voy a poder porque, — |
| Neighbor | 4 | —no me digas— |
| AM | 5 | —no, no porque yo yo ya tengo ésta—la fiesta de aniversario de |
| | 6 | casado de mi abuelo |
| Neighbor | 7 | —ugh— |
| AM | 8 | —que son como cuarenta, cincuenta años de casado y no puedo |
| | | faltar. |

(García, 2007, p. 554)

Translation⁴

Argentinean Spanish

(A stands for Argentinean; M for male)

- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| Neighbor | 1 | hey, good to see you! just this coming Saturday is my birthday and |
| | 2 | we are throwing a party, come on out. |
| AM | 3 | —hey, look, you know, I'm not going to be able to make it, — |
| Neighbor | 4 | —no, no, hold up— |

⁴ The translation into English was done in collaboration with students of Spanish 337: Advanced Translation II.

F2: 13 sale

Translation

F2: 1 Um, darn, I'm not going to be able to, **brother**=

F1: 2 = why **bro**?

F2: 3 look, the thing is that um - I'm working at a pizza place, **dude**,

4 and you know that we end up staying really late,

5 so for me it wouldn't be easy to get there.

Insistence #1

F1: 6 darn, what time do you get off? even if it's late, I'll be expecting you=

F2: 7 = You know I get off about eleven thirty or twelve, and well you know

8 I'm there from, I'm there like from ten in the morning, and well

9 it's really late, imagine, I get off just exhausted.

Insistence #2

F1: 10 yeah well, if you want to come then, we'll be there.

F2: 11 um, well, if maybe I could go, well I'd show up.

F1: 12 well, fine, we'll see.

F2: 13 okay.

(Félix-Brasdefer, 2006, pp. 2168-69)

In the Argentinean invitation example, refusal is direct, and a strategy of justification and indicative mood is used. For the Mexican invitation, although the refusal is direct in the very

beginning, the rest of the interaction shows complex explanations, uses of conditional mood, and insistence strategies.

Pragmalinguistic Competence plus Sociopragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is the ability to understand and produce pragmatic meaning (conventional meaning and the meaning of the speaker).

According to Félix-Brasdefer (2019), in order to grow their pragmatic competence, individuals need two kinds of knowledge:

1. **Pragmalinguistic knowledge:** knowledge of grammatical conventions and norms available in any language to express pragmatic intentions.
2. **Sociopragmatic knowledge:** knowledge of social norms, appropriate behavior, and perception of (im)politeness and degree of familiarity, social distance and power among the interlocutors (p. 252).

Usually, students have appropriate pragmalinguistic knowledge but are lacking in sociopragmatic knowledge. The latter is difficult to get in a classroom situation and will be acquired mostly in interactions with native speakers, especially in their study abroad semesters or similar experiences.

Therefore, it is necessary to make students aware of the differences that exist in the expression of (im)politeness in different Spanish speaking countries, and even regional variation in a same country.

Resources on Pragmatics

A number of websites present resources for the teaching of pragmatics, for example at the University of Minnesota (<https://carla.umn.edu/index.html>) and Indiana University (<https://pragmatics.indiana.edu/speechacts/index.html>). Also, Spanish classes are offered in YouTube and some presentations focus on expressing politeness, for example in Spain and Chile.

Currently, one of my students is working on using movies for her future Spanish classes. She selects movies on Netflix and marks fragments to use for teaching different topics. One of the fragments addressed introductions in Spanish, which is related to the use of politeness. For her, this was the first time she was able to hear other expressions beyond “mucho gusto.” Since students love Netflix, they could watch recently released Spanish or Latin American movies focusing on interactions in places like cafés, restaurants, offices, buses, etc. and get one or two-minute examples. This would provide good material for comparing styles, variations, etc.

Other sites similar to YouTube are good resources as well.

Conclusion

Politeness is present in everyday life. It is also part of our daily interactions. It affects the way we relate to each other.

Politeness is also situational and culturally dependent. It can be considered a social practice, and each social group applies and interprets it according to its norms and conventions.

In addition, there is regional variation in the expression of politeness in Spanish-speaking countries around the world.

Therefore, I consider it important to offer a wider view of politeness usage to students pursuing a Spanish major in order to better prepare them for encountering diverse forms and expressions that could be interpreted as polite or impolite when studying or living abroad.

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