

ABSTRACT

Compliments and Politeness
among Mexican and Puerto Rican Couples

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This paper explores the speech act of complimenting among Mexican and Puerto Rican couples. The study applies Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) in analyzing spontaneous, face-to-face compliment giving between each romantic couple of the same nationality, that is, Mexican or Puerto Rican. Following Holmes (1986), it examines compliments according to their form, function, and topic. Results are compared with previous studies in the field. The results show that dialect, education level and gender of the speaker influence the style and delivery of compliments. In addition, the results show that both Mexican and Puerto Rican females in this data set initiated compliments and gave more compliments than the male Mexican and Puerto Rican participants. Mexican males spoke the least and gave fewer compliments. Puerto Rican males spoke more than any other group and gave the most compliments. Underlying values and explanations for these results are discussed.

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among Mexican and Puerto Rican Couples

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to Janet Holmes, one of the most basic ways to see what both individuals and society value is to listen to what they compliment (Holmes 1986). For example, in many Chinese communities (Gao 1984: 33), complimenting someone's parents on their advanced age is considered an honor—because age is equated with wisdom, and wisdom is a highly valued attribute in those cultures. The same compliment in much of the United States would arguably not have the same positive effect, since the culture values youthful (physical) beauty over age and wisdom.

As Wolfson and Manes (1980) found in compliment studies on American English, compliments function to reinforce solidarity, or a sense of equality and rapport, between speakers, but what people are actually *doing* when they compliment someone can differ across cultures. For example, a husband may say to his wife, “You look pretty today.” The *form* (e.g. a compliment structure, as in this example) may be *doing* something that is the same or different than a *bald on-record* statement, taken at face-value (Austin, 1962). For example, the *function* of this statement, with the *form*, “You look pretty today,” could also be used as an indirect apology, without explicitly using the form of a *bald on-record* apology but rather that of a compliment. Thus, form and function in a given speech act may not always correspond in a direct, one-to-one relationship.

In this study I purpose to discover repeated *forms* and *functions* in conversational discourse among Mexicans (MX) and Puerto Ricans (PR) as they relate to compliments. Since many of my MX and PR friends are married couples, I examined how compliments occur in the context of this close, committed relationship, exploring some of the following basic questions: Do these partners use more directness or less in their compliments? Who gives more compliments, men or women? What repeated phrases emerge? In essence, my goal in this study is to understand the *form* and *function* of their discourse as it is compared across dialect, gender, and level of education.

The purpose of this study is not to delve into the depths and complexities of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other fields that would naturally overlap with an integrated understanding of human speech, or linguistics; rather the purpose of this study is to analyze how certain speech patterns and relevant behaviors occurred in two dialectal groups, namely, 14 Puerto Ricans (PR) and 16 Mexicans (MX), and to offer a primarily qualitative analysis of those interactions, creating space for the language to “speak for itself” regarding the values that may underlie these particular groups.

Chapter 2 will discuss more of the literature in the fields of speech acts and politeness studies to form a theoretical and experimental base for this study. Chapter 3 will discuss the specific methods and procedure that were used to collect relevant data on compliments from PR and MX couples. Chapter 4 shows the analysis and results in answering three research questions related to how dialect, gender and level of education may affect complimenting behavior. Chapter 5 concludes my findings and offers implications for future research. Lastly, Appendices A and B show the instruments used, including a biographical information form detailing data collected from all participants.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of key theoretical and research contributions to the field of pragmatics over the last fifty years, especially as related to speech acts and politeness studies (explained below). The study of “speech acts,” a term later coined by Blum-Kulka (1987), has supplied a helpful framework in understanding the form and function of human utterances. John Austin (1962), the father of speech acts, laid much of the groundwork for this area of pragmatics in his landmark book *How to Do Things with Words*. Then, one of Austin’s (1962) followers, John R. Searle (1969) defined a “speech act” as a “minimal unit of discourse, a basic unit of communication” (Searle, 1969; in Nelson, El Bakary, & Al Batal 1993: 307). Grundy expanded this definition. He stated that a speech act is “the performative, or action accomplishing, aspect of language use, and particularly the (illocutionary) force associated with an utterance” (Grundy 1995: 301).

In keeping with the performative nature of a speech act, Austin clarified three key progressions in this verbal output and reception interchange: 1) locution: what is said, 2) illocution: what is done, and 3) perlocution: the effect (Grundy 1995: 72). Hence, like dominoes falling in given direction, the verbal proposition of the locution triggers the subsequently ensuing features of the illocution (action) and perlocution (emotion), thus constituting a complete speech act (Grundy 1995: 77). The offsetting utterance (the locution) and the complex web of other factors surrounding it (culture, gender, and context, to name a few), interact to create a particular illocutionary force at the given

point in time in which they occur, also known as the “indexicality” (Grundy 1995: 299). Simplifying this framework, Recanati (2004: 448), holds that a speech act consists of two major components: a content and a force: “Some elements in the sentence indicate the force of the speech act which the sentence can be used to perform, while other elements give indications concerning the content of the speech act.”

Austin (1962) maintains that a speech act must meet certain conditions to be called a particular speech act. The form and function must match the structure and goals of the speech act. Nonetheless, in performing nearly every speech act, including apologies, compliments, introductions, requests, and refusals, one always runs the risk of *pragmatic failure* via engaging in a *face-threatening act* (Hymes, 1972, 1974; Wolfson, 1981, 1983, 1989). This risk is increased when factoring in the multi-cultural nature of cross-cultural speech acts and their (mis)interpretation by non-in-group members of a given speech community.

Thus, according to Brown and Levinson (1978: 66), *face* constitutes a psychological feature found in politeness expressions in the performance of a given speech act (e.g. compliments). Comprised of two important components, face can be either *positive* or *negative*, and any given speech act has the potential to appeal to one or both of these aspects (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 66). Since *positive face* deals with a person’s sense of self-esteem and *negative face* refers to one’s desire to determine his or her own course of action, a pragmatically competent speaker will appeal to the other person’s face in the appropriate way, depending on the macro- and micro-contextual factors (such as culture, relationship of the participants, gender, etc.). As each person possesses certain *face-wants*, such as the need to have face respected, *face-threats*,

endanger one's sense of self-esteem (*positive face*) or freedom of action (*negative face*). *Facework*, then, refers to "language addressed to the face-wants of others" (Grundy 1995: 299). Although some have criticized this view of face proposed by Brown and Levinson as being too western-oriented, it, nonetheless, provides helpful categories and a point of departure in understanding the formative framework of politeness studies as it relates to speech acts.

Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory framework, *facework* connects with both positive and negative politeness, which correspond to *positive* and *negative face*. *Positive politeness* and *negative politeness* involve some or all of the corresponding aspects on the part of the speaker as outlined in Table 1:

Table 1
Contrasting Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies

Positive Politeness Strategies	Negative Politeness Strategies
Notice/attend to hearer's wants	Be conventionally indirect
Exaggerate interest/approval	Question, hedge
Intensify interest	Be pessimistic
Use in-group identity markers	Minimize imposition
Seek agreement	Give deference
Avoid disagreement	Apologize (e.g. "excuse me,...")
Presuppose/assert common ground	Impersonalize (e.g. "Are there any bathrooms around?")
Joke	State the imposition as a general rule
Assert knowledge of hearer's wants	Nominalize
Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring a debt
Be optimistic	
Include speaker and hearer in the activity	
Give (or ask for) reasons	

Adapted from: (Brown and Levinson 1987: 102, 131; in Grundy 299)

All of the politeness strategies in Table 1 can be applied to studying speech acts, such as giving a compliment. All of these politeness strategies can be done either directly or indirectly. When a positive politeness strategy is employed directly, the structure and speech “match.” However, when used indirectly, the structure and speech “do not match” (Lo Castro 2003). Thus, “a direct speech act would relate a declarative structure to a statement, whereas an indirect speech act would refer to the use of the same declarative structure to make a request” (LoCastro 2003; in Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2010: 9). According to Tannen (1994: 178), “indirectness is a necessary means for serving the needs for *rapport* and *defensiveness*, associated respectively with Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative face.” *Rapport* is a sense of mutual understanding between people that doesn’t require explicit statements to be realized (Tannen 1994: 178). These factors arguably come into play within the context of a romantic relationship, such as that of the present study.

In determining how to manage *facework*, whether directly or indirectly, the subsequent sociolinguistic components interplay as follows: Social Distance (D) + Power Differential (P) + Ration of Imposition (R) = degree of face-threat to be redressed by appropriate linguistic strategy” (Grundy 1995: 197). Again, the nature of the relationships studied is important, since many romantic partners tend to use “positively affective speech acts or expressions of solidarity, compliment exchanges, [which] occur typically between family members, friends, and equals. They can be regarded as normal or routine currency in such relationships. One would expect compliments to be most frequent in such contexts. Moreover, the topics of compliments may serve as a reflection of the degree of intimacy of such relationships” (Holmes 1986: 499).

The ensuing study of the speech act of compliments examines two Spanish dialects and cultures in detail: first-generation Puerto Rican couples and first-generation Mexican couples residing in Texas (Silva-Corvalán 1983). Each of individual interview with each couple represented what is considered a “Community of Practice, introduced to language and gender research by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992). Following Lave & Wenger (1991), they define a CofP as follows:

An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages (1992: 464; in Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 173).

As Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 174) point out, “this definition suggests that the concept of a CofP is a dynamic, rich, and complex one.” In contrasting English Communities of Practice, Wolfson and Manes (1980) claim that the content of English compliments tends to be rather formulaic but also functions primarily to build strong rapport and solidarity among interactants (Wolfson 1981, 1983; Manes 1983; Goody 1978; Lakoff 1975).

While Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1978, 1987) and John Austin’s (1962) speech act theory form strong foundations for the study at hand, the social constructionist approaches build upon these theories in conjunction with the mentioned Communities of Practice. As the current study factors in gender in its analysis, a social constructivist approach in Cameron’s words (1992:13), “encourages a different focus: ‘not gender differences but the difference gender makes.’” Moreover, “instead of abstracting gender from social practice, [Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992:466)] note the

need to focus on ‘gender in its full complexity: how gender is constructed in social practice, and how this construction intertwines with that of other components of identity and difference, and of language’" (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999:180; quoting Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992: 472).

In connection with the social constructionist approach herein explored, ethnomethodology and the ethnography of speaking play a noteworthy role. As Garfinkel (1967) noted: “it is not what people say that is important but rather what they mean to say” (also see Hymes 1962, 1964, 1972a). For example, in Wolfson and Manes’ (1980) compliment-giving study, ethnomethodological evidence supports their functional interpretation of English compliments. For instance, they found that “among status nonequals, compliments generally flow from the higher-status person to the status-inferior (Wolfson 1983: 91; Herbert 1986). Thus, this distribution of power (P) accounts for the solidarity-building aspect of compliment-giving in the given ethnic context and explains more of the “why” and the “how” behind the speech act of compliment-giving among English speakers (Herbert 1986: 76-77).

With this theoretical framework in place, the definition of a compliment, as the speech act at hand, must be clarified, at least in broad terms. According to Holmes (1986: 486), “a compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” Moreover, within John Austin’s (1962) five-part taxonomy of speech acts, he lists compliments under the heading of *behabitives* as these constitute “adopting an attitude” (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010: 7). Subsequently, on the basis of Austin’s

taxonomy, Searle (1969) developed his own five-part taxonomy of illocutionary acts, categorizing compliments under the title, *expressives* as they “have the purpose of expressing the speaker’s psychological state of mind about, or attitude towards, some prior action or state of affairs” (Searle 1976: 1-16). Among many functions, compliments often “convey that some want (goal or desired object) of [the hearer’s] is admirable or interesting to [the speaker] too” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 108); and, as Wolfson (1983: 89) suggests, “a compliment may precede, and thus soften, a criticism.” For these reasons, the users of language and the context in which they create language carry significant weight in understanding meaning and the values underlying macro- and micro-speech across various ethnolinguistic communities of practice as seen in the speech act of compliment-giving.

Through a variety of cross-cultural compliment studies, Indonesian, Malaysian (Azman 1986), and Chinese ESL learners in America and New Zealand have evaluated English speakers to be excessive in their use of compliments (Wolfson 1981). Because cultural values differ, complimenting someone on his/her weight or wealth, for instance, surface in these context as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and may jeopardize any goals of solidarity or rapport, if those are indeed the desired outcomes for compliment-giving in a particular community of practice. For example, Gao (1984: 33) showed that age is a common compliment topic in Chinese society, because age is a symbol of “experience, long life expectancy and moral virtue” in that society. An utterance such as, “Your parents are extremely old” would be heard as a compliment in this cultural context, while it would certainly not be interpreted that way in New Zealand. Conversely, compliments

on appearance could cause great offence in Chinese culture, and at best they would be regarded as in extremely bad taste” (Gao 1984: 34).

In one study involving cross-cultural compliment analyses, Holmes (1986) uses the ethnographic method described in Manes and Wolfson (1981). Holmes (1986) asked ten students to collect data, writing down a sequence of 20 compliments in the order in which they naturally occurred without selection or editing, making a total corpus of 200 compliments from a variety of New Zealand adults. The ten students recorded the exact words of the compliment and of the compliment response; the sex and relative status of the participants; and the context in which the compliment occurred. “Exactly 50% of the New Zealand compliments occurred between female participants, and almost a quarter more were given by females to males. The number of compliments given by males was considerably fewer. Males gave 37 (18.5%) compliments to women and 17 (8.5%) to other men” (Holmes and Brown 1987: 524). The two most frequent topics in New Zealand data were as follows: compliments on appearance (45.0% of the total), and compliments on ability or performance (27.5% of the total). Compliments on possessions (“I love your new bike”) and personality/friendship (“That was kind”) accounted for 10.5% and 13.5%, respectively” (Holmes and Brown 1987: 530).

In another study, foundational to the one just mentioned in method of data collection and structure, Wolfson (1984: 236) found that 80% of the compliments in a corpus of over 600 compliments in the United States “depended upon an adjective to carry the positive semantic load.” Moreover, “while the number of positive adjectives which may be used is virtually unlimited, two-thirds of all adjectival compliments in the corpus made use of only five adjectives: *nice*, *good*, *beautiful*, *pretty* and *great* (Wolfson

1984: 236). Again, these findings recount the often formulaic nature of English compliments.

In addition to these studies, another study executed by Nelson, El Bakary, and Al Batal (1993) concerns 20 Egyptian and 20 American university students. The Egyptians were interviewed in Arabic in Egypt while the Americans were interviewed in English in the United States. The participants were prompted to recall the most recent compliment given, received, and observed. This results in a corpus of 60 Egyptian and 60 American compliments. The following aspects of each compliment were analyzed by the aforementioned researchers in this study: 1) the form of the compliment, 2) attributes praised, 3) relationship between the compliment giver and receiver, 4) gender of compliment giver and receiver, and 5) compliment frequency.

As a second phase of the study, more data was collected from 240 Egyptian and 240 American students via an adapted form of Barnlund and Araki's (1985) Complimentary Mode Questionnaire for responses. The findings show that both Egyptian and American compliments rely heavily on adjectives to carry the positive weight of the compliment form—the same result as Wolfson's study (1984). Nonetheless, Egyptians tend to be more verbose in their compliments, use more comparatives, refer to marriage, and employ more metaphors than the American students. American students compliment more frequently than Egyptians students, and American students focus more on abilities and skill rather than personality traits, as was the case for the Egyptians' compliment focus. Both groups tend to prefer directness over indirectness in their compliment usage (Nelson, El Bakary, and Al Batal 1993: 294).

The theories and studies outlined in this chapter will be referenced as pertinent to the method and analysis section of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Procedure and Method

Rationale

The primary goal in the procedure and method of this study is to compare and contrast the speech act of compliment-giving among heterosexual first-generation Puerto Rican (PR) couples and Mexican couples (MX) in the context of personal historical narratives. Although verbal interaction is generally spontaneous and fleeting, it may be captured for use in research or for detailed analysis via recording and transcription. Such interaction is far more than words. It relies on gestures, gaze, facial expressions, and other types of body language. Thus, the adopted method of data collection focuses on live, face-to-face, spoken discourse and interaction. In order to accomplish the stated goal, I digitally-recorded personal interviews with 15 couples and obtained biographical information (as further described below).

Participants

In order to work with human subjects, I first applied for and then obtained the IRB approval [Title # 191518-1] from Baylor University. Then, I asked some of my Spanish-speaking friends and acquaintances to consider participating in the study. The study involved seven Puerto Rican (PR) couples, for a total of 14 PR individuals along with eight Mexican (MX) couples, for a total of 16 MX individuals. Thirty individuals participated in the study. All of these individuals were born in either PR or MX, respectively and, therefore, speak Spanish as their first language. The participants ranged

in age from 25 to 49 years old. The average age of all of the participants was 36 years of age. The length of the relationship as partners ranged from 1 year to 29 years. The overall average length of relationships was 12 years in length.

Procedure

I set up a mutually agreed upon meeting time and place with each couple, free of excessive distractions and background noise. Typically the location for the video-interview was the participants' home. At the interview meeting, I asked the participants to read and sign consent forms and answered any questions they may have had. If they agreed to participate, I then prompted them according to the following method.

Methodology

In order to acquire a biographical sketch of the participants, I requested that the participants write down their responses to the questions that follow. If the participants were unable to read the form, I offered to read the questions orally and record their answers. Instead, the literate partner decided to ask the illiterate partner the questions and filled in the answers for him (all illiterate participants were males). Speakers were given the form in either English and/or Spanish, depending on their primary language(s) spoken. By providing important personal, cultural, relational, educational and linguistic background information, the Biographical Information Sheet facilitated the interpretation of the data collected. Since the interviews constitute a setting in which their "socially structured meaning is temporary, [existing] only for the duration of the communication event," I sought to integrate the background of the speakers in the methodology since, according to Bakhtin, if one removes utterances from their social event, "the resulting messages then 'belong to nobody and are addressed to nobody' (Bakhtin, 1986: 99; in

Butler, 2001: 44). On this basis, the biographical sketch included the following questions (please refer to Appendix A for both the English and Spanish versions of the actual forms utilized in this study):

- A) How many years have you lived in the USA?
- B) Where are your grandparents from? Your parents?
- C) At what age did you move to the USA, and how old are you now?
- D) What is your first language?
- E) What is/are the primary language/s spoken in your home?
- F) How many years have you been together with your partner?
- G) What is your occupation?
- H) Where did you attend elementary school? High school? Did you attend college? If so, where? For how long?
- I) Did you receive education of any kind in another country? If so, what kind? Where? For how long?

After eliciting the biographical sketch of the participants, I then provided a written narrative prompt in Spanish or in English. I explained that I would like them to address these points as they told their personal story. Moreover, I clarified that I was only there to listen, though I provided occasional verbal prompts as necessary. The participants were prompted to decide for themselves spontaneously and without prior planning how to tell their story as a couple and how/or whether to compliment their significant other. Although the prompting questions limited a purely natural and completely spontaneous interaction on behalf of the participants, they also guided the

participants in order to elicit both the narrative and compliments to be studied for the aforementioned purposes.

The written, narrative prompt read as follows:

- A) Please briefly tell how you met your partner.
- B) Recall the first time you knew you were interested in each other.
 - 1. What were you thinking about your significant other?
 - 2. What did you say to your close friends/family about him/her?

In the event that the couple needed more prompts to facilitate their narrative discourse, I sometimes also prompted them (verbally) with the following questions:

- 1. What attracted you to your spouse/significant other?
- 2. What made you want to stay with him/her?

After the couple answered the prompts via their personal historical narrative, I then offered the following verbal prompt: “Now please (directly) tell your spouse what you appreciate about him/her today (at this point in your relationship).”

This method of prompting the speakers to make contributions to the interaction was based on Grice’s Cooperation Principle which states, “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grundy 1995: 95; quoting Grice himself). Since Grice argues that people intend to be cooperative when they speak, I expected the participants to respond to the prompts according to the 4 Maxims of Grice’s Cooperation Principle, namely:

- 1. Quality—to give just enough/required and appropriate info [to the prompt];

2. Quantity—to speak the truth (not to lie; not to say things that cannot be backed up with adequate evidence);
3. Relation—to be relevant (not random);
4. Manner—to be clear and explicit:
 - a. To avoid obscurity of expression;
 - b. To avoid ambiguity;
 - c. To be brief (not unnecessarily wordy);
 - d. To be orderly (adapted from Grice 1975; in Grundy 1995: 95).

Although, in practice, Grice's Maxims were not followed to the same extent by all participants during each interview, Grice's framework facilitated my decisions on how and when to prompt the participants during the interviews in order to achieve maximal cooperation. Since the participants had volunteered to engage in the interview, I assumed that cooperation was a desirable and common goal shared between the participants and me in the CofP that each interview created (Lave and Wenger 1991; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992).

For instance, when participants violated (or "flouted," in Gricean terms) the maxim to "be clear," I prompted the participants to clarify ambiguous or obscure statements. At other times, when the direction of the conversation diverged from the prompt, flouting the Maxim of Relation, I then repeated the same prompt in order to elicit the participants' cooperation to be relevant to the prompt. In the judgment of either the participants or myself, after the participants had given enough of the required and appropriate information in response to the prompt (*i.e.* obeying the Maxim of Quantity), I

then decided to end the video-recording. Though the videos ranged in length from 15 to 35 minutes, the average length of all videos was 28 minutes long.

I subsequently transcribed the direct and indirect compliments of the participants into a spreadsheet format in order to facilitate data analysis. I then recorded the number of distinct compliments that fell within the definition of a compliment given by Holmes (1986: 486), namely: “a compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” Based on this definition, each distinct compliment was numbered consecutively throughout the data collection document and then counted and categorized according to three overarching and recurrent categories throughout the data: appearance, performance and character. I chose my compliment topic categories based on my knowledge of similar, though not identical taxonomies used in previous studies on compliments, such as those by Holmes (1986) and Wolfson (1984).

I then calculated the number of compliments given by the speaker based on the gender and dialect of the speaker and put these results into a table (see Tables 4 and 5). Next, I recorded key words and phrases that recurred throughout the data, observing the function of such words and phrases in each given context. I then compared these words (forms) and their functions (Austin 1962) based on the speaker’s gender. Then I compared the forms and functions based on the speaker’s dialect (PR or MX). Lastly, I compared the forms and functions according to the speaker’s highest level of educational (*i.e.* some grade-school, some high school, some college, B.A. degree, or Ph.D. graduate). Although the highest level of education was expressly requested on the

Biographical Information Form, some participants volunteered additional educational information, which was also noted. Finally, since video-recordings were the media of data collection, non-verbal communication was also taken into account as it related to compliment expressions and responses between partners. These observations of non-verbals were then sorted according to the respective dialect spoken (PR and MX).

Research Questions

Before analyzing the data, I hypothesized that PR couples express their compliments differently than MX couples, because I had observed through my own travels and cultural interactions that diverse cultures often use distinctive linguistic forms and functions (Austin 1962) in performing speech acts (*e.g.* expressing compliments; Blum-Kulka 1989). I also hypothesized that the form and function of PR as compared to MX compliments would reflect their respectively different cultural values. I based these ideas on an ethnomethodological framework, that is, a way of studying behavior developed in sociology. In this approach, methodical patterns are observed among those who share a common cultural background, in this case a PR or MX background (Grundy 1995: 217). I did not assume that every individual among these groups has an identical background; however, I suspected that I would begin to see trends in the linguistic patterns of each cultural group based on common methods of expression through a common dialect.

Secondly, I also suspected that women were more different than similar in their expression of compliments as compared to the men due to the fact that Tannen (1994, 2000), among other researchers (Holmes 1995, 1999; de los Heros 1998; Lakoff 1975, 1979), had noted significant differences in the communication of men versus that of

women. For instance, in a follow-up conference regarding her research on gender, language, and communication, Tannen (2000) noted many differences between boys'/men's as compared to girls'/women's communication style, including men's comparatively minimal eye-contact and greater physical distance in relation to their hearer as opposed to women's more consistent eye-contact and increased physical proximity in relation to their hearer. The majority of girls and women in Tannen's studies mimicked one another in similarities of syntax, diction, and body language whereas the boys and men did not do so to the same extent, if they did so at all. Tannen, following Robin Lakoff (1975), relied on Lakoff's research to form a basis for her own observations and analysis of the differences and similarities between men and women's conversational styles. Lakoff (1975) found that there are five primary influences on a person's conversational style: a) ethnic background, b) regional background, c) age, d) gender, and e) class.

Based on these findings of Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (2000), I suspected that I would find more differences than similarities, not only in the area of gender differences in giving compliments but also based on the differences in background and class, which sometimes relate to a person's educational level. Because I suspected that there would be a discrepancy in education level, I conjectured that this difference would also influence how the participants express their compliments and that they would be more different than similar based on this distinguishing factor.

Therefore the research questions for this investigation were:

(1): Were there recurring differences between these two linguistic groups (PR and MX) in their expression of compliments?

(2): Were there recurring differences between men and women in their expression of compliments?

(3): Did those with more education express their compliments differently than those with less education?

In sum, in order to answer these questions, I planned to analyze and categorize the data according to dialect; gender; and educational level. This included taking into account repeated words and phrases; number of compliments given related to appearance, performance, and character; compliment topic and style of delivery; and the biographical and observable educational background of each participant.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Results

This chapter discusses the results of the three research questions. As mentioned in the Procedure and Method (Chapter 3), the research questions were as follows:

- (1) Were there recurring differences between these two linguistic groups (PR and MX) in their expression of compliments?
- (2) Were there recurring differences between men and women in their expression of compliments?
- (3) Did those with more education express their compliments differently than those with less education?

Puerto Rican and Mexican Couples Compared

With regard to Question 1, I expected to find that the Puerto Rican couples (PR) were more different than similar in their expression of compliments as compared to the Mexican couples (MX). Recall that the study involved 7 PR couples, for a total of 14 PR individuals along with 8 MX couples, for a total of 16 MX individuals. In sum, then, 30 individuals participated in the study. All of these individuals were born in either PR or MX, respectively, and therefore speak Spanish as their first language. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 49 years old. The average age of all of the participants was 36 years of age. The length of the relationship as partners ranged from 1 year to 29 years. The overall average length of relationships was 12 years in length. Through my work in the community, I am acquainted with many of them either personally or through other friends. Although I stated in each interview that her role was to observe and occasionally

offer prompts as needed, my presence constituted an observer role in the CofP, which was created during each couple's interview.

In terms of overall quantity of words in their compliments, the PR groups spoke more than the MX groups, even though the MX groups had one more couple than the PR groups (please refer to Table 6 for detailed analysis of word count). In addition, the PR groups also tended to elaborate and illustrate their compliments with specific details, without extensive prompting on my part. This contrast between the PR and MX groups was seen most clearly between the MX men and the PR men whose compliments contrasted greatly in length and specificity as seen in the following examples. The elaboration and specification of compliments is indicated in bold.

(1) PR speaker: Ti [M]: *Pues, yo aprecio **como eres**. Y la **sinceridad, la fortaleza** cuando tienes que hacer algo tuyo. Y espero que sigas así, porque, ese, la parte de la fórmula—como su parte ha sido así, junto conmigo. Pero **siempre has sido así, cuidado con los niños, con todas las cosas de nuestro hogar y por las cosas de Dios también con nuestros niños, y pendiente a todo—que nadie esté enfermo, que si nadie tenga hambre, que si vamos a salir, no, vamos a ... prepararnos bien, vamos a guardar las cosas bien cuando las necesitemos—todas estas cosas han sido algo que ha funcionado bien por todos estos años... Espero que sigas siendo como eres**.*

By contrast, observe the MX speaker's compliment of his partner, with more prompting on my part as well as verbal interjections from his partner:

(2a) Researcher: *¿Por qué han decidido quedarse juntos hasta este momento?*

Ce[M]: *Pues, **nos llevamos bien**... hasta ahorita... **nos respetamos** ... y porque **la quiero**.*

Then I requested that MX M tell his partner directly—rather than indirectly—what he appreciates about her. This request is repeated twice with emphasis on the word

directamente. The MX [M] does not respond before his partner, MX [F], decides to interject an indirect compliment toward him, using the third person (indicted in bold).

(2b) Ma [F]: *Pues, yo quiero agradecerle porque siempre me **ha apoyado** a mi familia, aparte de que me **ha soportado** a mi genio, me **ha soportado** a mi familia... y siempre **estaba** allí cuando yo **lo** necesito.*

Then MX [M] responds to his partner by agreeing with what she said and by generalizing appreciation. Third person references, agreement and generalizations are noted in bold.

(2b) Ce[M]: *Yo **también**; es **el mismo**. **Pueda que tenemos los mismos pensamientos**. Yo mismo aprecio **a ella por todo lo que ha hecho** para nuestra familia. **Pues, todo, por mis hijos** [repeats this twice].*

In the above example, and others of its kind, the Mexican male participant creates distance (D) by choosing to speak in the third person (whether consciously or subconsciously), even after being prompted (more than once) to speak directly to his partner. This could be due to cultural norms of conventional indirectness as well as the infrequency of a third person's request that one person compliment another. Nonetheless, since this prompt is a consistent variable in the study, the recurrently indirect and seemingly evasive responses among MX males, in particular, is worth noting. As seen in the above example, the MX [F] provides a simple list of things she appreciates, which the MX [M] echoes by saying something to the effect of *yo también* or *es el mismo*. General phrases seen here such as, *nos llevamos bien*, *nos respetamos*, and *por todo lo que ha hecho* are preferred over specific illustrations in the MX data, especially those of the MX men. In addition, Ce[M]'s use of the subjunctive tense in this example, *pueda que tenemos los mismos pensamientos*, softens his statement as he again echoes his partner's

thoughts rather than initiating his own distinct compliments. This pattern of following the MX female's lead was characteristic of the MX data of compliments.

The overall indirect and less specific approach to complimenting among MX groups may be related to the value of maintaining harmony, since complimenting constitutes making a judgment about another and may, thus, be considered by some to be a FTA (Manes 1983: 96). As Nelson (et. al, 1993: 295) state in their contrastive study on Egyptian versus American compliments (please refer to Chapter 2):

An indirect communication style is associated with high context cultures in which language functions as a social lubricant to maintain group harmony. In cultures with indirect communication styles, one is more likely to use imprecise and ambiguous language, to say more or to say less than what is meant.

This indirectness to maintain harmony is seen in the following interchange between a MX couple in which the male, Ce[M], hedges his flaws (*e.g. **llego de mal humor***) with *o* and *a veces*, in addition to emphasizing, *nunca hemos peleado fuerte-fuerte* (terms in bold).

(3) Ma[F]: *Yo le agradezco porque siempre está pendiente de mí. Y me siento bien, **o** si estoy cansada, nunca está presionando de que tenemos que hacer algo para comer.*

(4) Ce[M]: *Yo también agradezco la paciencia que ha tenido conmigo porque yo también, **o a veces**, soy... **o llego de mal humor**... **Nunca hemos peleado fuerte-fuerte.***

Another difference, which may be linked to a higher value among MX for indirectness than PR, is the use of *respeto*, *respetar*, and *respetamos*, which all together as variations of the same term (i.e. respect) are used a total of 23 times throughout the data, with 18 of these references occurring in the MX data. Six out of 16 MX individuals used one of the variant terms for respect. By contrast, only two (2) PR out of the 14 PR

individuals mentioned the term, for a total of a mere 5 references to the same term(s). These results do not necessarily imply that the PR did not describe or value respect in their compliments toward one another, but rather that their method for conveying this term was explained by more specific examples which illustrated the concept of respect rather than having the word itself (*e.g. respeto*) suffice to convey all of the implications of what the term entails in their relationship as a couple.

In addition, four out of seven PR couples included the use of metaphors and/or proverbs in their compliments. Since the MX compliments did not include either of these components, the following are examples from the PR data.

Proverbs

(5) J[M]: ***Proverbios dice, dice la Biblia, que, ‘él que halla esposa, halla la felicidad.’*** Así que, realmente, yo encontré una gran esposa. Y puedo decir que ***soy inmensamente feliz y dichoso.*** Así que mi casa es feliz, porque tiene a Dios y ***porque tengo una gran esposa que ha puesto mucho, mucho amor en mi casa, que es Cristo.*** Y ella ha ***adornado con toda su belleza*** y con toda su delicadeza y su humildad mi casa y mi corazón y de mis hijos... Y te amo [S[F] kisses [M] on the cheek].

Metaphors

(6) H[M]: *Me encantaba que... era bien graciosa e inteligente; y sobre todo que amaba al Señor. Además me caía bien su familia. Primeramente, **la parte física—es el primer gancho**, pues, su corazón, su alegría, su insistencia. **Y de allí, me gancho*** [signaling a hook with hand; laughing].

(7) JV[M]: *Yo le digo que es mi secretaria...Me mantiene en marco porque yo digo tú eres—yo soy la cabeza de la familia, **tú eres el cuello—tú eres el que me dice para dónde voy.***

The PR data showed the use of intensifying words with greater frequency than the MX data. For example, *siempre* was used 51 times in PR data while only 24 times in MX data; and *muy* was used 42 times in the PR data; and 40 times in the MX data. Recall that

the PR group had two fewer participants than the MX group. A breakdown of which individuals used each term and how many times they used it is provided in Tables 3 and 4.

The PR data also showed the frequent use of quoted speech in their compliments as compared to the MX data, which had fewer examples of quoted speech. Here is one such PR compliment with both intensifiers and quoted speech, which, in combination, may also increase the emphatic illocutionary force. The quoted speech is in bold.

(8) MD[F]: *Pero yo creo que en estos trece años, la cara tuya de salir adelante, de superarte, de siempre decir, ‘¡Vamos a poder! No te preocupes.’ Siempre tienes una palabra—siempre, siempre—en cada momento—tienes una palabra positiva—siempre.*

(9) MArl[M]: *Siempre les decía, ‘Mira esa linda.’ Yo siempre me sentía cómodo, chivo, me sentía bien con ella, bien, bien chévere con ella.*

(10) Ta [F]: *Y lo más que me ha gustado ha sido que eres muy alegre. Cuando hay algo que está mal y yo te lo dejo saber, [dices] ‘Verdad, hice mal. Perdóname.’ Pues, es algo que siempre me ha gustado de ti y te doy gracias por eso.*

Although there was one more MX couple than PR couples, the MX couples gave fewer total compliments (247) than the PR couples, who gave a total of 329 compliments. This data in combination with overall greater word count of the PR groups, suggests that the PR groups verbalized their compliments more freely than did the MX couples since every couple was invited to say as much or as little as they desired to during the interview. Perhaps there are other factors in play here, such as potential power (P), social distance (D), and ratio of imposition (R), which may be further complicated by the “observer’s paradox” (Labov 1972: 209) of my physical presence interjected into this particular Community of Practice which came to be during the interview itself. For example, the factor of varying degrees of relationship (involving (D) and/or (P)) and *confianza* (Travis 2006) with each couple may have also affected the freedom with which

the participants expressed their compliments to one another under the circumstances, but the results are inconclusive on this point. By *confianza*, I mean the high degree of trust and self-disclosure between speakers, which is often fostered through expressing high degrees of personal and reciprocal warmth.

In terms of difference in displays of physical affection, six of the eight MX couples refrained from kissing one another during the interview, whereas five of the seven PR couples kissed one another and multiple times during the interview. Nonetheless, six out of eight MX couples displayed physical affection—holding hands, rubbing their spouse’s arms and belly, touching feet, etc. whereas most of the PR couples demonstrated physical affection via kisses rather than in other ways. Kisses among the PR couples usually occurred after very extensive, eloquent compliment speeches by their spouse. For example, J[M] says to his wife S[F]:

(11) *Y quiero agradecerte por ser tan compasiva, tan amorosa, por el tratar bien pendiente de los niños, porque normalmente yo soy una persona muy exigente y tú no eres de la de que hace todo de complacer a alguien sino que tú lo haces todo porque amas y te satisface lo que haces y eso me has enseñado a hacer las cosas porque realmente me apasionen, me satisfagan, no a complacer a nadie. Y me has enseñado a hacer las cosas con calma como siempre me dice, ‘que hagas las cosas con calma.’ Me has enseñado, quiero agradecerte por las veces en que no he orado y tú sí has orado; por las veces que no he tenido fe y has tenido fe; por las veces que, tal vez, yo no sea tan espiritual ni entusiasmado, y me has impulsado en la fe, y me has ayudado. Y te amo por eso; por mantener tan en serio nuestra sexualidad, cuidarla, respetarla, no permites que ninguna persona interrumpa eso en nuestras vidas, y que sea tan importante y sagrado. Y por darme la bendición de estar a tu lado cada día.*

In this example, it is evident that J[M] employs specific and emphatic detail in complimenting S[F]’s character qualities and performance, which is a positive politeness move: “exaggerate interest or approval” (Brown and Levinson 1987). Not only does

J[M] list her positive qualities, but he intensifies them with the word *tan*: *tan compasiva, tan amorosa...* Te amo por mantener *tan* en serio nuestra sexualidad... que sea *tan* importante y sagrado.” He also expresses deference by mentioning several times how much she has taught him (*me has enseñado*) to help him grow in the face of his own weaknesses. By using this negative politeness strategy, J[M] puts himself in an inferior position in relation to his wife, creating a hierarchy in this CofP, which produces the *illocutionary force* of emphasizing his compliments toward her (Austin 1962). Her response, the perlocution (Austin 1962), to this compliment is heard when she voices an “Mmmm” of agreement and then engages in the non-verbal gesture of a kiss with her partner.

In another instance with a PR couple, C[F] makes a long eloquent speech, again, emphasizing her spouse’s character and performance in (12) below. She repeats exaggerated words of approval in giving her compliments, such as *tan* and *excelente*, and then summarizes her compliment with additional phrases such as *como eres* and *todos los aspectos*, thus creating the effect of both detailed as well as general approval toward her partner. She also uses the formula *tú me has enseñado* four times in sequence and, thus, defers to her spouse as follows.

(12) K[F]: *Así que soy una persona diferente, **tú me has enseñado**, pues, valores; **tú me has enseñado** la paciencia; **tú me has enseñado** de la misericordia; **tú me has enseñado** de ver la vida de una manera diferente, y, le doy gracias a Dios por eso. Y le doy gracias a Dios por el corazón que tienes para conmigo, para con [son’s name], para con gente. Le doy gracias a Dios porque eres un hombre de Dios; porque eres el hombre que dirige este hogar. Y, esto, no creo que puede ser mejor dirigido con una persona con una persona—sino por ti.*

Reconoces que Dios es él que tiene que dirigir. Le doy gracias porque siempre te preocupas por nuestra relación con Dios. Este, le doy gracias porque el trabajo es tan fuerte, tan duro, pero yo tengo, y tenemos, la

bendición de que yo puedo quedarme con [their son] y criarlo nosotros, ¿verdad?—mejor—nadie lo puede criar. Este, tú un excelente trabajador y me gusta la forma en que—como eres como esposo, como papá, como hijo—que tus padres pueden contar en ti y en tus hermanas, también; como eres como amigo; eh, todos los aspectos, me gustan todos.

H[M]: Bien recibido, usted [they kiss one another on the lips].

As seen in the response of H[M] above, he somewhat playfully inserts a deference marker by referring to her as *usted* but then simultaneously conveys his solidarity by kissing her on the lips as an equal. In this sense, he uses both positive and negative politeness in his response to her compliments in the same way that she also used both politeness strategies in giving the compliments (though she used much more positive politeness than negative) (Brown and Levinson 1987).

In another instance in the PR data, S[F] also shows deference, putting her partner J[M] in a higher position, which he mitigates by equalizing the playing field again and help S[F] maintain her *positive face*, which is recovered through the interchange:

(13) S[F]: *Él es muy organizado y eso me ha ayudado a mí porque—¡uf!—yo soy bien desorganizada.*

J[M]: *No te ataques.*

S[F]: *En verdad. Él es bien organizado. Pero, también, yo lo ayudo.*

In the MX data, indirect speech was more common than in the PR data, such as in the following example in which only the context would clarify what was meant but not explicitly stated. The indirect speech is indicated in bold.

(14) Ma[F]: *Pues, supone la grande [cualidad] es que es bien noble y es bien sensible. **Él se olvida de las cosas bien fácil.***

In this example (14), Ma[F] refers to her partner as forgetting things easily—which could be either be positive or negative, depending upon exactly what is being

forgotten. For example, she could mean he forgets something, such as to pay the bills—which would be a criticism embedded in a compliment (which, as mentioned, did occur at several other points in the data). On the other hand, she seems to imply, without explicitly stating the word *malas* in front of the stated word *bien* that she is referring to his ability to forget the bad things and, according to the context clues before it, remember the good things—because he is very noble and *sensible*. While directness involves that the form explicitly match the function of an utterance, indirectness is when what is stated (the form) requires some level of inference on the part of the hearer to understand the function that the statement tacitly performs.

Marked words and phrases of PR and MX groups are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2
Words and Phrases
in compliments by MX individuals

MX speaker	C 1	C 1	C 2	C 2	C 3	C 3	C 4	C 4	C 5	C 5	C 6	C 6	C 7	C 7	C 8	C 8		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M		
																	Avg	Sum
<i>muy</i> (+adj.)	0	1	11	2	1	4	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	2	2.38	38
<i>bien</i> (+adj.)	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.63	10
<i>buen(o)/a</i>	0	1	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	0	1	0	0.94	15
<i>Pendiente/</i>																		
<i>preocupado</i>	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.19	3
<i>paciencia/</i>																		
<i>paciente</i>	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.56	9
<i>siempre</i>	5	0	1	0	0	3	2	1	1	2	3	0	2	0	2	2	1.50	24
<i>a veces</i>	0	1	2	4	4	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1.06	17
<i>más que</i>																		
<i>nada</i>	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0.56	9
Key:			C = Couple 1; C = Couple 2; etc.								F = Female				Avg = Average			
			1				2				M = Male				+adj. = adjective (added)			

Table 3
Words and Phrases
in compliments by PR individuals

	C 9	C 9	C 10	C 10	C 11	C 11	C 12	C 12	C 13	C 13	C 14	C 14	C 15	C 15		
PR speaker	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M		
															Avg	Sum
<i>muy</i> (+adj.)	5	4	4	20	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	2	0	2.93	41
<i>bien</i> (+adj.)	7	1	2	2	0	7	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.93	27
<i>buen(o)/a pendiente (de)</i>	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	2	0	4	0	1.14	16
<i>pacien(te)/c ia</i>	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0.86	12
<i>siempre</i>	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0.64	9
<i>a veces</i>	11	2	0	3	3	3	3	3	5	11	0	0	5	2	3.64	51
<i>más que</i>	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.71	10
<i>nada</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0
Key: C = Couple 11; C = Couple 12; etc. F = Female Avg = Average 11 12 M = Male +adj. = adjective (added)																

Preocupar(se)/preocupado was used interchangeably with *pendiente de*. Among the PR data, both were often intensified further with the accompanying *muy*, *bien*, or *siempre*. As Tables 2 and 3 show, *Preocupar(se)/preocupado* and *pendiente de* were used a total of three times, by two MX women. By contrast, the term was used 12 times by a total of six PR (5 M; 1 F); thus these terms were used on average 0.9 times in the PR data, but a mere 0.2 times in the MX data. All of these references in both the PR and MX data were in regard to the caring for or worrying about (depending on semantic intent) the wellbeing of the partner and/or children. The use of the term(s) shows an exaggerated concern that is applauded more consistently and explicitly in the PR data than in the MX data. If *preocupar(se)* carries the meaning of worrying about someone or something, the term may link worrying to expressing care and attention, although this is inconclusive since the exact semantic intention of the speaker is unclear. Note the following examples

of these terms from the PR data. The terms variant terms of *preocupar(se)/pendiente de* as well as the intensifiers *siempre* and *muchísimo* are in bold.

(15) MN(M): *Pues, mi amor, todavía aprecio la, la, la mujer que eres—que **siempre preocupes** por mí, **siempre preocupes** para que haya [algo] conmigo, que llegue temprano, y por la gran madre que eres. Yo sé que **te preocupas muchísimo** por esta pequeña, y pues, que **siempre estás pendiente de ella**.*

(16) TA(F): *...La **preocupación** tuya de sentarnos toda la noche y leerles la palabra de Dios y hablarles de Dios—eso es algo que, también, yo admiro de ti mucho.*

As seen in examples (15) and (16), *siempre* was another term that showed marked use in the PR data, but less use in the MX data. In the PR data, *siempre* was used in compliments a total of 51 times, by 11 of the 14 PR individuals, with an average use of 3.6 times per person. By contrast, in the MX data, *siempre* was used in the compliment form a total of 24 times, by 11 out of 16 MX individuals, with each person's using the term 1.6 times. Thus, *siempre* was used, on average, over twice as much per individual in the PR data as compared to the MX data. This may suggest, once again, that the PR participants prefer to use this word as a positive politeness strategy to intensify or emphasize their compliments more so than the MX groups. Here are examples of use in both sets of data, PR and MX, respectively:

(17) PR: Ma(F): *Pero yo creo que en estos trece años, la cara tuya de salir adelante, de superarte, de **siempre** decir, “¡Vamos a poder! No te preocupes.” **Siempre** tienes una palabra—**siempre, siempre**—en cada momento—tienes una palabra positiva—**siempre**.*

(18) MX: I(F): [rubbing partner's stomach]... *Que me cuidas **siempre**. **Siempre** me cuidas y me respetas.*

Another difference in repeated terms occurred in the phrase *a veces*, which was used 17 times by seven of 16 MX (43%) individuals; and a total of ten times by five out

of 14 PR (35%) individuals. The function of *a veces* in the two groups is what makes the contrast more significant than the percentages of the form's use in the data. Overall, *a veces* was used in negative politeness strategies, which were more prevalent among the MX data than the PR data. In the MX data, 12 out of 17 instances are used to soften a criticism that is embedded in the compliment. Two out of 17 instances with *a veces* in the MX data function to give deference by self-defacing (e.g. *A veces me desespero*), which can also be said to be a negative politeness strategy of “going on record as incurring a debt” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 102, 131). The remaining three out of 17 instances are used to qualify compliments.

Specifically, these three qualifying uses of *a veces* (seen in (19a)) occur after a MX [M] embeds a criticism in his compliment. Note that, immediately before and after the criticism (*necia*), the MX [M] distances himself from the MX [F] by suddenly switching from the second to the third person. He then switches to the past tense with *no podía hacer eso*, with *eso* referring to his being alone. He also adds *o* and *o sea* sometimes as a verbal filler and, right before his criticism, as softeners (the latter use is in bold). The diminutive in *poquito* softens the following criticism word, *necia*. Finally he redirects the conversation by asking a question as he nervously laughs. The terms that criticize (underlined), distance, and soften are in bold.

(19a) JC[M]: *Una cualidad... no sé... pero creo que son las mismas que sabes... Que seas una persona, este, muy independiente, o sea, es una persona muy fuerte. Aunque, **a veces**, hemos tenido problemas, **o sea**, estaba allí, **o sea**, **o** dices, “¡qué bien!” **o** sabe qué hablar. **A veces**, es un **poquito necia**. Pues, **es algo que siempre me ha gustado—que sea independiente, que se pueda acelerarse por sí mismo, es una cualidad que tiene**. Sé que **estaba** aquí solo y **no es fácil** estar aquí solo—y es algo que, a lo mejor, no podía hacer eso. Pues, sí, ¿qué cualidad tengo yo?* [laughs nervously]

Instead of following prompt to compliment, (19b) and other participants embedded criticism and/or insults in their “compliment” toward their partner. As Wolfson (1983: 89) suggests, “a compliment may precede, and thus soften, a criticism,” and this phenomenon was definitely evidenced in the data, especially among several of the Mexican couples, who used words such as *necia*, *taño*, *impaciente*, and *enojona* to describe their partner. The following shows how *a veces* is used in response to hedge a MX [F]’s compliment in response to the previous example that included criticism and request for compliments (19a).

(19b) MX F: *Me agrada que, a veces, me entiendes y, a veces, me escuchas; y que, a veces, te tomas el tiempo para comprender X-situación o X-cosa que yo te diga—que no, no ignores.*

In both the MX and PR data, *a veces* is used to “go on record as incurring a debt,” a negative politeness move, but the difference is seen in the number of times this occurs in the MX data (two out of 17 times) versus that of the PR (eight out of 10 times) (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 102, 131). The other two of the 10 instances with *a veces* in the PR data function as softeners of embedded criticism. However, both times in which a criticism is embedded in a PR compliment, there is additional softening of the criticism through the use of the diminutive as seen in these two instances.

(20) TI(M): *También es una persona humilde en el sentido de que ella es calladita, a veces, pero en el sentido de que es dulce.*

(21) MM(F): *Siempre has hecho lo posible para complacerme a mí, por complacer las nenas, por estar bien con la familia... Corazón blandito, a veces* [she laughs; partner does not].

Más que nada was another qualifying phrase used in compliments that differed between the PR and MX data. Although only four out of 16 MX individuals used the

term a total of nine times, by contrast, *más que nada* was not used at all in the PR data.

The following example shows the term in the MX discourse:

(22a) A(F): *Yo quería un hombre que me respetara y que fuera bueno conmigo **más que nada**. No importara si estuviera feo, bonito. Lo que importa es que estuviera bueno conmigo. Y fue lo que más me gustó de él, el respeto que tenía conmigo y, **más que nada**, que era muy diferente a los demás, a otras personas que yo había conocido.*

In the PR data, *sobre todo* (in bold) was a term comparable to the MX term *más que nada*.

(22b) Ma[F]: *Agradezco **sobre todo** tu corazón en el Señor.*

The adverb *bien* was used at least one time and up to eight times by each of the 13 out of the 14 PR participants in describing positive qualities of their spouse. On average each of these 13 PR individuals used the term, on average, 1.93 times each in expressing their compliments. There were a total of 49 references to *bien* in the PR data; 34 of these references followed the formula of *bien* + descriptor (e.g. adjective/adjectival phrase). This formula intensified the semantic weight of the adjective, such as in the following examples in the PR data:

(23) H[M]: *Es **bien** positiva, **bien** determinada cuando algo se pone en frente de ella, ella no ve impedimento—es como, hay que hacerla, y ya.*

(24) MD[F]: *[Name of partner] es un hombre de muchos detalles. No se le pasa ni una... Es **bien** detallista—el Día de la Mujer, el Día de las Madres—el Día de las Madres, yo creo que yo lo celebro dos o tres días antes porque él es **bien** detallista—y esto es lo más que me gustaba de [name of partner]... Me decía, “Es **bien** detallista.”*

(25) S[F]: *Él es **bien** organizado.*

By contrast, the MX data showed only three out of the 16 MX participants (19%) using this same formula. Although the word *bien* was referenced 27 times in the MX data, only ten of those instances followed the same formula used by the PR group (*i.e.*

bien + descriptive adjective). Of the ten uses of the formula, just one MX participant's uses the formula six times, accounting for over half of the formula usage among the total MX data. The MX data shows a wider variety of use for the adverb *bien*, including such varied and repeated uses as *nos llevamos bien*, *están bien*, and *me cayó bien*.

Although these differences were found between PR and MX data, certain formulaic expressions of compliments emerged in both groups such as, *Me gusta que...* y *Me agrada que...* This illustrates common themes and potentially shared valued between the two dialect groups. In addition, the following words and phrases were prevalent among both dialects and data sets.

Forma de ser was used by roughly one-third of both PR and MX individuals.

(26) A[F]: *Lo que pasa es que me él me gustó su **forma de ser**, que él no tomaba, él no era mujeriego, era muchacho muy respetuoso con mí.*

Familia was used by roughly half of both PR and MX individuals.

(27) MR[F]: *Me gusta de él que siempre está pensando en todos como **familia**—nada más en nosotros como pareja.*

Mis hijos was another common term between the PR and MX groups. Taking into account that one of the MX couples had no children, the same number (71%) of PR and MX individuals mentioned this term. Although the children are really *theirs*, together, this first person singular was strongly preferred over *nuestros hijos*:

(30) MR[F]: *Y aparte porque siempre había respetado a **mis hijos**, también me gustaba mucha de él que no se metía con **mis hijos**, o no me hacía comentarios malos de ellos.*

General and all-inclusive phrases, such as, *por todo lo que ha hecho* and *todos estos años* were commonly used by both PR and MX individuals in the data.

(31) PR [M]: *Yo te agradezco **todos estos años** de compañía que me has dado, de entendimiento y tolerancia, porque yo sé que, después, no es todo color de rosa.*

(32) MX [M]: *Yo mismo aprecio a ella **por todo lo que ha hecho** para nuestra familia. Pues, todo, por mis hijos [repeated twice].*

Muy diferente (a) was a term repeated by the same number of individuals in both groups. This term may be more of a reflection on the nature of the relationship itself, with low distance (D) and high commitment. These examples show how both groups found their partners to be outstanding, indicated in bold.

(33) A[F]: *Cuando yo les platiqué de él, que él era **muy diferente a** otros muchachos que yo había conocido, ellas se ponen contentas, porque como me querían mucho, me decían entonces que era un buen muchacho para mí y que sí me convenía.*

(34) A[F]: *Yo quería un hombre que me respetara y que fuera bueno conmigo más que nada. No importara si estuviera feo, bonito. Lo que importa es que estuviera bueno conmigo. Y fue lo que más me gustó de él, el respeto que tenía conmigo y, más que nada, que era **muy diferente a** los demás, a otras personas que yo había conocido.*

(35) C[M]: *Pues, no, que la miraba **muy diferente** que las demás. No fuma, digo. Hasta tres, fuman, toman, andan con otro y otro.*

Trabajo/trabajador(a)

In the MX data, some variant of *trabajo/trabajador(a)* occurred in the compliments of six out of 16 MX participants with each person referencing the term at least once and up to six times in the discourse, or on average, about three times (3.16) per person. A comparable number of PR participants, five out of 14, also mentioned the term, but only once or twice, or on average 1.6 times, in the discourse. The more frequent repetition of the term by the MX group showed a stronger emphasis given to this term as compared to the fewer repetitions per individual in the PR group. The following examples are cited from the MX data.

(36) A[F]: *Me gusta que tú, **te gusta trabajar**, te gusta—si no tienes trabajo un día, el otro día tú ves la otra forma de ir y buscar **trabajito** y traer algo para la casa. Ésas son las cualidades que a mí me gusta de ti, de cuando tú no tienes trabajo, este, **buscas la forma de encontrar un poquito de trabajo**, o sea que no te quedas estancado allí, y, que dices, “Ah, ¿Cuándo me vaya a llegar un trabajo?”—no, le buscas la forma, **tratas de salir adelante**. Y no te quedas allí sino que le echas ganas. Esto es lo que me gusta de ti* [tears in her eyes].

(37) Re[F]: *Pues, sí, porque él era una buena persona y le gustaba **trabajar**, y le gustaba mucho **trabajar**, le gustaba mucho **salir adelante**.*

Por tener paciencia a mí/ me tienes mucha paciencia occurred about the same number of times throughout both sets of data with nine references in the MX data, by six individuals out of 16 (37.5%); and nine references by six out of 14 PR individuals (42.8%). This made the average use 0.6 times in both sets of data.

(38) C[M]: *Te agradezco por procurarme, **por tener paciencia a mí**, porque a veces me desespero, pero es como todos—somos seres humanos.*

Based on these repeated phrases in conjunction with the previously mentioned discovery that compliments often correlate with cultural values, it seems that there are a number of observable similarities of values between the two dialects. The consistently repeated phrases mentioned here above emphasize that family (*familia*), one's way of being (*forma de ser*), patience (*paciencia*), and uniqueness of their partner (*muy diferente a*) all constitute important, shared values among both groups, PR and MX. Nonetheless, the style of expression of these values are, overall, expressed differently between PR and MX dialects, as PR used more words and more specific illustrations without outside prompting whereas MX tended to use fewer words and more generalized words along with depending on more outside prompting to compliment.

Gender Difference

Question 2: Were there recurring differences between men and women in their expression of compliments?

According to Holmes (1986: 469), “to be heard as a compliment an utterance must refer to something which is positively valued by the participants and attributed to the addressee.” Thus, a compliment (that is heard as such) deals with what the speaker and the hearer value; and repeated topics reveal the strong and consistently reinforced values in a given group and community. Since each couple in this study is comprised of one man and one woman of the same dialect, studying the topics they choose for their compliments shows who values what and to what (comparative) degree.

In Holmes (1986: 496) study of New Zealand compliments, she found that the majority of compliments fall into a few, basic categories: “appearance, ability or a good performance, possessions, and some aspect of personality or friendliness, with the first two accounting for 81.3% of the data.” Based on Holmes’ idea of over-arching, basic categories, I grouped the compliments into three basic categories: (1) Appearance / Physical Attraction; (2) Performance / Abilities; and (3) Character / Personality. Holmes and Brown’s analysis showed that both men and women most valued appearance and performance, which accounted for over 80% of the data. By contrast, the compliments in this present study showed that appearance received the least attention by the speaker and that character/personality (rather than performance) accounted for the highest number of compliments. The primary factor that distinguishes Holmes (1986) participants from the ones in this study is the contrast in the nature of the relationship between participants. That is, in Holmes’ (1986) study the participants may or may not be related to one

another in a close, long-term relationship since the participants in the New Zealand study were randomly selected, not based on their relationship to one another. By contrast, the nature of the relationship of the participants in this study is a very low distance (D) relationship, since these are committed life-partners rather than strangers on a university campus (as in Holmes' study). The primary factors that account for this study's reverse results from Holmes' study has to do with not only the greater relational proximity within each couple itself but also the personal presence of both partners upon giving and receiving compliments.

PR males complimented more frequently than the other groups (MX [M], MX [F], PR [F]) on character as well as appearance. The PR male compliments on appearance were given by four out of the seven PR males in the study, with one PR male in particular stating this value in compliment form six times. It is important to recall that the PR males used the greatest number of words of all the groups in giving their compliments, so it is not too surprising that they gave the highest number of compliments as compared to all other subgroups (MX [M], MX [F], PR [F]). What is especially interesting to note is that, with the exception of the MX females, all of the (remaining) groups (i.e. MX [M], PR [M], and PR [F]) complimented most on the topic of character. Once again, this may suggest that the nature of a committed, long-term relationship is a primary factor in producing this result in the data.

These results of the relationship between gender and compliments are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Gender and Compliment Topics

Compliment Topics	Speakers				Total
	MX M	MX F	PR M	PR F	
Appearance/physical attraction	3	5	11	8	27
Performance/abilities	48	70	67	47	232
Character/personality	49	61	101	94	305
Total Compliments	100	136	179	149	564

Key: F = Female; M = Male

Tables 5 and 6 show the compliments by couple, according to their nationality.

Table 5
Compliment Topics by Couples and Mexican Nationality

MX Speaker	APP	PERF	CHAR	Total
C1 Ma[F]	0	8	4	12
C1 Ce[M]	0	3	3	6
C2 A[F]	1	12	11	24
C2 C[M]	0	8	3	11
C3 B[F]	1	24	6	31
C3 A[M]	2	9	7	18
C4 G[F]	0	7	10	17
C4 JC[M]	1	4	5	10
C5 Ju[F]	2	3	3	8
C5 Ro[M]	0	11	6	17
C6 I[F]	1	7	5	13
C6 RI[M]	0	5	1	6
C7 Re[F]	0	8	8	16
C7 S[M]	0	6	6	12
C8 MRL[F]	0	1	11	12
C8 E[M]	0	2	17	19
Average	0.5	7.38	6.63	14.5
Total	8	118	106	232
Percentage of total compliments (559)	1.4%	21.1%	19.0%	41.5%

Key: C1 = Couple 1; C2 = Couple 2; etc.
[F] = Female
[M] = Male

APP= Appearance or physical attraction
= Performance or ability
CHAR = Character or personality

What is most interesting to note in Table 6 is that, among the PR couples, Character/Personality accounts for 34.9% of the entire compliment data. Although the average length of relationship among all participants (MX and PR) is 12 years, it is important to note that the PR couples have had an average of 15 years together whereas the MX couples have had an average of eight years together. Though it is my conjecture, I believe that relationships that are twice as long (PR couples) as compared to the other data set (MX couples) may facilitate a deepening of the value of Character/Personality since Appearance and Performance may fade or weaken with time. Religious convictions and values may also play a role.

Table 6
Compliment Topics by Couples and Puerto Rican Nationality

PR Speaker	APP	PERF	CHAR	Total
C9 ME[F]	0	12	13	25
C9 E[M]	0	4	7	11
C10 S[F]	0	5	12	17
C10 J[M]	3	7	32	42
C11 K[F]	1	10	8	19
C11 H[M]	6	10	23	39
C12 TA[F]	1	3	18	22
C12 TI[M]	1	15	20	36
C13 ARL[F]	0	5	12	17
C13 MN[M]	1	17	5	23
C14 V[F]	3	5	19	27
C14 JV[M]	0	6	4	10
C15 MM[F]	3	4	12	19
C15 MM[M]	0	10	10	20
Average	1.36	8.07	13.93	23.36
Total	19	113	195	327
Percentage of total compliments (559)	3.4%	20.2%	34.9%	58.5%

Key: C1 = Couple 1; C2 = Couple 2; etc.
[F] = Female
[M] = Male

APP= Appearance or physical attraction
= Performance or ability
CHAR = Character or personality

The data showed a strong, gendered pattern in that the female initiated the compliments in eight out of eight (100%) MX couples as well as in five out of seven

(71%) PR couples. In addition, PR and MX females gave a combined total of 285 compliments as compared with the 249 compliments given by the PR and MX males. Often choosing similar wording, males and females among all groups tended to reflect, or mirror, one another's compliments in how they stated their compliments to one another, often using similar phrases. The following example illustrates one such example and its use of strong positive politeness strategies as the couple seeks agreement and avoids disagreement (Brown and Levinson 1987).

(39a) Er[M]: *Básicamente, lo que me encanta de ti, o unas de tus cualidades, es que eres fijo en la que crees... Siempre eres **firme** en lo que crees y eso ha **ayudado para tener la familia que tenemos**.*

(39b) Mar[F]: *A ti... tu carácter, **tu firmeza**, tu capacidad **para dirigirnos como familia**.*

Much of the mirroring nature of the compliments tended to center around a strong focus on familial and social roles. In other words, overall, women and men are defined in relation to their traditional gender roles: wife and mother, for the women; husband and father, for the men. What is particularly distinct in terms of both dialect/ethnicity and gender is the very minimal use of the term *padre/papá* in compliments as compared to *madre/mamá*. Five out of seven (71%) PR males complimented on this with a comparable 62.5% of MX males complimenting on the *madre* role. In considering that one of the MX couples has no children, the MX percentage for this compliment focus of the *madre* role would be identical to that of the PR males (71%). By contrast, four of seven PR females (57%) compliment the *padre* role while only two of eight MX females (25%) mention *padre* (but never *papá*) as a compliment focus. Familial and societal roles may be highlighted as a compliment of one's character. For example, in the

following compliment, E[M], for the MX data, lists six of such roles for which he praises his spouse:

(40) E[M]: *Eres excepcional como **madre**, como **mujer**, como **esposa**, como **líder**, como **hija**, como **nuera**. Gracias y se te agradezco por todo.*

In this compliment, the male chooses the intensifier *excepcional* to highlight the value he places on these roles of his partner. This also aligns with the positive politeness strategy of exaggerating approval (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987).

In both groups (MX and PR), *trabajo/trabajador(a)* was used as a term to compliment primarily the men, reinforcing their traditional gender roles of being the bread winner outside of the home. In the MX data, the term was used by four MX women versus three MX men. In the PR data, the term was used by four PR women and one PR male. Thus, a total of eight (MX and PR) women complimented their partners on their hard work or hard-working nature, whereas only half as many men (total) complimented this performance or characteristic in their partners. These eight MX and PR women used the term a total of 19 times to compliment their partner whereas the four men (MX and PR) used the term six times. One noteworthy exception among the males, who used the term four of those six times to compliment his partner on her hard work both in and outside of the home is expressed as follows:

(41) C[M]: *Me presiento que no duerme bien porque se levanta muy temprano y, pues, cuando trabajaba [outside of the home], ya [se veía] más, uh más, estresada, porque ella tenía que entrarse más temprano. Y es de mucho trabajo, preparar la comida, lavar, ese, mi ropa. Yo también me preocupo todo eso, porque realmente **las mujeres tienen más trabajo que un hombre**. Uno dice que no, porque algo pea la casa o algo y acá, no, **aquí tienes a los niños, eh, es mucho trabajo para la mujer.***

In the following example the phrase *haces de todo* is reflected both ways— between the male and the female while once again reinforcing traditional male/female

roles, such as fixing things around the house (for the male) and cooking food (for the female):

(42a) J[F]: *Lo que yo aprecio de él es que sabe hacer de todo. Bueno, eres una gente como le llaman que sabe hacer de todo. Si es por la camioneta allí estás tú para arreglarla. Si descompone cualquier en la casa, allí estás tú. O sea, Dios te da las habilidades de, como, no, no construiste la casa, pero la redecoraste la casa. O, es no que andamos pagando extra porque son características que tú tienes.*

(42b) Ro[M]: *Muchas veces, me trae mucha hambre y no se me ocurre hacer nada... Pero haces de todo [i.e. you make the food easily].*

Another example of this occurs when R[M] embeds a compliment in an expression of thanks:

(43) R[M]: *Pues, gracias a Dios por tu paciencia y por todos los años que nos ha permitido estar juntos y por ser una buena esposa, una buena amiga, y una buena madre para nuestros hijos.*

As mentioned, the PR groups spoke more words than the MX groups, even though the MX groups had one more couple than the PR groups. As Table 7 illustrates, the PR men, in particular, used the most words to share their compliments as compared to each of the other groups (i.e. MX M, MX F, PR F). Overall, the combined total of MX women used 419 more words than the MX men, while the combined total of PR men used 688 more words than the PR women. Although women are often assumed to speak more than men, these results show that that was not the case found among the PR women, who spoke the fewest words on average than any other group (i.e. MX M, MX F, PR M). The MX men spoke the least of all groups.

Table 7
Word Count in Compliments
by Speaker

MX M	MX F	MX Total	PR M	PR F	PR Total	
185	133	318	132	424	556	
337	655	992	684	176	860	
323	462	785	584	270	854	
225	331	556	397	286	683	
242	264	506	289	142	431	
88	119	207	126	334	460	
208	220	428	314	206	520	
252	95	347				
232.50	284.88	517.38	360.86	262.57	623.43	Average
1860	2279	4139	2526	1838	4364	Total

Key: M = Male
F = Female

Holmes' (1997) observations men's speech in the public sphere may, in part, explain why five out of the seven PR males used significantly more words in their compliments than did their female partners. A study done by Holmes on gendered behavior in faculty meetings showed that "the men who spoke the least still spoke longer than the woman who spoke the most" (quoting Tannen's summary 2000). Through Holmes' study, it was shown that the public nature of a faculty meeting created a competitive edge for the men and motivated them to assert themselves via words whereas, by contrast, the home environment did not present them with that same motivation, since, in their view, they had nothing to prove and could, therefore, not speak as much in the private domain (i.e. at home). Women showed the opposite trend in that study, speaking far more in private than in the public sphere (Holmes 1997; in Tannen 2000). Based on both Holmes' and Tannen's research, it would seem that my presence in the current study could have constituted a somewhat public sphere, which may explain

why the PR men spoke relatively more than anyone else, though that would necessarily not explain why the MX men did not.

Education Level

Question 3: Do those with higher levels of education express their compliments differently than those of lower education levels? I expected to find that the education level of the speaker does affect the expression of compliments.

The biographical information (see Appendix A) highlighted a marked difference in education level (see Table 8) and the difference was also reflected by the difference in nationality. The highest level of education for 11 out of the 16 MX participants consisted of some grade school and/or some high school. Related to gender, at least three MX men could not read or write as evidenced in their inability to fill out the biographical information sheet and/or by their own (or their partner's) verbal admission. In each case, the MX female asked the questions to the MX males verbally and then wrote down their answers as dictated. Of the MX men, only two of the eight had some college education whereas two of the eight MX women had graduated with a B.A. or equivalent. These data further explain why parts of research Question 1 showed a significant difference in the expression of compliments between not only the two dialects (PR and MX) but also between the two genders in PR and MX couples. In terms of ranking levels of education, from lowest to highest, the least educated group consisted of MX men; then MX women were more educated than the MX men; PR women were more educated than MX men and MX women; and, finally, PR men were the most educated of all these groups.

Thus, the following observations overlap to some degree with not only ethnicity but also gender comparisons, since both MX and PR women fell within the middle range

of education level, that is, MX women were more educated than MX men but less educated than PR women; and, by comparison, PR women were less educated than their male PR counterparts. With the exception of one PR female, 13 or 14 PR participants graduated from college. Five of the 14 PRs received a B.A. or equivalent; six of the 14 PRs earned an M.A. or equivalent; and two of the 14 PR males earned their Ph.D.

Table 7 below illustrates the educational data as follows:

Table 8
Highest level of Education among PR M/F and MX M/F individuals

	MX M	MX F	PR F	PR M
(Some) grade school only	3	2	—	—
(Some) high school	3	3	—	—
(Some) college	2	1	1	—
Graduated with a B.A. or equivalent	—	2	2	3
Graduated with an M.A. or equivalent	—	—	4	2
Ph.D.	—	—	—	2
Total number of individuals	8	8	7	7
Key:	F = Females			
	M = Males			

The above data is relevant to this study since the expression of compliments inherently involves making a judgment, albeit usually a positive one, of another person. Compliments can be used as a Face-Threatening Act (FTA) (De los Heros, 1998: 63). Moreover, since compliments are comprised of words and involve some level of assessment and analysis on the part of the speaker, it seems logical that the more developed a person may be in these critical thinking skills, the more able he or she may be to expand upon the simple and non-descriptive formula of adj + NP of found in the compliment data of Americans, for example (Wolfson 1981: 120).

Poon Teng Fatt (1991: 43) points out the strong relationship between communicative competence and higher education in regard to intellectual, linguistic,

social, and civic development. Since, arguably, one of the purposes of education is to help individuals develop in such areas of expression and analysis, it appears that having more education would make it more likely that these abilities would be more sophisticated in those individuals with more education. Correspondingly, having less education may suggest that these abilities may have less opportunity to be developed in those individuals with less education.

In practical terms, the data showed that those with more education did indeed express their compliments with more complexity of thought (*e.g.* elaborating through illustrations and metaphors) and precise language (specific and descriptive word choice) whereas those with less education tended to generalize and repeat many basic words that referred to larger concepts (*e.g.* *amor*, *respeto*, *cuida*) without expounding on such ideas. Some of the more sophisticated terms used by those with more education included words such as, *impetu*, *impedimento*, and *emprendedora*. In sum, those with higher levels of education added more specific details and explanation that supported their compliments whereas those with less education seemed to say less and to say it in more simple and/or repetitive terms.

Notice the simplicity of complimenting in a MX couple with some grade-school education. (The male cannot read, and states this during the interview.) The basic and broad terms are noted in bold. First, I prompt couple to directly say to their partner what they appreciate about one another.

(44) I(F): *Pues, sí, **lo mismo**. Le aprecio que **me cuide**.*

RI(M): *Nos cuidamos.*

I(F): = *que **nos respetemos**—que siempre hay **respeto** entre nosotros*
[rubbing his arm affectionately]. ***Nunca cambias conmigo.***

RI(M): Soy **lo mismo**... Tenemos **mucha química**. Hace rato que nos decíamos que **nos amamos**.

I(F): No importa lo que la gente diga; le doy gracias porque **él me ayuda** [rubbing arm a lot—continuously] ... Y **lo amo mucho** [they kiss and laugh].

RI(M): *Aprecio mucho **que me caricias, me besas, todo lo aprecio de ti*** [she increases fervor of arm-rubbing]... [3.0 seconds of silence]... **todo la aprecio** [pulling her close to him, she leans into him and back on the couch; both laugh].

I(F): Yo también **te amo**.

By contrast, notice the descriptive nature of the following compliment (with only half of it shown here, for the sake of space), given by a PR male with a B.A. degree as he responds to an indirect prompt to compliment his partner (thus the use of indirectness). Here he compliments his partner on her radical participation to stand against social injustice, mentioning various categories that are included in that stand. In addition, he specifies his compliment further by using many distinct adjectives such as, determined, decided, pure, integrated, and radical, to describe the nature of his partner's heart:

(45) J(M): *Y tiene mucho **coraje** y mucho deseo de **ir en contra** de lo que todo es **la maldad**, en contra del abuso de niños, **en contra de la perversión sexual**, en contra lo que es **el discrimen**, en contra de lo que es **la violencia**, **las madres abusadas**, **los niños abusados**, en toda manera que se pueda ser. Ella es muy seria. Es **muy determinada en ir en contra**. Y realmente, me ha enseñado ser **decidido y radical**—amar a Dios y odiar a todo que Dios odia—**el pecado**. Y ella es **muy radical en mantener su corazón puro e íntegro** para Dios, para luchar en contra de todo en el mundo. Y, en verdad, tengo una mujer de un solo **temple** muy **íntegra** en que me puedo confiar 100 por ciento. Me ha enseñado ser **íntegro** a ser **sincero** y **transparente** y **puro** en todo mi caminar. Ésa es [partner's name].*

As stated in Chapter 2, semantically non-descriptive adjectives, such as *nice* and *good* followed by a NP was found to be one of the most commonly used compliment formulas found in American English (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Manes and Wolfson

1980; Wolfson 1981, 1983; Manes 1983; Goody 1978; Lakoff 1975). Although all couples (PR and MX) in this study also used equivalent generic formulas in their compliments, such as *buen padre*, *buena madre*, and *buena persona*, the MX group, particularly the MX men, did not often expand upon these basic compliment formulas. Indirect and non-specific compliments such as the following example were common among Mexican men, again, the group with the least education.

(46) RI[M]: *No hay mucho que decir porque los dos nos respetamos. Específicamente, **todo lo de ella me interesa. Todo.***

The obvious irony in this example is that the word, *específicamente* is used in a context with is anything *but* specific.

Three of the MX groups with a maximum level of education including some attendance to grade-school seemed visibly embarrassed about directly verbalizing their compliments toward one another in this context (with an observer present). For example, during and after a compliment, S and R related as follows.

(47) S[M]: *Aprecio de ti* [after forced correction to directly address his spouse—rather than speak about her], *hay muchas cosas que he aprendido de ella...*” (4.0 seconds of silence)... [nervous laughter by both participants].

Subsequently R[F] appears to mitigate the seemingly face-threatening-act of complimenting one another in this context perhaps due to the observer’s presence—that is, a Caucasian, educated, middle-class female:

(48) R [F]: *Danos un momentito* [R[F] hides face in S[M]’s chest, while both look down and continue laughing nervously].

Another common expression of compliments among most of the Mexican men with their highest degree of education being grade school, was to impersonalize the direct

prompt to compliment one's partner (which would typically entail the use of *tú* rather than *ella* or *usted*) as is seen in this example:

(49) R[F]: “*Pues, yo quiero agradecerle porque siempre me ha apoyado a mi familia, aparte de que me ha soportado a mi genio (anger/temper), me ha soportado a mi familia... y siempre estaba allí cuando yo lo necesito.*”

The opposite trend was found with those with higher levels of education—whether Mexican or Puerto Rican—suggesting that education, among other factors, may be a significant in affecting the expression of compliments. Nonetheless, in general the MX groups more often than the PR groups tended to switch, perhaps subconsciously, to referring to their spouse in the third person (*él* or *ella*), with this result being especially prevalent among MX men. Four out of the eight (50%) Mexican men in the study were prompted multiple times by both the researcher and their partners to speak directly to their partner, although they continued to speak in the third person even after clarifying the nature of the prompt. This may be due to cultural norms and comfort levels of the individuals involved. The *observer's paradox* (Labov 1972: 209) cannot be discounted as a factor in the data collection. These factors may explain, in part, why over half of MX men consistently tended toward creating more distance through their pronoun choices. This is one possible theory, though there may be other factors involved, such as potential influences of *machismo* or questions of *confianza* (Travis 2006).

Although Table 7 illustrates the significant difference in education level between the two dialectal and cultural groups involved, it is, nonetheless, hard to measure to what degree lower education levels may affect the compliment-giving except to say that the majority of those with less education in this study tended to use simpler words, fewer words, and repetition of basic phrases, such as *respeto*, *me cuide*, and *te amo* as compared

with more academic vocabulary and more words for expansion on complex ideas as seen in other examples already given. The results show that education may be a factor in creating differences.

In sum, for Question 1, I expected to find recurring differences between these two linguistic groups (PR and MX) in their expression of compliments, and there were some recurring differences, including:

- differences in preferred adverb usage (e.g. *muy* versus *bien*) with PR than MX individuals using both of these terms with more frequency to intensify compliments.
- differences in non-verbal expression (e.g. comfort level and displays of physical affection toward their partner)
- differences in positive v. negative politeness usage with PR groups' overall using more positive politeness strategies than MX groups
- differences in number of words used

Some similarities also surfaced, including:

- the strongly shared value of familial roles, especially the mother and child role(s)
- some similar usage of common terms with the same frequency, including *forma de ser* and *paciencia*

Regarding Question 2, I expected to find recurring differences between men and women in their expression of compliments. Some overall similarities among the genders did occur. For instance, the compliment topics of character and performance were greater than those of appearance for both genders, although MX females tended to

compliment more on performance than character as compared to the other groups. The focus on character and performance as the compliment topics of choice may be due to the nature of the low-distance relationship (D) of the participants.

The investigations of Tannen (2000) and Holmes (1997) found marked differences between styles of communication between men and women when in a public setting (talking with a non-intimate). Interestingly, the PR men in this study gave more compliments than any other group alone (PR F, MX M, MX F); they were also the most educated of all of the groups. In Holmes' (1997) study, male speech in a public sphere presented a challenge to attain or maintain status. Combining Holmes' finding with the dynamics of the present study shows how an outside observer, such as myself, created a public sector (albeit very small). Nonetheless, the highly educated, PR men made their voice heard the most in this micro-CofP. Were they, as Tannen's and Holmes' studies would suggest, seeking status by complimenting their spouses as much as possible in front of me (i.e. "the public")?

Perhaps the following observation from Tannen's data will shed further light on the results of the present study. In a quantitative and qualitative study, Tannen's (2000) investigated the conversational style differences between boys and girls, and then men and women (though she found that they stayed fundamentally the same, even with age). According to Tannen's video-conference series, *He Said, She said: Gender Language and Communication* (2000), typically (though not always) women seek cooperation while men seek status. This following illustration from Tannen's (2000) series presents the basic, competitive nature of boys' talk. The boys are talking about how high they can hit a ball:

Boy A: "I can hit a ball all the way up to the sky!"
Boy B: "I can hit a ball all the way up to Heaven!"
Boy C: "I can hit a ball all the way up to God!"

As one can see, the boys use language to outperform each other. Nonetheless, Holmes' study (1997) found the same status-seeking use of talk in the public setting of faculty meetings. In that setting, as well, with both men and women present, men talked the most and for the longest amount of time (Holmes 1997). I propose that these well-educated PR men may have seen me either as a peer or as an inferior and did not hesitate to use their words to maintain that position in the CofP during the interview time. I was the one outsider in their low distance (D) relationship.

Returning to Question 3, I expected those with more education to express their compliments differently than those with less education. Based on the greater level of detail in explanations, concepts, and sophistication of word choice, the data show that education may play a significant role in determining the style of compliments. So why did the MX men with lower education levels, (some of whom were visibly embarrassed to admit they could not read), not compliment their wives as much as the PR men did? Could it have to do with a social power (P) difference, based on our different levels of education? Although I see myself as an equal with them, do they see themselves this way, too? It is impossible for me to know, but social factors may have played some role in the CofP as well, namely, power (P), distance (D), and ratio of imposition (R).

Another possible factor contributing to the difference in those with less education (the MX groups) and those with more (the PR groups) may have to do with a stronger inclination among the MX pairs toward negative politeness, and, specifically, deference.

Tannen (1994: 140-141) cites Lakoff's (1979) "four principal foci of communicative competence," one of which is deference:

Deference [is] the aim is to avoid imposition. That is, unlike distance, deference allows interaction as long as the speaker does not attempt to get the upper hand. Hostility cannot be directly expressed, but can be made clear enough through questions or silence, for instance.

Perhaps, then, the more basic wording and simple expression of compliments was not only a factor of education but also of a preferred politeness strategy and a way of maintaining a sense of group harmony in the CofP.

On the other hand, *camaraderie* (Lakoff 1979), or solidarity, seemed to be a slightly more preferred politeness strategy among the PR groups, who also happened to have more education than the MX groups in this particular data set. Thus, it is impossible to completely separate all of the three components in answering the research questions, since education and dialect, in particular, tended to overlap in a marked way.

These analyses, of course, do not limit either group as if to put any individual or dialect in only one category of politeness or the other. Both groups used both positive and negative politeness strategies and showed similarities and differences, but further analysis is beyond the scope of this paper regarding the other factors that may have been involved.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest underlying cultural values and politeness preferences that have some similarities and differences among the PR and MX speakers involved in this study. Based on the trend in using more hedges, embedded criticisms, and fewer words and compliments, it seems that the MX groups had a stronger inclination to apply negative politeness strategies more so than the PR groups (Brown and Levinson 1978, [1987]). Based on the comparatively fewer hedges, minimal embedded criticisms, and greater quantity and intensity of words, it seems that the PR groups favored positive politeness strategies to a greater degree than the MX participants.

Undoubtedly, each individual interview with each couple represented a distinct CofP (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; following Lave and Wenger 1991). Due to the inherent nature of each CofP, it is impossible to control the consistency of relational variables, because, as Julé (2008: 27-28) states:

Language use by anyone at all always depends on where it occurs, why, when, how and with whom. One person's language use will vary widely according to the needs of the social context, for instance in terms of the level of formality required and what is being discussed, and in regards to the relationship between and history of both speaker and listener(s).

Since this study had a relatively small number of participants, future research involving a much larger number of participants would be helpful for quantifying the results and, consequently, confirming recurring patterns that the data may reveal. In that case, with a larger number of participants, either the researcher would need help in conducting the interviews and/or would perhaps need to employ another method of data

collection more conducive to a large-scale study. Of course, such a study was beyond the scope of this investigation.

In addition, since partners (married couples) are simply one part of an (ideally) integrated family unit, it would be interesting to apply this and other related studies on compliments to not only other dialect groups, such as Costa Ricans and Argentines but also to other socially related groups, such as other family relationships (outside of the spousal relationship), such as: parents and children, grandparents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, or women and their mothers-in-law. Studying the varied use of compliments as well as the politeness strategies used within the family unit would likely give insight into the family values and goals of particular linguistic and/or cultural groups—since, as Austin (1962) has made abundantly clear that people do things with words. Words are a medium for building relationships, and for tearing them a part. Words are used to enter into a marriage (“I do”), to correct (*e.g.* a child’s behavior), to give advice, and for many other speech acts that are especially prevalent in the family unit and have broad-sweeping social and cultural implications in a given community. Above all, words are revealing—whether directly or indirectly. What is said is sometimes just as significant as what is *not* said. In sum, exploring compliments and politeness within families or other societal units would build upon an already rich, but relatively recent body of theory and research that has made the field of pragmatics one of increasing interest and universal application.

This study has shown that the *form* and *function* of compliments work in tandem with each other to convey underlying personal and cultural values, whether directly or indirectly. In considering underlying values that surfaced through the study, it is

noteworthy that many of the participants (especially among the PR couples) were self-described as very religious and their language reflected this description. For example, many of the compliments involved religious themes or an awareness of the presence of *Dios*, such as the repeated use of the *formula*, *le doy gracias a Dios*. Although it is not possible to know the internal world and thoughts of individuals apart from their words and actions, this study took an outside-in approach to use words as a means in order to understand values. The words of many of the participants in the study reflected this value of including *Dios* in their compliments. Thus, the value of religion may have played a role in the expression of compliments. It would be interesting to study in greater depth how religion may play a role in the expression of compliments, but a thorough exploration of religious influences was beyond the scope of this present investigation.

As shown by this study, one can use words to build solidarity (via positive politeness strategies) or one can use words to safeguard autonomy (via negative politeness strategies). A working knowledge of these politeness strategies can enhance communication and prevent excessive miscommunication. Through effective communication, society is enriched by what each individual and group contributes as our concept of reality takes on a wider understanding and application. In practical matters, this working knowledge of what people are doing with words helps with business, marketing, and cross-cultural relationships—all of which can either be built up or torn down based on (mis)understandings or conflicting values and goals. In sum, bringing these politeness strategies and compliment formulas to the forefront of the collective consciousness has the potential to highlight values as well as to facilitate successful social competence.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

English Version

**Baylor University
Certification of Informed Consent
Principal Investigator: Melissa Carruth
Department of Modern Foreign Languages**

Biographical Information Form

Instructions: Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible. Your answers will be very helpful in understanding the linguistic and cultural components of this study. Thank you for your participation!

- A) How many years have you lived in the USA?
- B) Where are your grandparents from? Your parents?
- C) At what age did you move to the USA, and how old are you now?
- D) What is your first language?
- E) What is/are the primary language/s spoken in your home?
- F) How many years have you been together with your partner?
- G) What is your occupation?
- H) Where did you attend elementary school? High school? Did you attend college? If so, where and for how long?
- I) Did you receive education of any kind in another country? If so, what kind? Where? For how long?

APPENDIX A

Spanish Version

**La Universidad de Baylor
Certificado de Consentimiento Informado
Investigadora Principal: Melissa Carruth
Departamento de Lenguas Modernas**

Instrucciones: Por favor, responda usted a las siguientes preguntas con la respuesta más exacta que corresponda a la designada pregunta. Sus respuestas servirán de mucha ayuda en la comprensión del contenido lingüístico y cultural del dicho estudio. ¡Muchas gracias por su participación!

- A) ¿Por cuántos años ha vivido usted en los Estados Unidos?
- B) ¿De dónde son sus abuelos? ¿De dónde son sus padres?
- C) ¿A qué edad se mudó usted a los Estados Unidos? y ¿Cuántos años tiene usted ahora?
- D) ¿Cuál es su primer idioma?
- E) ¿Cuál es el idioma más hablado en su hogar?
- F) ¿Por cuántos años han estado juntos usted y su pareja?
- G) ¿Cuál es su ocupación profesional?
- H) ¿A dónde asistió usted para la escuela primaria? ¿A dónde asistió usted para la preparatoria o el “high school” o el colegio? ¿Asistió usted a la universidad? Si dice que sí, ¿adónde? y ¿por cuánto tiempo?
- I) ¿Ha recibido usted educación en algún otro país? Si dice que sí, ¿qué tipo de educación recibió? ¿Dónde? ¿Por cuánto tiempo?

APPENDIX B

English Version

Baylor University
Certification of Informed Consent
Principal Investigator: Melissa Carruth
Department of Modern Foreign Languages

This form asks for your consent to participate in a linguistic research project undertaken by me, Melissa Carruth.

If you agree to participate in the project, you will agree to be videotaped while telling your story of how you and your partner met and the progression of your relationship, including positive opinions you had and currently have of one another.

I do not expect there to be any risks associated with participation in this study other than a possible discomfort caused by my presence. The goal of this study is to observe interactions between couples in Spanish and in English in order to compare and contrast various linguistic elements of speech.

All participants will be given pseudonyms in all written reports. The data from the conversation and the results may be presented in class settings and at professional meetings. I will be the only person to keep copies of the videotapes, and I will keep them in a secure cabinet. They will be kept confidential except for the above-mentioned uses.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. You may have a copy of this form for your records. By signing this form you are testifying that you are eighteen years of age or older and that you have agreed to participate in this study.

Please direct all inquiries to Melissa Carruth c/o Dr. Karol Hardin, Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Foreign Languages, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97393, Waco, TX, 76798. 254-710-6008.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, or any other aspect of the research as it relates to you as a participant, please contact the Baylor University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research, Baylor University, Dr. Michael E. Sherr, PhD., Chair Baylor IRB School of Social Work, Baylor University, One Bear Place # 97320 Waco, TX 76798-7320. Dr. Sherr may also be reached at (254) 710-4483.

I have read and understood this form, am aware of my rights as a participant, and have agreed to participate in this research.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Spanish Version

**La Universidad de Baylor
Certificado de Consentimiento Informado
Investigadora Principal: Melissa Carruth
Departamento de Lenguas Modernas**

Este formulario le pide su consentimiento para participar en un proyecto lingüístico hecho por mí, Melissa Carruth.

Si se aviene a participar en el proyecto, usted será grabado en video mientras que dirá su historia personal de conocer a su pareja, incluyendo las opiniones positivas que tenía y las que ahora tiene usted con respecto al mismo.

No creo que haya ningún riesgo asociado con la participación en este estudio excepto la posible incomodidad causada por mi presencia. La meta de este estudio es observar interacciones en español y en inglés para comparar y contrastar varios elementos lingüísticos del habla.

Se asignarán seudónimos en todos los informes escritos. Los datos de la conversación y los resultados pueden ser presentados en clases o reuniones profesionales. Soy la única persona que mantendrá copias de los videos y los guardaré en un lugar seguro. Se mantendrán confidenciales excepto por los usos ya mencionados.

Su participación es voluntaria, y Ud. puede retirarse en cualquier momento. Si le gustaría, Ud. puede tener una copia de esta hoja. Al firmar este formulario, Ud. testifica que tiene dieciocho años o más de edad y que Ud. otorga su participación en este estudio.

Favor de dirigir cualquier pregunta a Melissa Carruth c/o la Dra. Karol Hardin, Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Foreign Languages, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97393, Waco, TX, 76798. 254-710-6008.

Si Ud. tiene cualquier pregunta con respecto a sus derechos como participante u otro aspecto de la investigación que tiene que ver con Ud. como participante, favor de comunicarse con el Comité de la Universidad de Baylor para la Protección de Sujetos Humanos en Investigaciones Escolares (Baylor University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research), Baylor University, Dr. Michael E. Sherr, PhD., Chair Baylor IRB School of Social Work, Baylor University, One Bear Place # 97320 Waco, TX 76798-7320. También se puede contactar al Dr. Sherr por su número telefónico: (254) 710-4483.

He leído y entendido este formulario, estoy consciente de mis derechos como participante, y consiento mi participación en este estudio.

Firma del participante: _____ Fecha: _____

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