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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.











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

























































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 descompones 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        |
| <b>Total number of individuals</b>   | <b>8</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>7</b> |

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.

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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: \_\_\_\_\_

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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.

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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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