

### Summary in Spanish

## LAS IMPLICACIONES DEL ESTUDIO DE LA CORTESÍA EN CONTEXTOS DEL ESPAÑOL. UNA DISCUSIÓN

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### 1. Introducción

En las últimas décadas los estudios sobre la cortesía han discutido conceptos centrales provenientes de la obra de Brown y Levinson ([1978] 1987) como lo son el de imagen social, el de amenaza y atenuación y el de estrategias de cortesía<sup>1</sup>. Uno de los problemas con los cuales se enfrenta el análisis de la cortesía en corpus de habla situados es que la aplicación de estos conceptos requiere de una perspectiva de relatividad cultural. Según Janney y Arndt (1993) la teoría lingüística en el área se centra en lo ético, en contradicción con la naturaleza émica del propio fenómeno de la cortesía.

Los actos de amenaza a la imagen (*Face Threatening Acts*) no lo son en forma intrínseca, sino que están sujetos a la evaluación de los hablantes en el aquí y el ahora de la interacción. Así que saber quiénes hablan de qué, cuándo y dónde y aun por qué, parece ser un punto de partida ineludible para la interpretación de sus manifestaciones. Es decir que la cortesía verbal o lingüística, al ser una expresión del nivel social del discurso, posee una fenomenología sociopragmática (Bravo 2001 y 2004a). Por este motivo su estudio supera la jurisdicción de la lingüística en términos estrictos, de tal modo que la incorporación del elemento extralingüístico constituye, a la vez que una necesidad, un reto para el analista.

La propuesta en este trabajo es utilizar categorías que, sean lo suficientemente flexibles como para incorporar teórica y metodológicamente *la variación* en las realizaciones de cortesía. Para lograrlo se presenta un modelo de análisis de corpus que consiste en evaluar el *efecto social* que los comportamientos tienen en la relación interpersonal para, a partir de allí, clasificarlos en términos de cortesía, descortesía o neutralidad. Por otra parte, se utilizan las categorías *vacías de contenidos socio-culturales* de *autonomía* y de *afiliación*. Las mismas permiten ordenar las interpretaciones a las cuales se arriba, en relación al compromiso con la imagen social. La explicitación y sistematización del elemento extralingüístico se realiza mediante la descripción de la premisas socio-culturales que subyacen a las interpretaciones del analista.

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<sup>1</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, entre otros, a Wierzbicka (1985) y Bravo (1996, 1999 y 2004).

## 2. Interpretaciones de cortesía: Imagen social, amenazas, atenuaciones y efectos sociales de cortesía

Con base en mis estudios, realizados en corpus de habla de distintas variedades del español y también en forma contrastiva con corpus de habla suecos, se me presentó la necesidad de reformular algunas categorías para hacerlas apropiadas a los requerimientos del análisis. De este modo, he ido formulando una serie de instrumentos metodológicos para aplicarlos a la observación del habla natural en español<sup>2</sup>.

En Bravo (1999) se discuten las dificultades para clasificar comportamientos de cortesía siguiendo los aspectos negativo y positivo de la imagen social, propuestos por Brown y Levinson (op.cit.)<sup>3</sup>. La conclusión es que tales aspectos no son universales, ya que dan cuenta de características socioculturales que no son trasladables sin más a otros contextos. La noción de imagen social, en sí misma, es, sin embargo, apta para dar cuenta de la particular concepción que un grupo de hablantes tiene de la relación interpersonal, al tiempo que permite observar dinámicamente la interacción. Esto facilitaría el registro y la interpretación de las *actividades de imagen*.

A pesar de su etnocentrismo, esta división ha servido para ordenar y sistematizar los resultados obtenidos por los investigadores. Por eso se trata en Bravo (1999) de encontrar una solución que no ignore los *contextos socio-culturales*. Los aspectos se redennominan *autonomía* y *afiliación*. Estos términos se corresponden con principios supuestamente humanos y, por lo tanto, también supuestamente universales<sup>4</sup>. Sin embargo, sus significados no son siempre los mismos; por ese motivo, sólo pueden emplearse para designar categorías vacías, a ser rellenas con los contenidos socio-culturales apropiados. Por ejemplo, los contenidos que describen la imagen negativa para Brown y Levinson (op. cit.) como los deseos de no imposición y de libertad de acción, se ubicarían en la categoría de *autonomía*. Por su parte, los que corresponden a la imagen positiva, como los de aprobación de la personalidad y de los deseos del interlocutor, en la de *afiliación*. Si bien estas categorías nos resultan útiles para agrupar contenidos, éstos, lejos de ser universales, están acotados socio-culturalmente. Baste para corroborarlo cotejar los contenidos descriptos más arriba con los que serían básicos para el hablante de español peninsular. En el caso de la autonomía el contenido más relevante parecería ser el de la *autoafirmación positiva*, mientras que para la afiliación el de la *confianza interpersonal*. Si bien la vigencia de estos en la imagen social básica española parece indiscutible (ver, entre otros, a Bravo 1993 y 1996; Hernández Flores 1999, 2002 y 2003; Contreras 2004 y Bernal 2005)<sup>5</sup>, no hay razones para pensar que por sí solos den cuenta de los deseos de autonomía y de afiliación de estos hablantes. El objetivo de esas categorías es el de abarcar un conjunto complejo de realidades

<sup>2</sup> Ver Bravo (1996) para un contraste entre el estilo comunicativo de negociadores españoles en contraposición con el de negociadores suecos, Bravo (1998a), para la incorporación del estilo comunicativo de los mexicanos, y Bravo (1998b) para el estudio de los malos entendidos de etiología socio-cultural entre estudiantes españoles y suecos en conversaciones interculturales en español. En Bravo (2000a, 2000b y 2002) se estudian las imágenes de los roles académicos en universidades argentinas.

<sup>3</sup> Esta problemática se retoma en prácticamente todas mis publicaciones. Ver especialmente Bravo (2001, 2004b y 2005) para una mayor comprensión del tema.

<sup>4</sup> Para una explicación acerca de este concepto y de sus antecedentes, consúltese a Bravo (2002: 172, nota nro. 9)

<sup>5</sup> Entre los autores que trabajan con los aspectos aquí descriptos de autonomía y de afiliación, consúltese, para la imagen social de hablantes argentinos a Boretti (2000 y 2003) y a Cordisco (2005); para la de hablantes zapotecas a Schrader-Kniffki (2001).

percibidas por los hablantes, en consecuencia, el sentido de incorporarlas como instrumentos metodológicos se justifica únicamente si son consideradas vacías, al mismo tiempo que abiertas y dinámicas. Esto será así, siempre y cuando las mismas sirvan para hacer las referencias extralingüísticas del analista claramente explícitas, y no constituyan nuevas reducciones al problema que se pretende solucionar.

Las definiciones de estos conceptos son<sup>6</sup>:

1. **autonomía**: abarca todos aquellos comportamientos que están relacionados con cómo una persona desea verse y ser vista por los demás como un individuo con contorno propio dentro del grupo.

2. **afiliación**: agrupa aquellos comportamientos mediante los cuales una persona manifiesta cómo desea verse y ser vista por los demás en cuanto a aquellas características que la identifican con el grupo.

El ejemplo que se va a exponer a continuación ha sido tomado de Bravo (2002) y se corresponde a un corpus de conversaciones entre académicos argentinos. De un análisis previo del mismo se extrajeron algunos ejemplos que fueron sometidos a un *test intersubjetivo* en el cual participaron 18 académicos argentinos que adoptaron el rol de analistas, utilizando los mismos instrumentos metodológicos y teóricos que para el análisis previo.

La conversación versa sobre los estereotipos del argentino en el exterior, se registran actos asertivos mediante los cuales los participantes dan opiniones acerca del estereotipo: “los argentinos son soberbios”. Como se trata de una crítica, se evalúa que el tema es, en principio, conflictivo. En el contexto, las aserciones pueden constituir amenazas y se puede, por lo tanto, esperar que se produzcan atenuaciones<sup>7</sup>. La atenuación es una interpretación que requiere de otra: La de que el acto que resulta atenuado sea amenazante. La amenaza y su atenuación se justifican en las necesidades de imagen de los participantes en ese evento comunicativo en particular. Si del análisis surge que esas atenuaciones han logrado su objetivo de disminuir el efecto social negativo de esos actos, protegiendo o recreando las imágenes sociales de los interlocutores, entonces usamos el término *efecto social de cortesía*. Este efecto podrá ser también neutro o descortés, dependiendo de diversos factores contextuales, siendo el de mayor peso, la evaluación de los interlocutores del grado de conflicto interpersonal.

(1)

1. CARLOS (1): (I ) Bueno en México yo me quedaba tranquilo cuando después de un tiempo me decían / ah pero TÚ no pareces argentino / entonces ya / esteee

**1. acto: presentar crítica: amenaza**

**Estrategia : desplazar al agente: atenuación**

2. DORA (1): (R/I) es un [piropo eso]

**coparticipar : cortesía**

3. CARLOS (1): [decía bueno] (R ) - era un piropo era un elogio

**Coparticipar: cortesía**

4. DORA (2): (R ) [sí sí]

**retrocanalizar : cortesía convencional**

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<sup>6</sup> Bravo (2002: 144).

<sup>7</sup> La atenuación es una interpretación que requiere de otra; la de que el acto que resulta atenuado sea amenazante.

5. CARLOS (1): (I) o sea que porque eraaa menosss les sonabaaa no les sonaba soberbiooo así esteee // (a) que se yo estaba pensando (b) en parte tiene que ver con que (c) hay muchos argentinos que (d) son / muy / muy soberbios y que andan – (e) UNO los ve - (f) estásss estás en México en cualquier lugar donde haaay // turistas argentinos ↑ / (g) y los ves [los reconocés] a =

**acto: presentar crítica: amenaza**

**Estrategia 1: desplazar al/la destinatario/a: particularizar y uso de la tercera persona ausente ([c], [d], [e], [f] y [g]) (+ atenuación)**

**estrategia 2: poner impedimentos: uso de modalizadores ([a] y [b]): atenuación**

**estrategia 3: incluir al/la interlocutor/a: uso de formas impersonalizadoras colectivas ([e], [f] y [g]): atenuación**

Carlos (1) presenta la crítica corriendo el riesgo de hacerse agente de la misma. Para atenuar puntualiza que no ha sido él quien lo ha dicho. La crítica ataca la imagen de autonomía, tanto individual como del grupo, ya que todos los participantes son argentinos y no desean verse como soberbios. Las respuestas de Dora corroboran lo dicho por Carlos y contribuyen a la continuación de su exposición; ambas aparecen superpuestas al enunciado de éste último y afectan positivamente a la imagen de afiliación. En 5 Carlos (1), evita centrarse en el destinatario, mediante estrategias de desplazamiento e inclusión del destinatario en el grupo propio (los que no son soberbios). La imagen que resulta comprometida (además de las de autonomía y afiliación de ambos a causa de la crítica), es la de afiliación.

Para apreciar cuáles son los efectos sociales de estos comportamientos, se establece una escala arbitraria (del 1 al 10) para medir el grado de conflicto que se supone que los interlocutores perciben. En relación a esta escala se ubican los grados que se cree que se obtienen mediante los comportamientos comunicativos registrados, en términos de atenuación y de cortesía. Como un resultado de la relación entre estos tres ítems, se evalúa en qué medida se ha producido un efecto social de cortesía<sup>8</sup>. Lo mostramos mediante el siguiente cuadro:

<i>Referencia</i>	<b>Actividades</b>	<b>Grado de conflicto</b>	<b>Grado de Atenuación</b>	<b>Grado de cortesía</b>	<b>Efecto de cortesía</b>
1C1	amenazar: estrategias atenuadoras	5-7	3-5	3-5	3-5
2D1	coparticipar: cortesía	0	0	5-7	5-7
3C1	coparticipar: cortesía	0	0	5-7	5-7
4D2	retrocanalizar: cortesía	0	0	2-3	2-3

<sup>8</sup> Los resultados que se exponen en el cuadro provienen de un test realizado por 18 informantes.

	convencional				
5C1	amenazar: estrategias atenuadoras	5-7	5-7	5-7	5-7

**Tabla 1.** Amenazas a la imagen sociocultural de Carlos y mitigación.

### 3. Del contexto del usuario al contexto del analista: El factor extralingüístico en la interpretación de cortesía

Las interpretaciones en el ejemplo 1 surgen gracias a que el analista contextualiza lo que acontece en la interacción, con los conocimientos acerca del mundo, que supone que los participantes comparten. Estas suposiciones del analista son lo que llamamos *premisas socioculturales* y no se explican a sí mismas, sino que deben ser objeto consciente de discusión para que la interpretación, en términos de efectos de cortesía, se justifique. Es decir que en lo que llamamos “contexto del usuario” interviene el “contexto del analista”. Fue necesario explicarles a los informantes que participaron del test intersubjetivo cómo se generan estos conocimientos. Seguidamente relatamos la experiencia.

Estudiantes de una universidad sueca elaboraron un ejemplo de conversación y analizaron las amenazas y las atenuaciones. Los 18 informantes argentinos, ya mencionados (ver la nota 8), tuvieron que analizar el mismo ejemplo y luego cotejar su análisis con el de los suecos para ver cuáles habían sido las similitudes y las diferencias. Tanto los informantes suecos como los argentinos fueron entrevistados con posterioridad para que dieran sus opiniones acerca de la clasificación que habían hecho.

Aquí voy a exponer sólo los intercambios que mostraron diferencias entre el modo de interpretar de los suecos y el de los argentinos (la interpretación de los informantes suecos se marca en negrita).

(2)

**Situación:** Petra y Stefan se conocen de la secundaria, llevan muchos años sin verse. Stefan está sentado en una mesa, en un café de la universidad, tomando un café. Ve a Petra salir y le llama la atención:

<...>

5. Stefan (3): Vad gör du nu för tiden?

*¿Qué estás haciendo ahora?*

**1. Interesarse por el otro—ritual- cortés**

6. Petra (3): Inget speciellt, eller, jag har just fått fast anställning på ett IT-företag här i

närheten. Fast det är rätt dåliga arbetstider, mycket övertid, du vet!

*Nada especial, o, he conseguido un trabajo fijo en una empresa de computación aquí cerca. Pero tiene malos horarios de trabajo, ¡muchas horas extras, ya lo sabes!*

**1. Respuesta: dar noticias sobre sí misma—ritual-cortés**

**2. Mostrarse superior: amenaza**

## 2.1 Estrategia atenuadora

### 2.1.1 Atenuantes: disminuir la importancia/dar malas noticias/buscar consenso

7. Stefan (4): Ja ha, vad kul!

*¿Ah-sí...? qué bueno!*

#### 1. Mostrar interés: neutral

8. Petra (4) Själv då?

*¿Y tú?*

#### 1. Dejar espacio al otro: cortés

En Argentina, la amenaza percibida por los informantes suecos en 6 de *mostrarse superior*, no fue percibida en una primera lectura. Cuando los informantes argentinos accedieron a la clasificación hecha por los suecos, admitieron que podría implicarse una amenaza pero consideraron los esfuerzos de atenuación como exagerados. Rechazaron por completo la interpretación de *mostrar interés* (ver el enunciado número 7) como neutral; por el contrario, interpretaron que se trataba de una cortesía que implicaba una elección de parte del hablante, una evaluación de las posiciones de los roles de los interlocutores y que incluía, en algunos contextos, el riesgo de parecer poco sincero. *Dejar espacio al otro* no surgió entre los argentinos como un acto, para ellos se trataba de una respuesta ritual, esperable y cortés sólo desde ese punto de vista. Los estudiantes suecos, por su lado, le atribuyeron una considerable importancia como recurso de cortesía.

Las observaciones en términos de diferencias socio-culturales fueron que:

1. hablar de sí mismo es menos amenazante entre los estudiantes argentinos que entre los suecos (6, ejemplo 2).
2. nivelar la asimetría social entre las personas es más importante para los estudiantes suecos que para los argentinos (6, ejemplo 2).
3. dar consenso y apoyo entre los estudiantes suecos pertenece al nivel convencional del intercambio, mientras que para los estudiantes argentinos estaría más sujeto a contextualización (7, ejemplo 2).
4. el requerimiento de sinceridad muchas veces implica el rechazo a expresiones positivas, entre los estudiantes argentinos.
5. la necesidad de atender al espacio del otro no sería tan importante entre los estudiantes universitarios argentinos (8, ejemplo 2).

Si tomamos estas diferencias en un plano socio-cultural, podemos relacionarlas con la *configuración de la imagen social básica* y con la visión del mundo de los hablantes; y en ese punto, nos encontramos con concepciones distintas del Yo social y de sus relaciones interpersonales. El considerar el espacio del otro en Suecia, estaría relacionado con la igualdad entre las personas prescripta por la norma o ley de igualdad (*jämntelaget*; ver Bravo 1999). Con mayor dramatismo se observa la presencia de este valor subyacente en las necesidades de imagen básica que se ponen en juego cuando se dan noticias favorables acerca de sí mismo (cuando Petra dice en qué trabaja). Ninguna de estas tendencias se presenta como necesidades de imagen básica en las

conversaciones entre académicos argentinos que hemos analizado, pero sí aparece el requisito de sinceridad, valor cultural ya observado en interacciones entre españoles.

#### **4. Conclusión**

En este trabajo hemos procurado solucionar el problema del traslado de categorías de carga socio-cultural entre culturas. Para esto y con base en conceptos relevantes para el estudio de la cortesía lingüística, hemos explicado el funcionamiento de categorías para el análisis que presentan un grado considerable de flexibilidad como las de imágenes de *autonomía* y de *afiliación*. Con el mismo propósito hemos expuesto un modelo analítico para evaluar el *efecto social de cortesía* de un enunciado en un determinado intercambio comunicativo. Proponemos medir el grado de conflicto y relacionarlo con el grado de mitigación obtenido. Por otra parte abogamos por la explicitación y comprobación de las premisas socio-culturales que subyacen a las interpretaciones que el propio analista hace de los comportamientos que supone de cortesía en su corpus.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF STUDYING POLITENESS IN SPANISH-SPEAKING CONTEXTS: A DISCUSSION

Diana Bravo

### Abstract

In the last decades, the studies on politeness have discussed central concepts stemming from Brown and Levinson's work ([1978] 1987), such as *face*, *threats*, *mitigations* and *strategies of politeness*. One of the problems that the study of politeness presents for the analysis of a situated corpus of speech is that the use of the mentioned notions calls for a socio-cultural perspective. In other words, it is necessary to include extralinguistic factors in the analysis of politeness, as the phenomena is beyond the sphere of linguistics in strict terms. In this paper, I approach the challenge based on other studies that I have already done for different corpora of Spanish. I discuss the problem of using certain concepts (face, threats, mitigations and strategies of politeness) as methodological categories for the interpretation of communicative behaviours in situated interactions. In my analysis, I use categories that incorporate, both theoretically and methodologically, *socio-cultural variation* in the realisations of politeness. To achieve this, I evaluate the *social effect* that certain behaviours have in the interpersonal relations under study, so as to, from then on, classify those behaviours in terms of politeness, impoliteness or neutrality. Also, I use the categories of "autonomy" and "affiliation", void of socio-cultural contents. Finally, I put forward extralinguistic elements in the analysis of corpora of Spanish by making explicit those "socio-cultural premises" that an analyst use to make his or her interpretations.

**Keywords:** Politeness; Spanish; Autonomy; Affiliation; Socio-cultural contents of face; Socio-cultural premises.

### 1. Introduction

Brown and Levinson ([1978] 1987) developed their theory of politeness by associating the notions of *face needs* and *facework*. The need of a speaker (an individual) to have his/her *face* respected in interaction requires efforts to reduce the impact of threats to that face. Conversation, as Goffman (1967) describes it, is conceived as a conflictive space (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997)<sup>9</sup>, where speakers are exposed to serious risks of "attacking" the addressees' face. Based on Brown and Levinson's model (op. cit.), the studies on the area of politeness have traditionally focused on "negative politeness" (Haverkate 1994: 21); that is, on speakers' altruistic strategies to mitigate the illocutive force of those acts that threaten the addressees' needs of personal freedom and private territory. The concept of mitigation is then assimilated to that of "strategies of politeness" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 91-94). These strategies are described, in their unmarked form, either through lexical, phrasal or propositional modifiers (Blum-Kulka,

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<sup>9</sup> This author asserts that this notion is far too pessimistic (1997: 13).



House & Kasper 1989) which, in themselves, do not constitute an act or constitute *an act that conceals another*. The latter is what Searle (1975) identified as an “indirect act” (such as a *request* realised as a *question*). The interpretation is thus “immanent” and the extralinguistic instruments used by the analyst in his/her interpretation are not made explicit in its methodological framework<sup>10</sup>.

The practical uses of Brown and Levinson’s model for the analysis of situated corpora have caused some reactions, mostly based on the results obtained when studying politeness in languages other than English. Many researchers (Janney and Arndt 1993; Spencer-Oatey 2003; Bravo 2004b; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004, to mention but a few) have discussed and confronted the issues of “ethnocentrism”, “universalism” and “cultural relativism” when analysing politeness phenomena. The discussion has also questioned the relation between threats (*face threatening acts*) and those negative face needs that would call for mitigating facework. One of the most important arguments in this discussion was introduced by Wierzbicka in 1985 in her paper “Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts”. The author points out the need of careful studies that would analyse cultural values underlying the perceptions of threats in different cultures. Janney and Arndt (1993) and Watts (1992) have also recommended caution when using supposedly universal theoretical notions. These insights allow me to argue that the use of Brown and Levinson’s model has, up to a certain extent, hindered cross-cultural research. More often than not, studies of specific cultures, as well as contrastive analysis between different ones, are based on Speech Act Theory (Austin [1962] 1981; Searle [1969] 1980) and on Brown and Levinson’s notions of positive and negative face, while also incorporating other methods to contrast the contexts of the users. Such methods stem from different ethnographic notions, mainly “speech community”, “speech events”, “rules of speaking” and, above all, “communicative competence” (Hymes [1964] 1972a; 1972b). This theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of speech acts has encouraged research in, for example, the teaching of second languages. In this area of study, researchers use tools of data gathering focused on the speakers’ differences as regards the interpretations of, in principle, the same speech acts realised by different groups of speakers. Politeness phenomena is generally associated to the manifestation of indirect speech acts. Blum-Kulka (1982), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) are among the most representative researchers adopting intercultural and interlinguistic perspectives. The authors comment on the insufficiency of Brown and Levinson’s model to explain politeness in non-Anglophone socio-cultural contexts without exceeding its limits when analysing their corpora. To overcome the insufficiency, Blum-Kulka et al. (op. cit.) develop methodological instruments to elicit communicative situations through the use of “discourse completion tests”, such as questionnaires, perception tests and simulations<sup>11</sup>. The tools devised prove to result in suitable categories of analysis for Anglophone contexts, such as the distinction between main acts and subordinate ones, internal and external modifiers, among others. With their methodology, the authors could come up with an comprehensive list of resources to differentiate functions in the interpretation of polite behaviours.

Brown and Levinson’s critics mention that some cultures orient towards a positive face rather than a negative one (consult, among others, Sifianou 1992 for Greek in contrast to British English; Placencia 1996 for Ecuadorian Spanish; Haverkate 2004

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<sup>10</sup> See Bravo (2004b) for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>11</sup> See Placencia and Bravo (2002: 1-19).

for Peninsular Spanish) or that the activities of politeness are not strategic but ritualised (Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki & Ogino 1986; Ide 1989). Additionally, the notion of negative face is assessed as being ethnocentric (Bravo 1999; Spencer-Oatey 2003), while also considering that most of what Brown and Levinson take as negative politeness has nothing to do with speakers' face but with speakers' "agendas" (Spencer-Oatey 2000). Finally, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997) has argued that Brown and Levinson's model grants too much importance to acts that focus on negative face in detriment to those acts that reinforce speakers' positive face<sup>12</sup>.

Brown and Levinson's theory presents a wide range of strategies to minimise the degree of offence to the speaker or the hearer in reference to the threat posed to a positive or negative face. It also discusses the possibility of contextualising the degree of threat using variables such as *Power*, *Distance* and *Weight of Imposition*<sup>13</sup>. Face needs are oriented towards the goal of preserving a self-face, avoiding losing it and considering at the same time the addressee's face. This is what differentiates aspects of face, its positive and negative ones. Goffman (1967)<sup>14</sup> understands this, on the one hand, as a public presentation of self and, on the other, as a feeling of empathy towards the addressee's face needs; in other words, facework is located on a socio-emotional plane and so this concept has, in itself, a socio-psychological nature. To consider the addressee's face has the consequence of preserving the speaker's. For Brown and Levinson, the reasons for this "face-preservation" are not on an emotional plane but on a rational one. Instead of exploring emotions, rational goals are sought through certain types of behaviours. However, these authors do adopt Goffman's idea on the preservation of face wants in social interaction, including both the preservation of a self-face and the addressee's face. Speakers evaluate face wants according to a positive or a negative face: The former seeks other people's approval of the speaker's wants, ideas, opinions and belongings; the latter considers that the speaker should be free of impositions and impediments. This perspective assumes a rational speaker engaged in a unidirectional exchange, thus supposing face as highly individualistic. Group, participant's roles, and the speaker's psycho-sociological characteristics are not considered by the model<sup>15</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, Brown and Levinson's model has proved to be productive (see Placencia & Bravo 2002; Bravo 2004b; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004), but it is necessary a detailed revision of practically its whole theoretical framework to accomplish the objective of generating adequate categories for the description of politeness in a situated corpus. It is necessary to take into consideration the "socio-cultural factor", as well as other situational and idiosyncratic factors. This calls for the need of a basic socio-cultural frame of analysis for the interpretations of the interlocutive process<sup>16</sup> in the exchange. The categories proposed by Brown and Levinson have shown such a degree of contextual variation that it is practically impossible to avoid the dichotomy between universalism and cultural relativism. Politeness is in itself a phenomenon that should be studied from a *socio-cultural*

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<sup>12</sup> "Face-flattering acts".

<sup>13</sup> Spencer-Oatey (1996) considers that these factors are insufficient to explain variation in relation to the realisation of speech acts.

<sup>14</sup> The notion of *face* is taken by Brown and Levinson from Goffman's work.

<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, these notions are central to Goffman's theory (1961, 1967).

<sup>16</sup> For this notion, see Voloshinov ([1929] 1992).

*pragmatic perspective*; that is, a pragmatics with a focus on the interrelation between language and society. It should be considered that:

the speaker of a language is endowed with interpretative resources that come from his/her social background and from his/her previous communicative experiences, which partially share with other people (group) and partially do not share with that same people (individual). These resources are used in interaction and are projected in those meanings emerging from it, creating in this way new alternatives. Thus politeness is taken as a socio-cultural phenomenon that confirms, updates, modifies or reverses itself in the actual situation of interlocution. This is possible because knowledge about underlying socio-cultural contents are presupposed to be shared. Those contents explain the interpretation of social effects of communicative behaviours in a given situation (Bravo 2004a: 8-9)

Even if Brown and Levinson present their categories as theoretical and universal, these cannot be applied to every different context with the same expected consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to use these categories in a flexible way so as to include the complexity evidenced by empirical studies on politeness. It is worth thinking not only on the variety of contexts but also on the role assigned during the interpretative analysis to informants and even to the analyst him/herself.

My purpose in this study is to include the extralinguistic element in the analysis of corpora of Spanish. From this starting point, I aim to describe categories of analysis that can account for, on theoretical and methodological planes, *variation* in the realisations of politeness in natural speech.

## **2. Interpretations of politeness: Face, threats, mitigations and social effects of politeness**

This study is based on my research of spoken corpora in different varieties of Spanish and in contrast with spoken corpora of Swedish. In these studies, I felt the need of reformulating some categories to make them more appropriate to the requirements of the analysis. I have then formulated a series of methodological instruments to apply them to the observation of natural language in Spanish<sup>17</sup>.

In Bravo (1999), I discuss the difficulties of classifying polite behaviours according to the negative and positive aspects of face, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (op. cit.). My conclusion is that such aspects are not universal, as they account for socio-cultural characteristics that cannot be directly cross-culturally observed. However, the notion of face is, in itself, appropriate to account for the particular understandings that a group of speakers have of their interpersonal relations, while it also allows for a dynamic observation of naturally occurring language. If this notion is used as a methodological instance, then the analysis and interpretation of *facework* is much easier, provided the socio-cultural factor is not set aside:

According to us, the problem is that socio-cultural contexts are found at the base of the configuration of a socially accepted face. These contexts, that account for the representations of cognitive, emotive and social realities, are manifested in particular contents of face which an

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<sup>17</sup> See Bravo (1996) for a contrast between the communicative style of Spanish negotiators and Swedish ones. Bravo (1998a) incorporates Mexican communicative style. Bravo (1998b) studies socio-cultural misunderstandings between Spanish and Swedish students in intercultural conversations in Spanish. In Bravo (2000a, 2000b and 2002), I study academic role faces in Argentinian universities.

individual or group identifies him/her/itself with. Brown and Levinson describe basic contents and reduce them to “positive” and “negative” aspects, supposing them as universal when in fact they only explain communicative strategies that target conflictive expressions for members of a given Anglophone society (Bravo 1999: 156).

I consider that, despite its ethnocentrism, this division has been useful to organise and systematise the results obtained by scholars. For that reason, I try in Bravo (1999) to propose a framework that, while considering the division of face, does not ignore *socio-cultural contexts*. I manage to do this by redefining aspects of face as *autonomy* and *affiliation* that are supposedly *human principles* and, consequently, also universal<sup>18</sup>. However, the meanings of these two categories are not always the same and they can only be used to refer to empty categories that are filled with appropriate socio-cultural contexts.

In Bravo (2002), I argue that there can be observed different levels in the analysis of Argentinian academics’ face contents. I describe aspects of face as follows:

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

For example, in some socio-cultural communities the contents that Brown and Levinson assign to negative face, such as “wishes of no imposition” and “freedom of action”, would be located in my category of *autonomy*, while those referring to positive face would correspond to *affiliation*. These categories are useful to describe a set of contents, but the contents of face in themselves are far from being universal; on the contrary, they are socio-culturally bound. We can corroborate this by considering what would be basic contents for a Peninsular Spanish speaker. In the case of autonomy, the most relevant content seems to be a *positive self-affirmation*, while for affiliation it seems to be an interpersonal *confianza* (‘mutual, interpersonal trust’)<sup>19</sup>. There is some evidence that confirms these contents as part of a Spanish “basic face”; that is to say, a set of socio-cultural contents or a configuration of a socially accepted face that is supposed to be known by the members of a given speech community<sup>20</sup> (see, among others, Bravo 1993, 1996; Hernández-Flores 1999, 2002, 2003; Contreras 2004; Bernal 2005, 2007)<sup>21</sup>. Despite this, there is no reason to think that the two categories account

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<sup>18</sup> See the Introduction to this volume.

<sup>19</sup> As stated by Hernández-Flores in this volume, the term *confianza* wouldn’t have a satisfactory translation into English. This term has been used by Thurén (1988), who studied a group of women in a neighbourhood in Valencia, Spain. This community uses the word *confianza* to show a type of interpersonal relation maintained with family and friends. The *confianza* reproduces relations of interpersonal proximity, a relation that requires the condition of knowing what to expect for with other people. It seems that a principle of “no offence” would be at work here (see Bravo 1996 and Hernández-Flores 2002).

<sup>20</sup> “The belief of its existence influences the choices and the interpretations to the contributions in face-to-face communication.” (Bravo 1999: 164).

<sup>21</sup> See also Boretti (2000 and 2003), Kaul de Margaleon (2005) and Cordisco (2005) for the face of Argentinians and Schrader-Kniffki (2001) for Zapotecas.

for speakers' wishes of autonomy and affiliation by themselves. These categories aim at comprising a complex set of realities perceived by speakers. As a consequence, the idea of incorporating the notions of autonomy and affiliation as methodological instruments is only justified when they are taken as *empty* and, at the same time, as *open* and *dynamic*. This is so given the caveat that the analyst should use the categories to make extra-linguistic references clearly explicit and they do not constitute new "reductions" of the problem sought to overcome<sup>22</sup>.

In what follows, I define and apply the categories that I use from the perspective of socio-cultural pragmatics, based on the above mentioned study of Argentinian academics' face contents. As I have explained in the Introduction to this volume, the phenomena of politeness are socio-cultural. This assumption is based on the extreme openness to interpretation of polite behaviour, both in the communicative situation and the context of the user<sup>23</sup>. This assumption requires from the analyst to use flexible methodologies that allow him/her showing socio-cultural variation in his/her corpora. One aspect that, as I have mentioned above, has demonstrated not to be universal is the one comprising threats and their relations to "politeness strategies", described by Brown and Levinson (op. cit.). Threats are not inherent to certain speech acts, but they are subject to the speaker's perception (Wierzbicka 1985). As an analyst, I would be wrong if I identify a mitigating strategy if no threat is realised. Mitigation is an interpretation that requires another one; that is to say, the act should be interpreted as threatening first and then as mitigated (see Bravo 1993). A threat and its mitigation are justified according to the speakers' face needs in a particular communicative event. In other words, threats and politeness strategies are interpretations stemming from the analysis and cannot be determined *a priori*. This supposes that an analyst, based on his/her knowledge of "habitual uses", can only hypothesise about threats and politeness strategies, so as to say the he or she believes that certain act can be perceived as threatening by the speakers or that a certain expression can be classified as polite or not<sup>24</sup>. Given this, an adequate methodological tool for analysis would be determining what "social effect" a certain expression has produced in the socio-emotional state of the interaction under analysis (Bravo 1993, 1996). The social effect that an expression produces in interaction cannot be of politeness only, but it can also be neutral or impolite, depending on diverse contextual factors, being the most important one the interlocutors' evaluation of the degree of interpersonal conflict<sup>25</sup>.

The analysis in the following section is based on Bravo (2002), where I use the concept "degree of conflict" to determine the social effect of communicative behaviours. This degree results from evaluating the characteristics of the conversational topics, the configuration of roles, and the relations between roles and a socially accepted face. In other words, in my analysis I use the notions of (1) a "basic face", already described above, and which I suppose it is extended in the society of reference, (2) a "role face" of academics, also socially accepted, and (3) a distinction between the "face of an individual" and the "face of a group". By "face of an individual" I mean a given speaker's face wants for its aspects of autonomy and affiliation, while by "face of a

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<sup>22</sup> See the Introduction to this volume.

<sup>23</sup> The papers by Albelda, Hernández-Flores and Kaul in this volume contrast the interpretations of (im)politeness in different activities and communicative situations.

<sup>24</sup> See Bravo (1996) and the Introduction to this volume.

<sup>25</sup> Factors such as interpersonal relation and the position of the interlocutors' roles can influence the attribution of "threatening" to a given communicative behaviour.

group” I refer to a group’s face wants for the same aspects<sup>26</sup>. The degree of conflict is an arbitrary evaluation based on a set of circumstances that determine the analyst’s interpretation and of which I account for by reference to the corpus under study only<sup>27</sup>.

### 2.1. *The configuration of face in a group of Argentinian academics*

After analysing my corpus, I considered it necessary to confirm some of the premises in my analysis. With this purpose in mind, I proposed an “intersubjectivity test” to 18 Argentinian academics, who analyzed a selection of the corpus<sup>28</sup>. These informants had previously been instructed in the same theoretical and methodological instruments that I had used in my own analysis (see the Introduction to this volume). The aim was to, with some degree of certainty, to support or reject my previous interpretations on the effects of politeness in the communicative behaviours that became objects of my study. What follows is a sample of the results synthesised by me.

The corpus consists on conversations between Argentinian academics that discuss stereotypes about Argentinians travelling or living abroad. The “assertive acts” have been analysed as communicating the expression of an opinion in relation to a topic that I considered in itself conflictive from the moment it deals with prejudices and are manifested as criticisms. In other words, and for this preliminary context, these acts can constitute threats and, consequently, speakers are expected to mitigate them. If from the analysis it emerges that mitigations have achieved the objective of moderating the negative social effect of those acts, protecting or recreating the interlocutors’ face, then I shall use the term *social effect of politeness*. The interaction is situated considering the roles that interlocutors hold in their academic settings. In the analysis, I conclude that speakers perform some facework oriented to the production of politeness and some other facework that enhances the speaker’s own face and threatens the hearer’s<sup>29</sup>. It also becomes evident that, in some cases, the group’s and the individual’s face wants overlap. In the analysis, the degree of mitigation and the effect of politeness for the communicative exchange have been considered by using an arbitrary cline that ranges from 1 to 10

The analysis proceeds using the following categories and terms: (see also Bravo 2002: 147 and the Introduction to this volume).

*Act*: a communicative activity that accounts for the here-and-now of what is said.

*Subact*: an act that is subordinated to another one.

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<sup>26</sup> I might be offended if I’m called a corrupt academic as my speaker’s and group’s faces are involved.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed explanation, see Bravo (1999 and 2002) and the Introduction to this volume.

<sup>28</sup> I would like to thank Professor Elvira Arnoux and Professor Angelita Martínez from the University of Buenos Aires for their support in this research.

<sup>29</sup> The behaviours of politeness have, idiosyncratically, affiliate objectives. When flattering a self-face (a behaviour of autonomy), and when involving positively the addressee’s, a social effect of politeness is achieved (Bravo 2002 and Hernández-Flores 2002). The objectives of politeness are not immanent to the expressions, but result from interpretations in context. As a consequence, it is not enough to determine if facework is involved in a given activity, but also to see if that activity is related to politeness or not (see Hernández-Flores, in this volume).

*Threat*: a face communicative activity that does not confirm / disallow / unprotect / denigrate or attack the addressee's face or one's own.

*Strategy*: a face communicative activity that is a part of an act.

*Co-participation*: an act that is combined with the interlocutor's preceding utterance and with a social objective that is interpersonally positive.

*Conventional politeness*: an activity of politeness that constitutes a "minimal response". It does not take a turn and it has not got a thematic content that updates the progress of the conversation.

(1)<sup>30</sup>

1. CARLOS (1): (I) Bueno en México yo me quedaba tranquilo cuando después de un tiempo me decían / *ah pero TÚ no pareces argentino* / entonces ya / esteee 'Well in Mexico I calmed down when after a while they would tell me / *ah but YOU don't look like an Argentinian* / so then / uhmmm'

**1. act: to present a criticism : threat**

**1.2 sub-act: to avoid taking responsibility: mitigation, threat strategy: to shift the agent: mitigation**

2. DORA (1): (R/I) es un [piropo eso] 'it's a [compliment that] '

**co-participate: politeness**

3. CARLOS (1): [decía bueno] (R ) - era un piropo era un elogio 'I would said well] (R) – it was a *piropo* it was a compliment'

**co-participate: politeness**

4. DORA (2): (R) [sí sí] (R) '[yes yes]'

**Backchannelling: conventional politeness**

5. CARLOS (1): (I) o sea que porque eraaa menosss les sonabaaa no les sonaba soberbiooo así esteee // (a) *que se yo* estaba pensando (b) *en parte* tiene que ver con que (c) *hay muchos* argentinos que (d) *son* / muy / muy soberbios y que andan – (e) *UNO los ve* - (f) *estásss* estás en México en cualquier lugar donde haaay // *turistas argentinos* / (g) *y los ves* [los *reconocés*] a =

'(I) that is because I waaas lesss it seemed to them I didn't seem to them haughty so theeen // (a) I don't know I was thinking (b) in part it has to do with (c) there are many Argentinians that (d) are / very / very haughty and they are involved – (e) *ONE can see them* – (f) you are you are in Mexico in every place you are where there are // Argentinian tourists / (g) *and you see them* [and you *recognise*] them ='

**1. act: to present a criticism: threat**

**1.2 sub-act: to avoid taking responsibility : mitigation and threat**

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<sup>30</sup> The Arabic numbers preceding the communicative contribution order the sequence of the exchanges. The numbers immediately after the fictitious names of the speakers show the quantity of contributions produced by each speaker.

**strategy 1: to shift the addressee: to particularise and use the absent third person ([c], [d], [e], [f] and [g]) : mitigation**

**strategy 2: to put impediments: use of modals ([a] and [b]) :mitigation**

**strategy 3: to include the interlocutor: use of collective impersonal forms ([e], [f] and [g]) :mitigation**

In (1), Carlos avoids taking responsibility for the criticism of being haughty, made by his interlocutors. This criticism attacks his autonomy face (the way he wants to see himself and be seen by others as an individual) and, at the same time, the face of Argentinians considered as a group (how they want to be seen as a group in contrast to other groups). The strategy of “shifting the agent” (that is, avoiding being the agent of what he says by assigning the utterance to some other people) constitutes a mitigation to the threat but, at the same time, the mitigating strategy can also threaten Carlos’ affiliation with his interlocutors. The mitigating strategy threatens Carlos’s affiliative face because his interlocutors could interpret, in their roles of Argentinians, as the addressees for the criticism. In other words, the threat of this strategy lies in the possibility of Carlos presenting himself as arrogantly superior to his interlocutors, which, in turn, would affect his own face in his role of Argentinian.

In the intervention 5, Carlos (1) avoids taking responsibility for his criticism. He achieves this by shifting the addressee by particularising (it is not *everyone* but *many*, [c]), using impersonal forms ([e]: *One* and [f]: *You are*) and the absent third person ([d]: *Are y* [e]: *One can see them*). As regards the threats related to haughtiness and exclusion, the speaker puts impediments to the assertive force of the utterance, using modals of attitude ([a] and [b] in strategy 2); avoiding the exclusion of the other by using collective impersonal forms (such as *one* instead of *everyone*) and the second singular person meaning *all of us*) ([e] and [f] in strategy 3). Backchannels are classified as *conventional politeness* as they are minimal answers with little or no thematic compromise (Bravo 2002: 150). The theme, for its nature, affects both the individual’s and groups’ face (Bravo 2002: 167). In the example, the threat becomes evident in the possibility of *to be seen as haughty* (individual face) and that of *to be seen as a haughty Argentinian* (group face). In the example, Carlos makes the threat evident when considering that he can be seen as haughty (individual face) and to be seen as a haughty Argentinian (group face).

As regards the issue of assigning effects of politeness to given behaviours, I try to summarise the results of the analysis in the following tables. In the first one, I include a classification in terms of face threats and consequent mitigating behaviours in Carlos’ utterances. In the second one, I present my interpretation of the degree of politeness attributed to communicative behaviours, in relation, also, to the degree of mitigation and of politeness supposedly perceived by participants in that context. I also incorporate Dora’s utterances in the second table (from Bravo 2002: 151). Note that the numbers of the reference correspond to turns in the exchange.

Reference	Threats	Compromised Face	Mitigations
1. Carlos	A criticism	Individual and group autonomy	To avoid taking responsibility
	To be seen as haughty	Affiliation and autonomy	To shift the agent



	To present oneself as superior/To exclude the interlocutor	Affiliation	----
5. Carlos	A criticism	Individual and group autonomy	To avoid taking responsibility: To shift the agent
	To be seen as haughty	Affiliation and autonomy	To put impediments
	To exclude the interlocutor	Affiliation	To include the interlocutor

**Table 1.** Carlos’ face threats and mitigating behaviours.

Reference	Activities	Degree of conflict	Degree of mitigation	Degree of politeness	Effect of politeness
1. Carlos	Threat/sub-acts and mitigating strategies	5-7	3-5	3-5	3-5
2. Dora	Co-participate: politeness	0	0	5-7	5-7
3. Carlos	Co-participate: politeness	0	0	5-7	5-7
4. Dora	Back channeling: conventional politeness	0	0	2-3	2-3
5. Carlos	Threat/sub-acts and mitigating strategies	5-7	5-7	5-7	5-7

**Table 2.** Carlos and Dora’s effects of politeness.

The degree of politeness includes both what is mitigating and what is not<sup>31</sup>. “To co-participate” has a higher degree of evaluated politeness than “backchanneling”, as in the first case the interpersonal compromise is manifested in a higher degree than in the second case. It is worth taking into account that this measure is according to informants, who have assumed the roles of analysts. For an interpretation, informants follow what they suppose is shared knowledge with the participants in the conversation. These suppositions constitute “socio-cultural premises” (Bravo 1999: 168-175) and come from the analysts’ experience on those socio-cultural contents supposedly present in the Argentinian academic context. In the following section, I will explain in more detail what this knowledge consists of.

### 3. From the “context of the user” to the “context of the analyst”: The extralinguistic factor in the interpretation of politeness

In this section, I will present one of the procedures I followed to explain my informants how they should proceed as analysts to study the corpus, what they should understand

<sup>31</sup> See the distinction between “strategies of politeness” in particular and “mitigating strategies of politeness” in general (Bravo 2001 and Hernández Flores 2002, among others).

by “shared knowledge” between the analyst and the speakers (socio-cultural contexts) and how the analyst’s hypothesis (socio-cultural premises) influence their interpretation of expressions of politeness. The method consisted in making the informants work with a fabricated conversation, made up by a group of other informants studying at a Swedish university, who had done a speech act analysis and had considered the strategies of politeness involved. Also, the Swedish group analysed their own fabricated data using certain categories explained beforehand. After the activity, I conducted a discussion on their classification. This same activity was later replicated by Argentinian informants with the same dialogues. First, the Argentinians analysed the material without the Swedish students’ classification. Then, I questioned the Argentinian informants about their answers. Finally, I showed them the activity solved in Sweden and we discussed about the results. I took down notes during these sessions.

The categories used by the Swedish informants for their classification were:

*Acts* (see section 2.1)

*Threat* (see section 2.1)

*Strategy* (see section 2.1)

*Politeness ritual*: a communicative activity with an effect of politeness that normatively integrates a politeness scenario. The terms “initiative” and “response” are used to formalise the speech acts realised in an “adjacency pair”.

*Mitigating strategy*: a face communicative strategy with an effect of politeness that diminishes the negative interpersonal effect of a threat,

*Enhancers*: communicative strategies that serve the purpose of reinforcing the polite effect of expressions.

*Mitigating resources*: communicative activities through which mitigating strategies are realised.

### 3.1. Analysis

The dialogue and the classification of the Swedish students (controlled and synthesised by me) were the following:

(2)

*Situation*:

Petra and Stefan know each other since secondary school, but they haven’t met for many years now. Stefan is sitting at a table in the university café and drinks a cup of coffee. He sees Petra coming out and he draws her attention:

1. STEFAN (1) : Nej men hej Petra, det var länge sedan!!!

‘Hey, look, don’t tell me... Hi, Petra, such a long time without seeing you!’

**1. Act: saying hello: ritual: polite**

**1.1 Enhancer: show surprise: reinforce the effect of politeness**

2. PETRA (1): JA, verkligen ! Hur är det?!

‘YEAH... really! How are you?’

**1. Act: response: ritual: polite**

**1.1 Enhancer: give consent and emphasise using “really”: reinforce the effect of politeness**

**2. Act: initiative: ritual: polite**

3. STEFAN (2): Jo då, det knallar och går, själv då?

‘Ah, yes... It works, and you?’

**1. Act: response : ritual: polite**

**2. Act: initiative: ritual: polite**

4. PETRA (2): Jaaa, det är väl bra...

‘Yeeeah, I’m all right...’

**1. Act: response: ritual: polite**

5. STEFAN (3): Vad gör du nu för tiden?

‘What are you up to?’

**1. Act: initiative: show interest for the other: ritual: polite**

6. PETRA (3): Inget speciellt, eller, jag har just fått fast anställning på ett IT-företag här i närheten. Fast det är rätt dåliga arbetstider, mycket övertid, du vet!

‘Nothing special, oh, I got a job in a computer company near here. But it has got awful working hours, you know, lots of overtime!’

**1. Act: response: give news about oneself: ritual: polite**

**2. Act: show oneself as superior: threat**

**2.1 Mitigating strategy**

**2.1.1 Mitigators: mitigate the importance / give bad news about himself / seek consensus**

7. STEFAN (4): Ja ha, vad kul!

‘Oh, really? That’s cool!’

**1. Act: show interest: neutral**

8.. PETRA (4) Själv då?

‘And you?’

**1. Act: leave the floor to show consideration: polite**

9. STEFAN (5) Ehh jag planerar att söka in på Handels, så jag läser upp matten nu...på Komvux

‘Ehh... I’m about to enrol in the School of Commerce, I’m studying Maths... at the secondary for adults.’

**Act: give personal information**

**Strategy to avoid presenting oneself as somebody that hasn’t finished secondary school by thematising that he is about to enrol in an educative institution (university level)**

**preserve self-face, avoid conflict: polite**

10. PETRA (5): Ja ha. Har du förresten kontakt med någon från gamla klassen?

‘Oh, yes...? Do you have any contact from our old class?!’

**Act: ask for information**

**Mitigating strategy: change topic: avoid conflict: polite**

11. STEFAN (6): Nej det blir inte så mycket nu förtiden, har så mycket att göra, du vet

‘No, not much nowadays, I have a lot to do, you know’

**Act: give information: neutral**

12 PETRA (6): Ja det blir ju så...

'Yes, it happens...'

**Act: agree: polite**

13. STEFAN (7): Fast å andra sidan vore det ju kul att dra ihop dem...

'But on the other hand it would be good to meet together...'

**Act: agree: polite**

14 PETRA (7) Ja visst. Har du förresten hört det senaste?. Jag sprang på Thomas Jakobsson på stan igår, han sa att lena har blivit utsedd till årets modell av Elle.

'Of course. Have you heard the last one? I came across TJ in downtown yesterday and told me that Lena has been named by Elle model of the year.'

**Act: give information**

**Strategy: small talk to avoid conflict: polite**

15. STEFAN (8): VA, hon är ju inte snygg, okej att hon är söt, men så speciell är hon inte...

'What! She's not that nice; ok, she's nice, but nothing special..'

**Act: Agree**

**Strategy: don't differentiate from the other: polite**

16. PETRA (8): Ja...något annat kunde hon väl inte få...hon är ju INTE direkt smart...dessutom kan man tänka sig hur hon fått jobbet...(lätt skrott). Nej vad taskiga vi är, hon har säkert förändrats mycket...

'Yees... She wouldn't find other thing... She's not very intelligent... Besides, you would have to think very well how she got the job... (giggles). Hey, we are bad! She have surely changed a lot...'

**Act: criticise a third party: outgroup: impolite; ingroup: affiliation: polite**

17. STEFAN (9) Ja, det får vi hoppas.

'Yes, I hope.'

**Act: agree: polite**

18. PETRA (9) Nej men oj vad tiden rinner i väg, jag måste gå nu

'No, but oh, how late it is! I must go...'

**1. Act: announce that she's parting: threat**

**2. Mitigating strategy: give excuses: polite**

19 STEFAN (10): Ja men du, det var kul att ses

'Yes, but look, it was a good meeting you'

**Act: saluting: ritual: polite**

20. PETRA (10) Ja, lycka till med allt, vi får höras av...

'Yes, good luck with everything, we keep in touch...'

**Act: response: ritual: polite**

21 STEFAN (11) Ja, ha det så bra

'Yes, good luck to you too'

**Act: response: ritual: polite**

22. PETRA (11) Detsamma, hej då

'Same to you, bye!'

**Act: response: ritual: polite**

### 3.2. Discussion

From my perspective, the interpretation of some of the utterances above would be socio-culturally determined. For example, in 6, Petra's effort to mitigate the importance of her position would be exaggerated. However, in Sweden, and as a consequence of a "Norm of Equality"<sup>32</sup>, it is expected not to show superiority in order to level out social asymmetries. I find surprising the classification as "neutral" of Stefan's utterance and its social effect in 7 as, according to my own interpretation, Stefan's show of interest had a clear effect of politeness.

This result can be related to the high degree of automation of positive backchannelling in Swedish conversations, backchannelling that seems to lack referential contents, such as a conscious manifestation of polite behaviour. In other words, from my experience of the River Plate Spanish variant spoken in Buenos Aires, these expressions would be uttered with a higher degree of consciousness than in a Swedish context. They would also be used more frequently in the Argentinian context than in a Swedish one when there is a sincere interest on what other people say or when it is intended as a conscious manifestation of politeness<sup>33</sup>.

In the classification of 8, the answer is expressed through the act of "leave the turn to show consideration". In my analysis, it emerges as a preferred answer within an adjacency pair in a ritual scenario. The explanation of the difference between my perception and my informants' is that these actions may need to be relevant in a Swedish context, as they would be perceived as an evident benefit for the interlocutor. These "socio-cultural premises" are speculative, but justified, at the same time, by my experience living in both Swedish and Argentinian socio-cultural contexts. This experience guided my research questions during the group discussions with my Swedish informants on how they justified their analysis. In order to illustrate my methodology, I reproduce below some of the answers I obtained when discussing the analysis:

(3)

7. STEFAN (4): Ja ha, vad kul!

'Oh, really? That's cool!'

**1. Show interest: neutral**

Question:

*Why do you think THIS EXPRESSION is NOT POLITE?*

Answers:

*Because I thinks it is not relevant.*

*We always say it like that, we have to say it.*

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<sup>32</sup> *Jämmtelaget*.

<sup>33</sup> According to Allwood (1976), communicative activities are produced and apprehended with different degrees of awareness and consciousness by speakers. Backchannels and, especially those produced through a non-verbal channel, are usually interpreted as polite by default. In other words, the failure of producing backchannelling in contexts where it is expected provokes social effects of impoliteness. This would be attributable to the fact that these signals are highly automatic in interaction. (Bravo 2000b).

*I don't think in politeness when I talk like that.  
It's not what we think about... many times ((laughter from classmates))*

In Argentina, The above interaction was classified as polite and I made the same question (but inverted) to the Argentinian informants.

Question:  
*Why do you think THIS EXPRESSION is POLITE?*

Answers:  
*Agree / approve other people's actions requires effort.  
You should be thankful if somebody is nice and is happy for you.  
It's an act that requires you to be happy for real and that has a very positive effect of politeness.  
I don't say that if they are not my friends.  
It's the same to me, I never say those things and I don't like when they say it to me ((booed by classmates))  
I wouldn't always do this, it depends on the context because I may be taken as a fake.*

To comment on the differences in the analysis made by Swedish and Argentinian informants, I base my analysis on the perception of the Argentinians', who had a chance of taking back their comments when confronted with Swedish perceptions. If we go back to the first Swedish and Argentinian analysis, we can read in line 8:

(4)  
8. PETRA (4) Själv då?  
'And you?'

**1. Leave the floor to show consideration: polite**

Argentinian students didn't acknowledge the act as the Swedish students did, but as part of the initiative-response pair. It is a polite act in that structural sense only. Then, when confronted with the interpretation of Swedish informants, the Argentinians insisted that the act did not seem relevant for them and that they did not interpret this to be polite in the utterance. But they interpreted the act of showing a ritual interest for the other as polite. From this, I can argue that the need of protecting the space of the other is more conscious in the Swedish group than in the Argentinian group.

I also observed differences in the perception of the threat in line 6, Petra (3). The Argentinian group, in the first analysis, classified Petra's act of informing on her position as "not threatening". When comparing the answers by Swedish informants, it was agreed that the evaluation of the context would be determining for an eventual classification of this act as threatening.

According to the perception of Swedish informants, in line 9 Stefan (5) there is a conflict that needs subsequent repairs. Argentinian informants don't see, in their first round, a threat, but then they consider the possibility of a face attack after comparing with the Swedish analysis of the same act. They explain that there can be an unwanted effect if the relation between speakers determines so (for example, an antagonism based on the expectations of personal success) or if there wouldn't be a high degree of *confianza* ('interpersonal, mutual trust') between participants. Either way, Argentinian

informants don't find a reason to justify subsequent face repairs and do not attribute the *change of topics* on line 10 Petra (5) to the need of avoiding the conflict. For them, this act would be neutral with respect to politeness. In 14 Petra (5), and considering that no threat is interpreted, there isn't a conflict to repair for the Argentinian group. However, they admit the affiliative function of talking about third parties or talking about shared activities. For this group of informants, it also seems doubtful the functions of repairing and of politeness of contributions 14-16. Contribution 16 is perceived as threatening for both speakers but it is specially threatening to Petra's face as regards her gendered role of a female. The explanations are centred on the fact that criticisms to "absent third parties" are in themselves dangerous because they can damage the speaker's face if they are not performed in a context of *confianza* ('interpersonal, mutual trust'). There is also the possibility that the criticisms are not shared by the interlocutor and leave way to threats. A third possibility is that the criticism is based on stereotypes of a woman's expected behaviour. Informants insist that these comments are not expected among people attending university. This, according to the Argentinian informants, can be considered as *politically incorrect*.

The observations in terms of socio-cultural differences were that:

1. The need of leaving the floor to show consideration wouldn't be so important for Argentinian informants.
2. Giving positive backchanneling is less marked in a Swedish context than in an Argentinian one.
3. The perception of the proximity degree required for affiliation through criticisms to third parties is less among Swedish informants than among Argentinian.
4. Speaking about oneself is less threatening between Argentinian informants than between Swedish ones.
5. It is more important to level out social asymmetries in a Swedish context than in an Argentinian one.
6. For Argentinian informants, the requirement of sincerity implies more often than not a rejection to positive backchannelling.
7. Agreeing and giving support are acts that Swedish students place at a conventional level of the exchange, while Argentinian consider them subject to contextualisation.

The above list of differences gives the impression that those behaviours are present in both groups, but one with more preference than the other. However, if we take these differences not only on a contrastive plane but also on a socio-cultural one, we can relate them with the configuration of a "basic face", together with the speakers' worldview. I find in that intersection different conceptions of a "social I" and of its interpersonal relations.

The fact of considering the "space of the other" in Sweden would be related with a distributive form that considers equality between people in a conscious manner. More prominently, I observe the presence of this underlying value in the needs of a basic face that are affected when favourable news about oneself is given (such as when Petra announces her new position). Positive backchannelling, a token of Swedish

conventional politeness, would be related to the need of expressing consensus<sup>34</sup> in a conversation. None of these tendencies appear as basic face needs in the conversations between Argentinian academics that I have analysed, but it does appear the requisite of sincerity, a cultural value that I have already observed in interactions between Peninsular Spanish speakers<sup>35</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to approach the problem of rendering categories with a socio-cultural load between cultures. To achieve this, and based on relevant concepts for the study of “linguistic politeness”, I have explained the operation of some analytical categories that present considerable flexibility. The categories are those of “autonomy” and “affiliative” aspects of face, “contents of face” and “social effect of politeness”. I have presented a model of analysis in order to evaluate the social effect of an utterance in a given communicative exchange and socio-cultural context. To achieve this, I have proposed to measure a “degree of conflict” in relation to a “degree of mitigation”, taking into account the exchange as a whole. Also, I have put forward an assessment of those socio-cultural premises that underlie interpretations made by an analyst when evaluating polite behaviours identified in his/her corpus.

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<sup>34</sup> I have studied the contents of this Swedish basic face of affiliation in Bravo (1996: 64-65).

<sup>35</sup> In tests of social habits done in Spain, it is observed that “sincerity” is a condition for politeness to be considered as such (Hernández Flores, 2002). In Bravo (2005), I comment on the difference between *flattering* and *adulation* in this sense.



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