

Santa Clara University

Scholar Commons

Modern Languages & Literature

College of Arts & Sciences

3-2011

Asking for a letter of recommendation in Spanish and English: A pilot study of face strategies

Laura Callahan

Santa Clara University, Lcallahan@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/mod_lang_lit



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Callahan, L. (2011). Asking for a Letter of Recommendation in Spanish and English: A Pilot Study of Face Strategies. *Hispania* 94(1), 171-183.

Reprinted with permission.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Languages & Literature by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.



*Hispania, A journal devoted to the
teaching of Spanish and Portuguese,
published by the AATSP*

**Asking For a Letter of Recommendation in Spanish and
English: Face Strategies**

Journal:	<i>Hispania, A journal devoted the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese, published by the AATSP</i>
Manuscript ID:	HISPAN-OA-03-2010-0039.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	email, face, independence, involvement, politeness, Pragmatics, requests, Spanish



Asking for a Letter of Recommendation in Spanish and English: Face Strategies

Abstract: Linguistic politeness plays an important role in the opinions people form of one another, especially when an individual has little other knowledge of an interlocutor, as is often the case in relationships between professors and students. Positive face refers to the desire to be liked and appreciated; negative face refers to the desire to be unimpeded. Positive and negative face are often characterized as corresponding to the dichotomies of involvement vs. independence, intimacy vs. distance, and solidarity vs. deference. An action or utterance that goes against one’s need for appreciation, in the case of positive face, or need for autonomy, in the case of negative face, constitutes a face-threatening act. Almost any interaction has the potential to damage participants’ positive or negative face. Speech acts that attend to the addressee’s as well as the speaker’s own face, both positive and negative, are described as face work. Face work mitigates the force of face-threatening acts. This paper examines the face work in two students’ email requests for letters of recommendation, to investigate whether and how the type and amount of face work differs in requests written in English and Spanish by native speakers of each language.

Keywords: email, face, independence, involvement, politeness, pragmatics, requests, Spanish

1. Introduction

The present paper compares two email requests for a letter of recommendation, both sent to a professor in a large North American public university system. One of the emails was written in English and the other was written in Spanish, each one in the writer’s native language. Other investigators have compared the pragmatic conventions of these two languages as manifested in the realization of various speech acts (see, for example, Ballesteros Martín 2001; Félix-Brasdefer 2003; Heros 1998; Hickey and Vázquez Orta 1994; Iñigo-Mora 2008; Koike 1994; Sánchez Vicent 2008; Valeiras Viso 2002). In general terms, Spanish and English discourse practices have often been characterized in a rather dichotomous way, with Spanish associated with a preference for positive politeness, and English with a preference for negative politeness. Positive and negative politeness will be discussed further below.

With respect to the speech act of requesting,ⁱ it has been shown that Spanish tends to favor more directness than does English; this has held across studies with speakers of diverse varieties of each of the two languages. For example, Hofmann’s (2003) Canadian English speakers favored more indirect strategies in comparison to his Costa Rican Spanish speakers, as did Díaz Pérez’s (2005) British English speakers in comparison to his Peninsular Spanish speakers. Márquez-Reiter’s (1997) Uruguayan Spanish-speakers showed a higher preference for imperative constructions than did her British English speakers. She observes that this preference “can also be seen in Brown and Levinson’s terms, as an ‘optimistic’ way of performing FTAs [face-threatening acts] since imperatives indicate a certain optimism that the addressee is willing to carry out the act requested by the speaker; thus the frequent use in Spanish can be seen as an indication of positive politeness” (Márquez-Reiter’s 1997: 163). In all varieties of both languages, however, social distance has been shown to have an effect on the degree of directness,

Face Strategies

with lower status speakers increasing the indirectness of their requests to higher ranked addressees.

Díaz Pérez (2005), Hofmann (2003), and Márquez-Reiter (1997) examine a variety of request types elicited through a discourse completion test (hereafter DCT).ⁱⁱ The present work makes a contribution to this body of research with an examination of naturalistic data in which native speakers execute a specific type of request that heretofore has been studied primarily via elicited data produced by language learners.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, the particular speech event studied here—email communication written in either Spanish or English asking for a letter of recommendation—is one in which *Hispania* readers are very likely to participate at some point in their professional lives, whether in the role of sender, receiver, or both.

Students can make a variety of requests of professors. Some common types include requests for extensions on due dates, information on assignments, suggestions for and/or copies of readings, comments on preliminary drafts of papers, rescheduling of examination dates, and explanations of final grades. These requests have to do with the business of the course. In this sense, the professor has some obligation to fulfill or at least attend to the request.

A request for a letter of recommendation is a type of petition not as closely tied to the conduct of the course. Although most such requests do come from current or at least recent students, the instructor does not have the same degree of obligation with respect to this type of request. Opinions are mixed as to whether or not professors have an absolute obligation to write letters of recommendation, but there seems to be a general consensus that doing so is part of an academician's professional responsibilities (Harris; Roberts 2006). Nevertheless, at most institutions such work does not appear on faculty members' annual reviews or tenure applications, or if it does, it carries little weight. In addition, even among those who consider writing these letters to be a professional duty, most agree that not all requests need be fulfilled (Central Michigan; DePaul). A professor may refuse to write a letter for various reasons, including, but not limited to, the student's less than stellar academic performance, discipline issues, or last minute timing of the request. Thus, a request for a letter of recommendation is by no means assured of a positive response, and it behooves the requestor to take steps to increase the possibilities of success. One such step is to attend to the instructor's face.

Face is a fundamental concept in politeness theory. Positive face refers to the desire to be liked and appreciated, while negative face refers to the desire to be unimpeded (Brown and Levinson 1987). Positive and negative face are often characterized as corresponding to the dichotomies of involvement vs. independence, intimacy vs. distance, and solidarity vs. deference (Scollon and Scollon 2001). An action or utterance that goes against one's need for appreciation, in the case of positive face, or autonomy, in the case of negative face, is said to constitute a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987).

Speech acts as well as non-linguistic actions that attend to the addressee's as well as the speaker's own face, both positive and negative, are described as face work.^{iv} Face work attenuates, or mitigates, the force of face-threatening acts. A request that the addressee perform some action is by its very nature an imposition that threatens his or her independence and autonomy (i.e. his or her negative face).^v Scollon and Scollon (2001: 41) speak of linguistic

strategies of involvement and independence as part of “[p]oliteness (or [f]ace) [s]ystems”, and provide examples, summarized in Table 1.

<Table 1. about here>
<caption> Table 1. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence^{vi}
(adapted from Scollon & Scollon 2001: 40-41)

Note that those strategies characterized as involvement all constitute, in O’Driscoll’s (2007) words, “moves toward” the interlocutor, while those assigned to independence constitute “moves away” (474). Put into other terms, positive face(work) emphasizes connection and belonging, while negative face(work) maintains separation and individuation (O’Driscoll 474). Strategies of involvement and independence will be the main focus of the present analysis. Within these strategies, on a more minute level, linguistic mitigators of a request can take various forms. Examples include set phrases such as ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, formality markers such as the use of titles and last names, salutations and valedictions, and past tense and conditional^{vii} verb forms. All such discrete items will be referred to in this paper as face markers. Other forms of face markers will be elucidated as they appear in the data.

2. Literature review

This literature review focuses on face in email from students to teachers, something which has not been the topic of other comparisons of Spanish and English, except perhaps in the context of second language learners.

In one of the earlier studies related to face work in email between students and professors, Waldeck et al. (2001) discuss strategies that instructors can use to encourage students to communicate with them via this medium. These strategies include such practices as self-disclosure, phatic speech, use of the student’s first name, and compliments on the student’s work.

Moving to communication directed by students to teachers, Davies et al. (2007) studied the structure of apologies in a corpus of 100 emails sent to three university professors in the UK. Apologies were rarely found alone, occurring instead couched in between other speech acts, particularly, as alluded to in the paper’s title— “Institutional Apologies in UK Higher Education: Getting Back into the Black Before Going into the Red”—speech acts calculated to garner the writer future favor.

Much of the research on politeness involves comparisons of first and second language speakers’ communication in English. For example, Beisenbach-Lucas (2007) performed a quantitative and qualitative analysis of low and high imposition requests sent to faculty by graduate students at a North American university, finding that native speakers of English used a greater variety of politeness features in their petitions, especially with regard to indirect syntactic choices. Based on her conclusions, Beisenbach-Lucas advocates pedagogical intervention for ESL students in the use of email to instructors.

In another comparison study, Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) asked eighty undergraduates, forty Jordanian non-native speakers of English in Jordan and forty native speakers of English in the U.S., to create an email message in response to a hypothetical scenario requiring them to plead

Face Strategies

for an extension of a deadline. The authors found differences in the sequencing of moves, with the Jordanians placing their justifications before the request and the Americans making the request first, followed by the reasons it was being made. The Jordanians invoked compassion to support the request, while the Americans were more apt to refer to ancillary documents and to provide means for further communication. Finally, as in Beisenbach-Lucas (2007), Al-Ali and Sahawneh's ESL speakers used more lexical/phrasal devices to mitigate their requests, rather than "syntactic devices that require a native language proficiency that the nonnative users lack" (57).

Bretag (2006) also examined email from ESL students, at an Australian university. Using a Freirian perspective—in which both teacher and student act as both student and teacher—her focus was on the third space created via interaction in this medium. She examined the strategies of positive politeness, such as self-disclosure, used by both students and instructor to create this third space, in which the hierarchical relationship between student and teacher is altered.

As mentioned above, the specific situation in which students who are native speakers of two different languages use their respective native language to make a relatively high imposition request of one professor in a single country, has not, to the best of my knowledge, been examined. My research questions therefore include: (1) What differences, if any, characterize such messages from one language to the next? (2) Will these differences be consonant with findings from previous studies on pragmatic differences between Spanish and English?

3. Method

Two emails were chosen for analysis and comparison, one written in English by a native speaker of English, the other written in Spanish by a native speaker of Spanish. The English speaker was male and the Spanish speaker was female. Both were in their mid to late twenties. The man was raised in a country in which English is the dominant language and the woman in one in which Spanish occupies this position. Constant variables include the length of the email (227 and 209 words, respectively), the writers' age, academic level, length of acquaintance with the addressee (about 18 months), and ultimate objective: a letter of recommendation to enter a graduate program.^{viii} The addressee was also a constant variable: as has been noted, both emails were sent to the same person, a female professor of approximately twice the writers' age working in a large North American public university system.

Each of the emails was analyzed from the perspective of involvement and independence politeness strategies (Scollon 2001; see Table 1, above), as well as smaller, individual elements that constitute face markers. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, below, letters in parentheses were inserted before individual phrases, clauses, and sentences that were considered to represent a strategy of involvement or independence, or in a few cases, both at once. These letters were then copied into Tables 2 and 4, below, within their respective categories. Individual elements that constitute face markers were copied into Tables 3 and 5, below, and these were classified as markers of positive or negative face. All of this will be illustrated in Section 4.

4. Results and discussion

To begin, we can see that in Figure 1, ‘Hey’ and ‘how are things going?’ for example, are treated as two separate items, (a) and (b), and so on until the end of the message. The last item is the email writer’s first name, in (u).

<Figure 1 here>
<caption> Figure 1. Email from Native English Speaker^{ix}

What we see in Table 2, then, is that each item marked with a letter in the English language email (in Figure 1) has been assigned to a category of involvement or independence. For example, items (a) ‘Hey’, and (b) ‘how are things going?’ are considered to be strategies of involvement in that the writer notices and attends to the reader (Table 2, top section, row 1).

Note that four items have been deemed to instantiate strategies of both involvement and independence. In the case of (i) ‘I of course should have given you much more time to write it!’, there is evidence of involvement insofar as this statement indicates that the writer knows the reader’s wants (in this case her need for adequate lead time in light of her busy schedule) and is taking them into account (Table 2, top section, row 6). It also shows signs of respecting the reader’s independence, by acknowledging the writer’s own responsibility for an error (Table 2, bottom section, row 4). Item (j) ‘The good thing is that it can be submitted electronically’ likewise shows an orientation toward involvement, in that it expresses optimism (Table 2, top section, row 5), as well as an orientation toward independence, in that it minimizes the threat to the reader’s autonomy, insofar as electronic submission will facilitate the task the reader is being asked to undertake (Table 2, bottom section, row 3). Finally, item (k) ‘and we wouldn’t have to worry about mail’, also minimizes this threat—by downtoning the possible obstacles to meeting a deadline on short notice—at the same time claiming ingroup membership with the reader via the use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ (Table 2, top section, row 3).

Note that in both Table 2 and Table 4, a strategy characterized as oriented toward involvement—the use of the hearer’s language or dialect (Tables 2 and 4, top section, row 10)—and its opposite, characterized as oriented toward independence—the use of the speaker’s own language or dialect (Tables 2 and 4, bottom section, row 10), have not been applied to the data under discussion. As noted in Author (xxxx), language choice is complex and open to multiple interpretations, depending on the context and interlocutors. For example, the English language email was written in what happens to be both the writer and reader’s native language, a choice that could therefore instantiate a strategy of involvement. Alternatively, it could signal a strategy of independence, i.e. oriented toward non-imposition. This is because although Spanish would also have been available for use, and was in fact the language used on most other occasions between these two individuals, it is nevertheless a second language for both. In the Spanish language email, the writer uses her own native language, rather than the reader’s, a choice that could represent a strategy of involvement, in that the writer recognizes the reader’s proficiency in the language and includes her among its legitimate users.

<Table 2. about here>
<caption> Table 2. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence in Email from Native English Speaker

Face Strategies

Table 3 shows individual elements from the English language email that constitute face markers. These have been classified with a plus or minus symbol as markers of positive or negative face. We see that there are five types of face markers (a total of eleven tokens) oriented toward positive politeness, from an opening and closing^x—‘Hey’ and ‘Thanks’—to the use of the writer’s first name alone at the end of the message (his first name and surname together with telephone number are not taken into account, as this appeared to be an automatic setting on the email and therefore not part of the actual message). There are three types of face markers (a total of eight tokens) with an orientation to negative politeness, including presequences to the request, subjunctive and conditional verb forms, and requests phrased as statements. The presequences—such as, for example, ‘I imagine you were expecting this question’—serve to prepare the reader for the coming imposition. The subjunctive and conditional verb forms move the request into the realm of the hypothetical, thus giving the appearance that the writer does not take it for granted that his request will be fulfilled.

<Table 3. about here>

<caption> **Table 3. Face Markers in Email from Native English Speaker
(5 Positive Types; 3 Negative Types)**

As in the first email, in Figure 2 we see the classification of various items, from the opening in (a), ‘*Querida profesora Miller*’, to the closing in (o), which, in contrast to the native English speaker’s message, takes the form of the writer’s first and last name.

<Figure 2 here>

<caption> **Figure 2. Email from Native Spanish Speaker**

Following the procedure described above, each item marked with a letter in the Spanish language email (in Figure 2) has been assigned to a category of involvement or independence in Table 4. Here again we see that some phrases have been deemed to instantiate strategies of both involvement and independence. Thus, item (a), ‘*Querida profesora Miller*’, orients toward involvement, in that it pays notice to the reader (Table 4, top section, row 1) by using not only a rather warm salutation but also the reader’s name, while still maintaining a certain distance and hence an emphasis on independence with the use of the reader’s family name and title (Table 4, bottom section, row 8). Items (c), ‘*pero quería adelantarle un poco de que se trata mi pregunta*’, and (g) ‘*Como usted ya se tomó el trabajo de escribir una de las recomendaciones, me apenaba mucho volver a pedirle el favor de hacer otras dos copias de la carta*’ likewise instantiate strategies of involvement and independence at the same time. Item (c) is an example of the writer’s volubility (Table 4, top section, row 9), and item (g) of an exaggerated show of sympathy with the reader (Table 4, top section, row 2). Item (c) also serves to minimize the threat of the imposition (Table 4, bottom section, row 3), especially with the downtoner ‘*poco*’, while item (g) does double duty as an implicit apology (Table 4, bottom section, row 4).

<Table 4. about here>

<caption> **Table 4. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence in Email from Native Spanish Speaker**

As in Table 3, above, Table 5, below, shows individual elements from the Spanish language email that constitute face markers and which have been classified with a plus or minus symbol as markers of positive or negative face. There are three types of face markers (a total of five tokens) oriented toward positive politeness, including the salutation ‘*Querida*’ and acknowledgment of the reader’s contribution, ‘*gracias a que usted*’. There are eight types of face markers (ten plus^{xi} tokens) with an orientation to negative politeness, including the use of deferential second person pronouns and verb forms, a strategy unavailable in English.

<Table 5. about here>
<caption> Table 5. Face Markers in Email from Native Spanish Speaker
(3 Positive Types; 8 Negative Types)

5. Conclusions and implications for future research

The first research question guiding this study asked what differences, if any, might be found in emails from students who are native speakers of Spanish and English using their respective first language to make a relatively high imposition request. We have seen that both writers employ a variety of linguistic politeness strategies, but each tends toward a different type, as detailed in Section 4. Both writers used a similar number of independence strategies, but the English language message includes more strategies of involvement and positive politeness, although these are not absent from the message written in Spanish. As well, the message in English has a more informal tone than the Spanish one. A good example of this can be seen in the choice of opening formula—‘Hey, how are things going?’ versus ‘*Querida profesora Miller*’. The degree of familiarity between instructor and student may contribute to the level of (in)formality the latter uses when addressing the former.^{xii} The length and context of acquaintance between the professor and both students in this study was similar, as detailed in Section 3. However, it was not possible to control for personality differences, and the fact that the native English-speaker shared more cultural background with the instructor than did the native Spanish-speaker may also have been a factor.

The second research question asked whether these differences would be consonant with findings from previous studies on pragmatic variation between Spanish and English. If one takes the positive-negative dichotomy mentioned in Section 1 at face value, the answer to the second research question would be no, they are not, insofar as the English language message bears more face markers oriented toward positive politeness than does the Spanish language one. Notwithstanding the small sample of the present study, this may be due in part to the fact that much of the work upon which the aforementioned dichotomy is based consists of elicited rather than spontaneous speech. As Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus (2008) note: “Unlike in requests collected from natural data (whether face-to-face or electronic), there is no real interpersonal history between potential requester and requestee available to respondents when they complete a DCT, no matter how highly contextualized the situations in the DCT may be presented” (270).

The limitations of this study include two uncontrolled variables: the gender of the writer, and his or her country of origin, and hence, the particular variety of English or Spanish that shapes the writer’s discourse. As to gender, men typically engage in less face work than women (see, for example, Fishman 1984; Montgomery 1995). However, it has also been found that more face

Face Strategies

work occurs in mixed sex dyads; therefore, the fact that the professor to whom both requests were directed in this study was a woman may have functioned as an equalizing factor, causing the male writer to use more face work.

The fact that there are differences in the pragmatic conventions within both Spanish and English as used in different countries or regions has also been well established (see, for example, Bou Franch and Gregori Signes 1998; Curcó and de Fina 2009; Félix-Brasdefer 2008; Márquez Reiter and Placencia 2004; Tannen 1981). Notwithstanding differences within each language, however, comparisons of Spanish to English have shown consistent differences between the two languages regardless of the particular varieties examined. The difference most often found, as noted in Section 1, is a general tendency for more directness in Spanish. Although this seems to be most notable in Peninsular Spanish, and perhaps least in Mexican Spanish, the difference is still salient in comparison to English, whether the latter is British or American. Privacy concerns preclude disclosure of the exact regions from which the two email writers in this study come, but the distribution is such that each can be taken as fairly representative of a large non-European macrodialect of his or her respective language.

The emails analyzed were chosen for their homogeneity in length, purpose, and certain writer characteristics (apart from gender), as noted in Section 3. A future investigation should include a larger corpus, which, if extensive enough, might yield statistical differences between the two groups of writers: students asking for a letter of recommendation in their native English, and other students asking for one in their native Spanish. A next and perhaps more important step would be to test instructor's reactions to sample letters, which in turn could provide useful data on intercultural communication in this venue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

Notes

ⁱ Searle (1976) defines the speech act of requesting as "attempts to get hearers to do something" (3), and further describes how status differences between speaker and hearer will affect how the request is phrased.

ⁱⁱ Discourse completion tests (DCTs) are questionnaires on which respondents indicate how they would perform particular speech acts (such as issuing a request or apology, declining an invitation, etc.) in given situations. Contextual information such as the age of and relationship between hypothetical interlocutors is typically included. Role plays function as a variation on DCTs, requiring participants to act out hypothetical scenarios.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, asking for a letter of recommendation was one of the sample situations used to elicit speech from learners of Spanish in Félix-Brasdefer (2007), with the aim of discovering how proficiency level affects pragmatic development in learners of Spanish as a foreign language, as manifested in their production of requests. The present study is not directly

concerned with second language acquisition, although the data offered here could be used for comparison by researchers of interlanguage pragmatics.

^{iv} Paralinguistic features such as tone and volume of voice, as well as smiles, gestures, and laughter, can also serve as face work, complementing or at times substituting speech. See also Pan (2000), for an interesting exposition of what happens when a language lacks the types of structures referred to as face markers.

^v It must be recognized that imposition is not universally considered to be a face-threatening act; see, for example, Hernández-Flores (2004) and Sifianou (1992). Nevertheless, it is seen as such in the cultures of all three participants represented in the data for the present paper.

^{vi} In Tables 1, 2, and 4, H stands for Hearer, which for the purpose of the present paper will be considered equivalent to reader; S stands for Speaker, equivalent for our purposes to writer.

^{vii} The conditional is recognized as a face marker in many languages. Chodorowska-Pilch (2004) posits that it has become grammaticalized as such in Spanish.

^{viii} More specific details, such as the email writers' country of origin, field of study, additional personal characteristics and particulars of their relationship to the addressee, are not given here in order to preserve anonymity.

^{ix} Names and other identifiers have been changed in both emails.

^x Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus (2008) found that many participant responses on DCTs featured scarcely more than the request itself, and often lacked opening and closing sequences, which, as the authors observe, is where much of the face work in natural interactions takes place.

^{xi} The instances of formal second person pronouns and verb forms have not been counted individually, but rather treated as one token in Table 5, since these deferential forms are used without variation throughout the message. This is the most common practice, although in oral discourse a speaker may sometimes change from formal to informal to address the same interlocutor within the same speech situation or event.

^{xii} Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2008) found opening formulae associated with an informal register in data elicited from their ESL participants, hypothesizing that "[t]hose users think that email as a medium of communication, in general, is characterized by informal and casual language" (59). A discussion of the possible influence of orality in electronic communication is outside the scope of this paper. Of more immediate interest here is the fact that, in contrast to Al-Ali and Sahawneh's investigation, non-nativeness is not a factor in the current study; the informal register was used by a native speaker of the language in question.

Works Cited

Al-Ali, Mohammed Nahar, and Meera B. Sahawneh. (2008). "An Investigation into the Generic

-
- Features of English Requestive E-Mail Messages.” *LSP and Professional Communication*. 8.2: 40-65. Print.
- Author. (xxxx). Information deleted for blind review.
- Ballesteros Martín, Francisco José. (2001). “La cortesía española frente a la cortesía inglesa: Estudio pragmatolingüístico de las exhortaciones impositivas.” *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*. 9: 171-207. Print.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, Sigrun. (2007). “Students Writing Emails to Faculty: An Examination of E-Politeness among Native and Non-Native Speakers of English.” *Language Learning & Technology*. 11.2: 59-81. Print.
- Bou Franch, Patricia, and Carmen Gregori Signes. (1998). “Pragmática intercultural: Emisiones del oyente en inglés británico y español peninsular.” *Quaderns de Filologia: Estudis Lingüístics*. 4.3: 123-134, 297. Print.
- Bou Franch, Patricia, and Nuria Lorenzo-Dus. (2008). “Natural versus Elicited Data in Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation: The Case of Requests in Peninsular Spanish and British English.” *Spanish in Context*. 5.2: 246-277. Print.
- Bretag, Tracey. (2006). “Developing ‘Third Space’ Interculturality Using Computer-Mediated Communication.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 11.4. Web. 25 November 2009.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Print.
- Central Michigan University. “Letters of Recommendation.” *Meteorology Program*. Web. 29 December 2009.
- Chodorowska-Pilch, Marianna. (2004). “The Conditional: A Grammaticalised Marker of Politeness in Spanish.” *Current Trends in the Pragmatics of Spanish*. Ed. Rosina Márquez Reiter and María E. Placencia. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 57-75. Print.
- Curcó, Carmen, and Anna de Fina. (2009). “Modo imperativo, negación y diminutivos en la expresión de la cortesía en español: El contraste entre México y España.” *Actos de habla y cortesía en español*. Ed. María E. Placencia and Diana Bravo. Munich: LINCOM Europa. 107-140. Print.
- Davies, Bethan L., Andrew John Merrison, and Angela Goddard. (2007). “Institutional Apologies in UK Higher Education: Getting Back into the Black Before Going into the Red.” *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture*. 3: 39-63. Print.
- DePaul University. “Recommendation Letter Etiquette: A Guide for Students.” *Liberal Arts and Sciences*. Web. 29 December 2009.
- Díaz Pérez, Francisco Javier. (2005). “Cortesía verbal y nivel de oblicuidad en la producción de peticiones por hablantes de inglés y de español.” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. 50: 279-299. Print.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. (2003). “Declining an Invitation: A Cross-Cultural Study of Pragmatic Strategies in American English and Latin American Spanish.” *Multilingua: Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*. 22.3: 225-255. Print.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. (2007). “Pragmatic Development in the Spanish as a FL Classroom: A Cross-Sectional Study of Learner Requests.” *Intercultural Pragmatics*. 4.2: 253-286. Print.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. (2008). “Sociopragmatic Variation: Dispreferred Responses in Mexican and Dominican Spanish.” *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior,*

Culture. 4.1: 81-110. Print.

Fishman, Pamela M. (1984). "Interaction: The Work Women Do." *Language, Gender, and Society*. Ed. Barrie Thorne, Cherise Kramarae, and Nancy Henley. Boston: Newbury House. 89-101. Print.

Harris, Scott R. "Writing Letters of Recommendation: A Form to Help Students Help You, So You Can Help Them." Web. 29 December 2009.

Hernández-Flores, Nieves. (2004). "Politeness as Face Enhancement: An Analysis of Spanish Conversations between Friends and Family." *Current Trends in the Pragmatics of Spanish*. Ed. Rosina Márquez Reiter and María E. Placencia. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 265-286. Print.

Heros, Susana de los. (1998). "El papel del género en la datación y recepción de cumplidos y la cortesía lingüística." *Cuadernos del Lazarillo: Revista Literaria y Cultural*. 15: 62-68. Print.

Hickey, Leo and Ignacio Vázquez Orta. (1994). "Politeness as Deference: A Pragmatic View." *Pragmalingüística*. 2: 267-286. Print.

Hofmann, Peter J. (2003). "Language Politeness: Directive Speech Acts in Brazilian Portuguese, Costa Rican Spanish and Canadian English." Ph.D. Dissertation. State University of New York at Stony Brook. Print.

Iñigo-Mora, Isabel. (2008). "Politeness Strategies in English and Spanish Parliamentary Settings." *Respectus Philologicus*. 14.19: 108-114. Print.

Koike, Dale. (1994). "Negation in Spanish and English Suggestions and Requests: Mitigation Differences?" *Journal of Pragmatics*. 13: 187-202. Print.

Márquez Reiter, Rosina. (1997). "Politeness Phenomena in British English and Uruguayan Spanish: The Case of Requests." *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*. 18: 159-167. Print.

Márquez Reiter, Rosina and María E. Placencia. (2004). "Displaying Closeness and Respectful Distance in Montevidean and Quiteño Service Encounters." In Rosina Márquez Reiter and María E. Placencia (eds.) *Current Trends in the Pragmatics of Spanish*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 121-155. Print.

Montgomery, Carol. (1995). "Face Considerations in Conversation Closings." *CUNYForum*. 19: 81-94. Print.

O'Driscoll, Jim. (2007). "Brown & Levinson's Face: How It Can—and Can't—Help Us to Understand Interaction across Cultures." *Intercultural Pragmatics*. 4.4: 463-492. Print.

Pan, Yuling. (2000). "Facework in Chinese Service Encounters." *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*. 10.1: 25-61. Print.

Roberts, Rick. (2006). "Writing Letters of Recommendation." *University of North Florida Career Services*. Web. 29 December 2009.

Sánchez Vicent, Inés. (2008). "Individual versus Group Identity through Language and Communication: A Contrastive Analysis of Politeness Strategies Employed in Catalogues of the Spanish, American and British Toy Business Sector." *Researching and Teaching Specialized Languages: New Contexts, New Challenges*. Ed. Purificación Sánchez Hernández, Pascual Pérez-Paredes, Pilar Aguado Jiménez, and Raquel Criado Sánchez. Murcia, Spain: Universidad de Murcia. 162-173. Print.

Scollon, Ronald and Suzanne Wong Scollon. (2001). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. Print.

-
- Searle, John R. (1976). "A Classification of Illocutionary Acts." *Language in Society*. 5: 1-23. Print.
- Sifianou, Maria. (1992). "The Use of Diminutives in Expressing Politeness: Modern Greek versus English." *Journal of Pragmatics*. 17: 155-173. Print.
- Tannen, Deborah. (1981). "New York Jewish Conversational Style." *Intercultural Discourse and Communication. The Essential Readings*. (2005). Ed. Scott F. Kiesling and Christina Bratt Paulston. Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 135-149. Print.
- Valeiras Viso, Jesus M. (2009). "'Deja tu mensaje después de la señal': Despedidas y otros elementos de la sección de cierre en mensajes dejados en contestadores automáticos en Madrid y Londres." *Actos de habla y cortesía en español*. Ed. María E. Placencia and Diana Bravo. Munich: LINCOM Europa. 209-232. Print.
- Waldeck, Jennifer H., Patricia Kearney, and Timothy G. Plax. (2001). "Teacher E-Mail Message Strategies and Students' Willingness to Communicate Online." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 29.1: 54-70. Print.

Table 1. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence
(adapted from Scollon & Scollon 2001: 40-41)

Linguistic Strategies of Involvement	
1.	Notice or attend to H
2.	Exaggerate interest in, approval of, or sympathy with H
3.	Claim ingroup membership with H
4.	Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy
5.	Be optimistic
6.	Indicate S knows H's wants and is taking them into account
7.	Assume or assert reciprocity
8.	Use given names and nicknames
9.	Be voluble
10.	Use H's language or dialect
Linguistic Strategies of Independence	
1.	Make minimal assumptions about H's wants
2.	Give H the option not to do the act
3.	Minimize threat
4.	Apologize
5.	Be pessimistic
6.	Dissociate S, H from the discourse
7.	State a general rule
8.	Use family names and titles
9.	Be taciturn
10.	Use own language or dialect

Figure 1. Email from Native English Speaker

(a) Hey, (b) how are things going? (c) After doing a bit of job searching (I'm going to teach a course at El Camino next semester!), I'm starting to hit the PhD applications hard. (d) I imagine you were expecting this question, (e) but do you think you would feel comfortable writing recommendation letters for me? (f) If you were willing I would be forever grateful.

(g) If you are ok with writing them for me, I have a pretty big favor to ask. (h) Unfortunately, I mistakenly believed that the deadline for Bedford was Dec. 15th, but I just found out that I was horribly mistaken and it is in fact due the 30th of November, and (i) I of course should have given you much more time to write it! (j) The good thing is that it can be submitted electronically (k) and we wouldn't have to worry about mail. (l) I'm very sorry that I didn't ask for this earlier, (m) do you think it will still be possible? (n) Thanks for your time, (o) and thanks for the help you've been giving me.

(p) By the way, I contacted Michael Johnson and Susan Smith and they've both been great. (q) Susan said that they're very close to starting a PhD program in Political Science, possibly in 2007. (r) I'm waiting for a response to see if it's something I could possibly apply for. (s) I hope to hear from you soon! (t) Thanks,

(u) Bob

Bob Jones
[telephone number]

Table 2. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence in Email from Native English Speaker

Linguistic Strategies of Involvement: Total of 9 types, 16 tokens	
1.	Notice or attend to H: (a), (b), (n), (o), (t)
2.	Exaggerate interest in, approval of, or sympathy with H: (e)
3.	Claim ingroup membership with H: (k)
4.	Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy: (d)
5.	Be optimistic: (j), (s)
6.	Indicate S knows H's wants and is taking them into account: (i)
7.	Assume or assert reciprocity
8.	Use given names and nicknames: (u)
9.	Be voluble: (c), (p), (q), (r)
10.	Use H's language or dialect
Linguistic Strategies of Independence: Total of 5 types, 8 tokens	
1.	Make minimal assumptions about H's wants
2.	Give H the option not to do the act: (f), (g), (m)
3.	Minimize threat: (j), (k)
4.	Apologize: (i), (l)
5.	Be pessimistic: (h)
6.	Dissociate S, H from the discourse
7.	State a general rule
8.	Use family names and titles
9.	Be taciturn
10.	Use own language or dialect

**Table 3. Face Markers in Email from Native English Speaker
(5 Positive Types; 3 Negative Types)**

Use of addressee's given name	
Use of addressee's surname	
Use of titles with addressee's name	
Use of nicknames and pet names	
Salutations and valedictions	Hey/ Thanks +
Use of speaker or writer's name	Bob +
Expressions of interest in addressee's welfare	how are things going? +
Use of presequences to the request	I imagine you were expecting this question/ do you think/ do you think -
Use of past tense verb forms	
Use of subjunctive and conditional verb forms	You would feel comfortable/ If you were willing/ I would be forever grateful/ we wouldn't have to worry -
Intensifiers	Pretty big/ horribly/ of course/ !! +
Requests prefaced with negation	
Requests phrased as statements	I hope to hear from you soon! -
Please and thank you and variations thereof	Thanks/ Thanks/ Thanks +

Figure 2. Email from Native Spanish Speaker

(a) *Querida profesora Miller:*

(b) *Yo pienso pasar el lunes durante sus horas de oficina para consultarle algo, (c) pero quería adelantarle un poco de que se trata mi pregunta. (d) Seguí su consejo de aplicar en noviembre al doctorado de Firestone (e) y (gracias a que usted y la profesora Allen aceptaron escribir las recomendaciones) ya los papeles para postularme al doctorado de Ciencias políticas están listos.*

(f) *Lo que sucede es que también, recientemente, tengo en mente presentarme a Sullivan State University y Magnolia University para los doctorados de Ciencias sociales en ambas universidades. (g) Como usted ya se tomó el trabajo de escribir una de las recomendaciones, y yo no tenía planteadas por entonces las otras dos opciones, me apenaba mucho volver a pedirle el favor de hacer otras dos copias de la carta. (h) Lo cierto es que el profesor Carter y la profesora Allen aceptaron escribir cartas para las tres universidades, (i) pero Magnolia y SSU me piden tres cartas y me están haciendo falta dos de ellas (una para Magnolia y otra para SSU).*

(j) *Yo entiendo profesora si usted ya no dispone del tiempo para hacer otras dos recomendaciones, (k) pero si aún fuera posible hacerlas le estaré muy agradecida... (l) Y si no, por supuesto, también.*

(m) *Un saludo (n) y disculpe la inconveniencia,*

(o) *Graciela Guerrero*

Table 4. Linguistic Strategies of Involvement and Independence in Email from Native Spanish Speaker

Linguistic strategies of involvement: total of 4 types, 11 tokens	
1.	Notice or attend to H: (a), (m)
2.	Exaggerate interest in, approval of, or sympathy with H: (g), (k)
3.	Claim ingroup membership with H
4.	Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy
5.	Be optimistic
6.	Indicate S knows H's wants and is taking them into account: (l)
7.	Assume or assert reciprocity
8.	Use given names and nicknames
9.	Be voluble: (b), (c), (d), (e), (h), (i)
10.	Use H's language or dialect
Linguistic strategies of independence: total of 5 types, 7 tokens	
1.	Make minimal assumptions about H's wants
2.	Give H the option not to do the act: (j)
3.	Minimize threat: (c)
4.	Apologize: (g), (n)
5.	Be pessimistic: (j)
6.	Dissociate S, H from the discourse
7.	State a general rule
8.	Use family names and titles: (a), (o)
9.	Be taciturn
10.	Use own language or dialect

Table 5. Face Markers in Email from Native Spanish Speaker
(3 Positive Types; 8 Negative Types)

Use of addressee’s given name	
Use of addressee’s surname	Miller -
Use of titles with addressee’s name	Profesora -
Use of nicknames and pet names	
Salutations and valedictions	Querida/ Un saludo +
Use of speaker or writer’s name	Graciela Guerrero -
Expressions of interest in addressee’s welfare	
Use of familiar second person pronouns	
Use of formal second person pronouns	le/ usted/ su -
Use of familiar verb forms	
Use of formal verb forms	Yes -
Use of past tense verb forms	quería adelantarle/ me apenaba -
Use of subjunctive and conditional verb forms	si aún fuera posible -
Intensifiers	Mucho +
Requests prefaced with negation	
Requests phrased as statements	me apenaba mucho volver a pedirle el favor de hacer otras dos copias de la carta -
Please and thank you and variations thereof	gracias a que usted/ el favor de +