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WORKPLACE REQUESTS IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF EMAIL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TWO SUPERVISORS AND A SUBORDINATE

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the mitigation in email communication betweem two supervisors and a subordinate, to investigate how this feature differs in requests written in English and Spanish by native speakers of each language. Forty-seven emails were harvested from a span of three and a half years. The Spanish-speaking supervisor's requests contained fewer mitigation devices of every type. Although the requests written in Spanish contained less mitigation, this does not mean that this supervisor's email communication was devoid of facework. On the contrary, his use of imperatives and other direct strategies may have been intended as a form of positive politeness. Its reception (i.e. its interpretation by the receiver), however, was often otherwise, given the fact that both the receiver and the other supervisor were L1 English speakers, and the fact that, especially in comparison, the latter's requests did contain the indirect strategies that characterize linguistic politeness in English.

1. INTRODUCTION. In almost any workplace it is possible that not all members share the same communication style. This possibility increases when individuals from different cultures and countries work together, whether as peers, subordinates, or superiors. Each must adapt to different discourse practices, with lower status workers expected to adapt more to their superiors than vice versa. The specific situation studied here—a university department in the United States—is one in which it is particularly common to encounter colleagues and supervisors from cultures outside one's own. U.S. universities often hire faculty members who were born and educated elsewhere, particularly in those cases

in which expertise in the subject matter is apt to have been gained in a non-English-speaking country.

Linguistic politeness plays an important role in the opinions people form of one another, especially in the absence of non-verbal forms of communication. It can therefore influence the atmosphere of a workplace in general and workplace relations between superiors and subordinates in particular. This paper examines the facework in email communication between two supervisors and a subordinate, to investigate whether and how the type and amount of facework differs in requests written in English and Spanish by native speakers of each language, as well as how it differs in requests made by the superiors to their subordinate versus those made by the subordinate to her superiors.

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, or FTA (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 facework. Paralinguistic features such as tone and volume of voice, as well as smiles, gestures, and laughter, can also serve as facework, complementing or at times substituting for 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.

Facework attenuates, or mitigates, the force of face-threatening acts. This does not imply that face is limited to threats to an individual's image (for a broader perspective, see, for example, Arundale 1999, 2006; Domenici and Littlejohn 2006; Garcés-Conejos 2009; Haugh 2009; Locher and Watts 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2000, 2005; Ting-Toomey 1988, 2005; Watts 2003). More recent approaches treat face as something that is discursively constructed in each interaction. For a good exposition of some problems with and possible adaptations of Brown and Levinson (1987), see O'Driscoll (2007). Traditional approaches such as Brown and Levinson (outlined above), in which certain a priori assumptions are made, nevertheless account well for the data in the present study. Moreover, the researcher's insider knowledge of the dynamics between the subordinate and her two supervisors supports the claims that will be made in this paper regarding the level of imposition of the requests and other factors that depend on individual perceptions.

As various scholars have pointed out, not only can the value respectively accorded to negative and positive politeness vary, but speech acts cannot be assigned to one or the other in universal terms. For example, requests are often assumed to be inherently face-threatening (i.e. threatening to negative face), since they impinge on the addressee's personal liberty. But in some contexts requests may have a different communicative value. Márquez-Reiter observes that 'requests can also imply closeness and intimacy since the speaker must feel close enough to the addressee to ask him/her to do something (Sifianou 1992) and should thus be considered to be in the realm of positive politeness' (Márquez-Reiter 1997: 161). I maintain that in the United States, however, a request that the addressee perform some action does indeed threaten his or her independence and autonomy, i.e. his or her negative face.

A request given with no facework would be a bald imperative, as in example (a):

(a): Come to my office tomorrow at 9:00 am.

Linguistic mitigators of the request take various forms, and all constitute facework. Examples of mitigators are frozen phrases such as 'please' and 'thank you,' as well as past tense and conditional verb forms. Requests can also be framed as questions. Various combinations of mitigators can be used, as illustrated in (b)–(f).

(b) Please come to my office tomorrow at 9:00 am.
(c) I wanted to see you in my office tomorrow at 9:00 am.
(d) I'd like you to come to my office tomorrow at 9:00 am, please.
(e) Would it be possible for you to come to my office tomorrow at 9:00 am?
(f) I'm usually free at 9:00 am on Fridays.

The forms outlined in (b) - (f) are examples of internal modification, i.e. manifested within the request itself. Other facework can be found in the discourse surrounding the request, in this case the email message. Examples of such external modification are greeting, salutation, and farewell formulae. Additional mitigators of a request can include supportive moves such as preparators, grounders or reasons, disarmers, and appealers. These forms of mitigation will be elucidated below, to the extent that examples appear in the data for the present analysis.

Requests in both English and Spanish can take three basic sentence forms: imperative, question, and declarative (Oka 1981: 79-80, provides a basic

overview). The propositional meaning (i.e. literal meaning) may contrast with the social function, or illocutionary force. The classic example of this is 'It's cold in here', in which the propositional meaning is an observation on the temperature whereas the illocutionary act is a request for the hearer to close the window.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW. In this section I review the literature that is most germane to the present investigation, beginning with a brief review of requestive behavior, and then focusing on requests in the workplace, especially written, and on requests in email business communication. I also review comparative studies of requests in Spanish and English. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature on requests, nor does it include work on interlanguage or pragmatics acquisition in a second or foreign language. Although the present paper provides data that will contribute to intercultural awareness, it is not a study of the subjects' acquisition of pragmatic skills.

2.1 REQUESTIVE BEHAVIOR. Requests can be divided into the head act (i.e. the request itself) and supportive moves, or mitigators. Only the head act is obligatory; it may or may not be accompanied by mitigators. The head act may be expressed in different ways, from direct, to conventionally indirect, to non-conventionally indirect. An example of a direct head act would be one framed as an imperative, with or without the mitigator 'please', as in (a) and (b) above. A conventionally indirect request might take the form of (e). A non-conventionally indirect request could be something like (f), which is an example of what in popular terms is known as a hint.

Blum-Kulka (1987), in her study of English and Hebrew, found that in both languages conventionally indirect (i.e. not direct and not hints) requests were perceived as most polite. She theorizes that conventionally indirect requests combine the need for pragmatic clarity with non-coerciveness.

With respect to differences in the requestive behavior of men and women, Franzblau (1980) found discrepancies between perceptions and actual practices in cross- and same-gender requests. Her experimental data 'did not conform to the stereotype that women are more deferent speakers than men. [...However] the main hypothesis was supported. The presence of please influenced the attribution of female gender to the speaker of the simple request and male gender to the listener' (Franzblau 1980: abstract). Oka (1981), in actual practice, did find that among his 19 participants, women favored the use of 'please', which the author classifies as a politeness element, while men also used bare imperatives and 'will you' interrogative forms (100).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) seminal study examined cross-cultural, situational, and individual variability for realization of requests and apologies, with the purpose of gathering base-line native speaker data with which to later

compare non-native speakers' realizations. Languages and varieties included Australian, American, and British English; Canadian French; Danish; German; Hebrew; and Russian. The authors underline the difference between usage (grammar) and use (pragmatics). They used a controlled elicitation procedure (discourse completion task, or DCT) to gather data reflecting socially different situations. Dependent variables included request perspective (hearer or speaker oriented, or impersonal), and whether mitigators were found internal to the head act or as adjuncts to it. The authors conclude that there is some universality in the basic pragmatic features of requesting and apologizing behavior. This universality has to do with the degree of directness in requests, and linguistic markers and reference to 'a set of specified propositions' (209) in apologies. However, strategy selection (i.e. the realization of the act) varies across languages.

Ritter (1984) found that the reasonableness of the request boosted ratings of competence, likeability, and compliance. His most important finding was that 'likeability ratings were not affected by communication style' (abstract). Hearn (1985) likewise found that reasonableness of the request trumped all when it came to compliance.

Collocation of mitigators within an utterance can make a difference in its illocutionary effect, as can intonation and other suprasegmental features. Wichman (2004) shows that the word 'please' has many functions, from that of marking an utterance as a request to mitigating its illocutionary force as such. These are signaled by intonation and collocation within the utterance, only the latter of which is available for analysis in the present study's corpus. In Wichman's British English corpus, 'in mitigated commands, *please* is most commonly utterance-initial [...] in indirect requests *please* is most commonly utterance-final' (1543).

2.2. REQUESTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE. Murray (1987) notes that the majority of communication in the professional workplace has the purpose of accomplishing some task, hence 'conversations begin with a bid for action (usually realized by a request) by one party' (abstract). See also Vine (2004). Hence, when we are talking about workplace communication, we are more often than not talking about making requests.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996) focus on the concept of inherent and relative status, and consider it important to view '[...] each individual act of written (and spoken) communication [...] as [...] potentially aimed at defining the relational space between two parties' (638). The power relationship and the degree of imposition affect the degree of politeness in the texts. We will see this in the corpus for the present study.

Bilbow (1997), focusing on authoritativeness, examines how '(i) speakers project certain impressions of themselves to others, and (ii) hearers attri-

bute characteristics to speakers on the basis of their discourse' (461, abstract). The cross-cultural impression management (CCIM) discourse model proposes that differing cultural backgrounds affect what characteristics participants in a speech situation assign to their interlocutors, pointing out that these characteristics may not be the ones members of the speakers' own culture would associate with the speaker. See also Wigglesworth et al. (2007).

2.3. WORKPLACE REQUESTS IN EMAIL COMMUNICATION. Writing long before the existence of wide-spread email, Oka (1981) found that the degree of formality/politeness went up a notch in the options his respondents indicated that they would use in written as opposed to oral English. He concludes:

> On the basis of these analyses, the major difference between spoken and written English seems to apply most distinctly to the categories of senior and unknown addressees, where higher forms in terms of formality/ politeness tend to be employed in written English. Furthermore, the command form of request almost disappears in written English even to the most intimate addressees, being replaced by expressions higher in formality (e.g. *will*) or politeness (e.g. *please*). (98)

Email, as with other forms of electronic communication, has on occasion been noted to show characteristics associated with spoken rather than written language (Ferris 1996, Hinrichs 2006). Be that as it may, the corpus for the present study does reflect Oka's findings in that it contains no command forms in English that are not either accompanied by *please* or otherwise mitigated. Not so for the Spanish language messages, as will be discussed in the next section.

Mulholland (1999) is one of the earliest studies of email communication, done at a time when its use in the academic workplace was still in a transitional phase. She investigated issues of efficiency and interpersonal communication in correspondence related to setting the agenda for committee meetings, noting that due to an 'instability of politeness conventions in the newer genre' (77), problems arose in interpreting agency and politeness, as well as discrepancies in the degree of politeness in the message and reply.

Kankaanranta (2001) studied a corpus collected from email in a recently merged Finnish-Swedish company. She found that 'both Finnish and Swedish speakers tend to favor on-record strategies, i.e. the imperative and interrogative form, in issuing requests in their English email messages.' (304).

Kong (2006) finds that the same degree of politeness (as measured by the presence of grounders, i.e. reasons for the request) is found in directives issued

by superiors-to-subordinates as in those written by subordinates-to-superiors. He hypothesizes that it is not the directionality of the power differential that matters here, but rather the participants' awareness of a differential. In the corpus for the present study, nevertheless, we will find that requests made by the subordinate of her supervisors contain more reasons and explanations than do those issued to her by her superiors.

Bremmer (2006) used Brown and Levinson's model (1987) to analyze requests issued by academic colleagues engaged in the implementation of a new general education curriculum. The author looked at emails sent by midlevel coordinators: people who had responsibility but no power. He analyzed the use of pronouns and politeness strategies and the difficulties of writing for both superiors and peers in the same message. Thus, context was a variable in addition to the traditional ones of relative power and degree of imposition. He observes that 'the linguistic choices writers make in such contexts as they position themselves in relation to their peers and those further up the hierarchy may also serve to define and reinforce their identity within the institution' (397, abstract).

2.4. REQUESTIVE BEHAVIOR IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH. Numerous studies have been done on politeness in Spanish, focusing on various speech acts and varieties of Spanish.[1] Some comparison studies of politeness strategies in Spanish and English are also available.[2] Within this literature, work focusing on requests includes Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus (2008), Díaz Pérez (2005), Hofmann (2003), and Márquez-Reiter (1997). In general, it has been shown that Spanish favors more directness in requests than does English; this has held across studies with participants representing 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 Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus' (2008) as well as Díaz Pérez's (2005) British

[1]See, for example: Achugar 2009; Arellano 2000; Bolívar 2002; Boretti 2001; Bravo 1998, 2002; Briz 1998 2002; Chodorowska-Pilch 2002; Concha Delgado 1995; Cordella 1990; Curcó 1998; Curcó and de Fina 2002; De los Heros 1998, 2001; Félix-Brasdefer 2002, 2008; Ferrer and Sánchez Lanza 2002; García 1992, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002; Hernández-Flores 1999, 2001; Hernández Ramírez 2008; Koike 1994, 1998; Márquez-Reiter 2002; Márquez-Reiter and Placencia 2004; Placencia 1994, 1996, 2001, 2002; Puga Larraín 1997; Ruzickova 2007; Valdés and Pino 1981.

[2]See, for example: Ballesteros Martín 2001; Concha Delgado 1995; De los Heros 1998; Félix-Brasdefer 2003, 2008; Iñigo-Mora 2008; Koike 1994; Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Márquez-Reiter 1997, 2000; Placencia 1992, 1995, 1998; Sánchez Vicent 2008; Valeiras Viso 2009. Note that these do not include studies of interlanguage pragmatics. In any case, the latter type of studies tend to show the same preference for a higher level of directness among Spanish speakers, particularly Peninsular, who transfer this to their use of English (Mir-Fernández 1994).

English speakers in comparison to their Peninsular Spanish speakers. Márquez-Reiter's (1997) Uruguayan Spanish-speakers preferred imperative constructions more than did her British English speakers. In all varieties of both languages, however, social distance has been shown to have an effect on the degree of directness and number of mitigators used, with lower status speakers increasing the indirectness of their requests to higher ranked addressees. For example, Arellano (2000) administered a questionnaire containing DCTs with various levels of authority and imposition to Mexican-Americans in California's Central Valley, finding the imperative with mitigation to be the most favored strategy. In addition, her informants used more mitigation and indirectness the greater the imposition and the higher the hypothetical hearer's authority level.

3. DATA AND METHOD. Forty-seven email messages were harvested from a span of three and a half years. Eleven were written in English by a supervisor who is a native speaker of English, and seventeen were written in Spanish by a supervisor who is a native speaker of Spanish. All twenty-eight of these were addressed to the same subordinate, who is a native speaker of English with near native fluency in Spanish. The remaining nineteen messages were written by the subordinate, ten in English addressed to the native English speaker supervisor, and nine in Spanish to the native Spanish speaker supervisor. All forty-seven messages were harvested from the subordinate's email account, to whom the researcher had a personal connection. The criteria for inclusion were that the message come from or be addressed to one of the two supervisors referenced above, and that it contain a request. All messages saved on the subordinate's email account from the three and a half year time period (toward the middle of the decade 2000-2010) meeting these criteria were included. Each of the messages contains a request for the recipient to perform some work-related action, such as preparing a document, attending a meeting, or providing information. Both supervisors were male and the subordinate was female. All three participants were of similar ages. The workplace in question was in an institution of tertiary education, in a unit in which owing to the discipline it was common for workers to speak and write in languages other than English.

As a point of departure, following Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus (2008), each of the messages was divided into three sequences: opening, request, and closing. Not every message had all three types of sequences; the only one required for inclusion in the corpus was the head act of the request. Taxonomies of features found in the requests and their mitigators were assembled using elements from Bataller (2010), Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus (2008), and Usó-

Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008); these are seen in Tables 1 and 2, below.

The research questions are as follows:

(I) How will the type and number of mitigators differ in requests written in English and Spanish by supervisors who are native speakers of each language?
(II) How will the type and number of mitigators differ in requests made by the supevisors to their subordinate versus those made by the subordinate to her supevisors?

On the basis of previous studies, in which more direct strategies are favored by speakers of both Latin American and Peninsular varieties of Spanish, I hypothesized for question (I) that there would be fewer mitigators in the requests from the Spanish-speaking supervisor. For question (II) I hypothesized that both supervisors' requests would contain less mitigation overall than the subordinates' requests, and that the latter's would contain more mitigation, especially grounders (reasons for the request).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. In what follows, I explicate the categories shown in Tables 1 and 2, and give examples from the corpus of the various types of request strategies and mitigators. I also discuss differences in their usage by the English speaker versus Spanish-speaker supervisor, and in their usage by the supervisors as opposed to the subordinate.

To begin, it must be noted that the classifications in Tables 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive, nor do they have a one-to-one correspondence. The types in Table 1 all have to do with the head act, the speech act of the request itself. These are ranged from most to least direct, but even those considered to be direct strategies may contain some mitigation. Of the indirect strategies listed in Table 1, modal and conditional verbs mitigate the illocutionary force of the request head act. Modal and conditional constructions denote tentativeness and detachment, and are hence associated with negative politeness (Márquez Reiter 1997). Most of the other forms of mitigation are found external to the request head act, as can be seen in the longer second list in Table 2 (External to the request). These range from the simple presence of greetings, the addressee's name, closing formulas, and the writer's name, to more elaborate devices such as the provision of reasons for the request and other extra information.

We will now proceed to examples from the corpus (where possible) of each of the types of strategies and mitigating devices in Tables 1 and 2, along with a discussion of their use by the three individual email writers.

	A. L1 English supervisor (Eric)	B. L1 Spanish supervisor (Marcos)	Subordinate >L1 English supervisor (Jane)	Subordinate >L1 Spanish supervisor (Jane)
Total number email messages	11	17	10	9
Direct strategies				
Mood derivable	4 (36%)[3]	14 (82%)	8 (80%)	3 (33%)
Elliptical phrase				
Explicit/hedged performative	2 (18%)		1 (10%)	2 (22%)
Obligation statement		1 (6%)		
Want/ need statement	1 (9%)	1 (6%)		1 (11%)
Total	7 (64%)	16 (94%)	9 (90%)	6 (67%)
Indirect strategies				
Query ability	6 (54%)	2 (12%)	2 (20%)	3 (33%)
Query willingness				
Query permission				1 (11%)
Query possibility				2 (22%)
Hint				
Total	6 (54%)	2 (12%)	2 (20%)	6 (67%)

TABLE 1. *Request strategies (adapted from Bataller 2010)*

In Table 1, there are five direct strategies listed. Of these, four types appear in the corpus, i.e. all but the elliptical phrase. Examples of the latter, in which '[o]nly the object that is being requested is mentioned' (Bataller 2010: 165) would be: 'the minutes from last week's meeting' or 'names of the prize-winners in Portuguese.' From these (invented) examples one might hypothesize that elliptical phrases would appear much more in oral requests, in which the requestor and addressee are synchronous, and thus any necessary clarification can be given quickly.

Of the four types of direct strategies that do appear in the corpus, mood derivables are the most common. As its label suggests, a mood derivable is the least

[3]All percentages given refer to the percentage of tokens within one of the four subsets. For example, Eric's four tokens of mood derivables equate to 36% of his eleven email messages to Jane.

ambiguous type of request, the fact that it is a request being transparent from the grammatical form used, which is usually an imperative (Bataller 2010: 165). An example from the corpus is:

(1) Please pass the attached schedule on to her. [JE.8][4]

All three writers used mood derivables, Marcos the most, followed by Jane in her messages to Eric.[5] Eric used a mood derivable construction less than half as much as Marcos, and only half as much as Jane did in her messages to him (Eric). And while Jane used this very direct form eight times to Eric's four (80% vs. 36%), she only uses a mood derivable 33% of the time to Marcos' 82%. This may be due in part to the fact that Marcos has slightly more authority over her than does Eric, although both men are her superiors in the hierarchy of the academic workplace. Although Jane does use a high percentage of mood derivables with Eric, she uses 'please' twice as much as he does (see Table 2). She also uses more of the various other types of mitigators, often in the same sentence, than do either Eric or Marcos.

The next direct strategy used is the explicit or hedged performative, in which there appears 'an illocutionary verb that may be modified by modal verbs' (Bataller 2010: 165-6). This form was used by Eric and Jane, but not Marcos. An example of a hedged performative from the corpus is:

(2) Can I ask you to take care of the below and attached? [EJ.6]

The fact that no hedged performatives are used by Marcos is not surprising, given his high use of mood derivables (82% of his requests), and his slightly higher degree of authority over Jane, mentioned above.

Only one obligation statement appears in the corpus, used by Marcos:

(3) *Debes agregar los aùsentes: Smith and Hamilton.*[6]

'You must add the absent ones: Smith and Hamilton.'[7] [MJ. 10]

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[4]The first letter in brackets following examples from the corpus refers to the writer: **E**ric, **J**ane, or **M**arcos. The second letter refers to the addressee. Numbers were assigned to each email message within each of these four subsets (EJ, MJ, JE, and JM).

[5]The names Eric, Jane, and Marcos are pseudonyms, used to facilitate the discussion by eliminating the need to repeat longer labels for the participants.

[6]All names and other identifying characteristics have been changed.

[7]All translations are my own. Note that Marcos' messages occasionally contain Spanish and English together; in the example here the original states "Smith and Hamilton" and not "Smith y Hamilton". Jane's messages to Marcos also contain some English words or phrases.

Want/need statements are likewise scarce, with just one each produced by the three writers. Eric's and Jane's tokens are want statements:

(4) I'd like you to help write up the annual report. [EJ.11]

(5) *Quiero que vengan mis estudiantes, pero me gustaría que no se limitara a ellos, y que viniera al menos algún que otro faculty member de nuestro depto.*

'I want my students to come, but I'd like it not to be limited to them, and that at least one or two faculty members from our dept. came.' [JM.3]

Marcos' token takes the form of a need statement:

(6) *Necesitaría que editaras y agregaras las reflexiones que enviaron algunos miembros del comité.*

'I'd need you to edit and add the reflections that some committee members sent.' [MJ.9]

Note that both Marcos and Jane's statements feature conditionals, in the part in which a request is made of the addressee. As has been noted, negative politeness is associated with modal and conditional constructions, which denote tentativeness and detachment (Márquez Reiter 1997), whereas the present indicative has a tighter connection to reality. While Jane's statement does contain a present tense indicative form—*Quiero que vengan mis estudiantes*, 'I want my students to come'—it is not directed at her interlocutor but rather makes reference to a third party, the students enrolled in one of her courses. This statement actually instantiates one of the mitigation devices to be discussed in Table 2, in that it functions as a preparator for the request that follows.

Of the strategies classified as indirect in Table 1, we can see that Jane uses the most variety of types. Although Eric equals her in quantity (albeit not percentage),

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This is to be expected given that their communication takes place in a primarily English-speaking environment, and much of their correspondence—as is the case with Marcos' message here—refers to English language texts, such as meeting minutes, committee reports, etc. As a reviewer very aptly pointed out, a bilingual speaker's very choice of language—in this case Marcos' use of Spanish—could serve to mitigate a request or increase its directness. In this particular case, however, the researcher's knowledge permits her to state with confidence that Marcos used Spanish when addressing Jane simply because Spanish is his dominant language and he habitually used it with any interlocutor who could be assumed to understand. Eric, on the other hand, had no choice but to use English when addressing Jane, as that was the only language in which both were fluent.

he uses only one type, query ability. Inverse to what is seen with the direct strategies, Jane uses indirect strategies to address requests to Eric much less of the time than he does in his requests to her. However, this is counterbalanced by her lower use of 'thank you'; see discussion below. And in fact she uses indirect strategies more than five times as much in requests to Marcos than Marcos does in his requests to her.

It is Eric who uses the most query ability constructions, 'in which the hearer must infer that the question concerning his or her ability to carry out a specific action counts as an attempt from the speaker to make the hearer do so' (Owen 2001, cited in Bataller 2010: 166). An example from the corpus is:

(7) Can you attend this meeting? [EJ.7]

While most of Eric's query ability questions use the present indicative and interrogative punctuation, Marcos' use of this construction features on the one hand the less direct conditional verb form, coupled with the more direct lack of interrogative punctuation. Hence, in his statements, there is no question that what might look like a question is not a question but at the very least, a request, if not an order. Examples include:

(8) *Por favor, se podrían*[8] *hacer cargo de esto, gracias, m*

'Please, could you take care of this, thanks, m' [MJ.3]

While Eric's ability queries are framed as questions, with question marks, they are apt to proceed straight to the closer 'thanks', giving the appearance that Jane's compliance is assumed (this will be discussed further below). Jane's ability queries not only use conditional verbs but are often also followed by grounders, or reasons for the request. This type of mitigation device will be discussed more below:

(9) Could you please clarify this for me? I want to have my information up to date in case I'm called upon to decide some related issue. [JE.5]

Query willingness constructions, in which, similar to query ability, the hearer must infer that the speaker's inquiry regarding his or her willingness to carry out an action constitutes an attempt on the speaker's part to get him or her to do so, do not appear in the corpus. An (invented) example of such a construction would be: 'Would you mind coming to campus Friday morning?'

[8]This comes from a message sent to both Jane and a coworker, concerning a task that Marcos wanted the two to take joint charge of, hence the plural verb form *se podrían* instead of *te podrías*.

The remaining indirect strategies listed in Table 1 appear in Jane's email messages only, and only in requests addressed to Marcos. Query permission refers to asking addressee's permission for the writer to conduct an action (Bataller 2010: 166); the sole example from the corpus is:

(10) *¿Podría llegar tarde?*

'Could I arrive late?' [JM.6]

Query possibility, used twice by Jane, refers to the possibility of fulfilling a request (Bataller 2010: 166), as in, for example:

(11) *¿Sería posible traerlo el 7 de diciembre, a las 6:30?*

'Would it be possible to bring him on December 7, at 6:30?' [JM.3]

Finally, there are no tokens of the strategy considered to be the most indirect of all, hints. Recall that hints are considered to be non-conventionally indirect, and have been shown to be more difficult to process, and, perhaps for that reason, dispreferred (Blum-Kulka 1987; Gibbs 1981, 1985). A sentence in one of Jane's messages to Marcos appears at first glance to be a hint:

(12) *Hay una charla ese día a las 4:30, de modo que tal vez aún estarías en el campus.*

'There's a talk that day at 4:30, so maybe you'd still be on campus.' [JM.5]

But on closer examination, this can be seen to function instead as a disarmer (one of the mitigation devices to be discussed below) for an immediately preceding request, which was structured as a query ability:

(13) *El miércoles, 11 de octubre, ¿podrías tú quedarte hasta las 6:00?*

'On Wednesday, October 11, could you stay until 6:00?' [JM.5]

Let us now consider the information in Table 2, along with more examples from the corpus. To begin, we see that use of the word 'please' or its equivalent in Spanish, *por favor*, has been classified as a mitigation device. 'Please' has traditionally been considered a politeness marker, and it does seem to function to soften the requests in the corpus. Some researchers have questioned the status of 'please' as a politeness marker, however, and advocate for its classification as a request marker instead, arguing in essence that it has undergone the pragmatic equivalent of grammaticalization, and hence no longer signals politeness, but rather marks an utterance as an unambiguous request (Wichmann 2004). This might well be so in the case of requests using indirect strategies, such as: 'Would

you be able to come in on Saturday, please?' But the request status of the tokens in which 'please' occurs in my corpus is already unambiguous, because they feature imperative verbs.[11]

	A. L1 English supervisor (Eric)	B. L1 Spanish supervisor (Marcos)	Subordinate >L1 English supervisor (Jane)	Subordinate >L1 Spanish supervisor (Jane)
Total number email messages	11	17	10	9
Internal to the request				
Softeners: please[9]	5 (45%)	4 (23%)	9 (90%)	1 (11%)
External to the request				
Openers: greetings		1 (6%)		
Openers: summons[9]	11 (100%)		10 (100%)	1 (11%)
Preparators	2	3	8	7
Grounders	6	3	14	20
Disarmers	2		1	1
Appealers: Ok?, etc.	1			
Closers: thank you[9]	10 (91%)	11 (65%)	3 (30%)	2 (22%)
Closers: signature[9]	11 (100%)	10 (59%)	10 (100%)	6 (67%)
Total[10]	48	32	55	38

TABLE 2. *Mitigation devices (adapted from Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus 2008; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2008*

[9]In contrast to the other types of mitigation devices (see note #10) this type of mitigation device appeared only once per email message, if it appeared at all. For example, 100% here means that the writer used this type of device in all of his or her emails.

[10]The numbers in this row refer to the total number of tokens. Some of the types have multiple tokens within one email; hence each of the figures in this row is higher than the figure for the total number of emails from each person, shown in row 2.

[11]An exception is (7), in which a conditional verb appears; however, as discussed above, this utterance's status as a request is made clear by the absence of interrogative punctuation.

(7) *Por favor, se podrían hacer cargo de esto, gracias, m*
'Please, could you take care of this, thanks, m' [MJ.3]

Examples include:

(14) Please sign me up for 2. [EJ.10]

(15) Please see below. [EJ.9]

(16) *Por favor agrega en portugués Julia Esparza y Eliseo Diego.*
'Please add Julia Esparza and Eliseo Diego in Portuguese.' [MJ.14]

The bulk of the mitigation devices to be considered here are external to the request, coming either before or after the request head act. Two types that would typically be restricted to the opening sequence of the message are greetings and summons. Greetings are a classic opening move (Bou Franch and Lorenzo-Dus 2008), yet are absent from most of the messages in the corpus, appearing only once, in an email from Marcos addressed to Jane and a colleague:

(17) *Hola, les agradecería si me pudieran traducir al inglés estas dos cartas.*
'Hi, I'd be grateful if you could translate these two letters into English for me.' [MJ.5]

This might be explained by two factors: the writer's idiosyncratic style and the fact that this request was for something not strictly related to the job responsibilities of either addressee, and so was more of a favor, and on top of this was issued on a work holiday. Marcos' messages almost never included greetings (nor even the addressee's name, which will be discussed next). This last fact, plus the unusualness of the request, may have prompted the use of a greeting for this message. The occurrence of *hola* contrasted with the writer's usual style, thus standing out for its unexpectedness, and hence functioning as politeness (Fitzmaurice 2010). If Marcos had always used greetings when addressing Jane and her colleague, his use of one in this message would have failed to achieve the desired level of politeness commensurate with the extraordinary request.

Summons, in this case use of the addressee's name, are used by Eric and Jane in all of their messages to each other. Marcos never uses the addressee's name, and Jane does so only once in her messages to him. The fact that Jane does use addressee's name in her correspondence with Eric would seem to indicate that, rather than using her own, uniform, style, she as the subordinate accommodates to each supervisor's individual style. The one time she opens a message to Marcos with a summons, she uses his full name (as opposed to the first name initials that both she and Eric use in the majority of their correspondence). This message's content is also out of the ordinary: Jane is asking for Marcos' forgiveness for a

misunderstanding she had caused with one of his superiors.

As has been noted, some writers treat email more as a spoken conversation, in which one would not necessarily use an addressee's name in every turn. This applies most to cases in which the parties are known to one another, and thus are not omitting summons due to ignorance of an addressee's name. When the addressee's name is unknown a greeting may be substituted, such as *hello*, *good morning*, *greetings*.

One could argue that although the use of summons is common, and hence perhaps, politic (Watts 2003), in messages from individuals who rarely use them, their presence signals overt politeness that is apt to be recognized by intimate interlocutors as such.

Looking at Table 2, one can note a large difference in the number of the next two types of mitigation devices used by Eric and Marcos on the one hand, and Jane on the other. Jane uses a total of fifteen preparators to Eric and Marcos' combined five, and thirty-four grounders to their nine. Preparators 'prepare the addressee for the subsequent request'; grounders 'give reasons that justify the request' (Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2008: 351). An example of a preparator used by Eric is:

(18) I'll be leaving tonight, as you know. Can you help take care of the details below? [EJ.9]

A grounder from Jane, cited above in (9) and reproduced in (19) is:

(19) Could you please clarify this for me? I want to have my information up to date in case I'm called upon to decide some related issue. [JE.5]

Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor define disarmers as 'devices that are employed to avoid the possibility of a refusal' (2008: 351). In other words, speakers attempt to anticipate specific barriers to compliance and frame their requests in a way that will acknowledge and remove those obstacles (Francik and Clark 1985, Hearn 1985, Ritter 1984). In (12) and (13) above and reproduced in (20), Jane anticipates Marcos' response that he will not be on campus at the time of the evening meeting she is trying to arrange, by reminding him of a function scheduled for late that afternoon:

(20) *El miércoles, 11 de octubre, podrías tú quedarte hasta las 6:00? Hay una charla ese día a las 4:30, de modo que tal vez aún estarías en el campus*. 'On Wednesday, October 11, could you stay until 6:00? There's a talk that day at 4:30, so maybe you'd still be on campus.' [JM.5]

The attempt in (20) to disarm was unsuccessful; Marcos did not comply with Jane's request. Her use of two disarmers was likewise unfruitful in a request made of Eric, in (21). Here she anticipates two possible responses from him, either that she ask someone else to obtain the information she needs or that this information would not have been sent to him:

(21) In the interest of not duplicating work already done, could I ask you to please just search your email for a message from Teresa Daniels (tdaniels@university.edu)? I already told Linda not to do this, and Karen reports that this person sends this info to supervisors. [JE.2]

In contrast, Jane complies with both of Eric's requests to her that contain disarmers. In (22), he anticipates her possible objection that a message she has prepared on his behalf in response to a student complaint is inadequate:

(22) The message looks great. Please send out. [EJ.3]

In (23), a potential barrier to Jane's compliance involves a person subordinate to both her and Eric, but one who has demonstrated a lack of regard for Jane's authority on a past occasion:

(23) [...] could I trouble you to [perform an action that will not be welcomed by the person in question]? If s/he gives you any trouble, have him/her see me. [EJ.8]

The next category, appealers, are devices that allow the speaker to 'appeal directly to the hearer's consent' (Trosborg 1995: 214). These often take the form of tag questions, such as 'Ok?', 'Right?' etc. There is only one example of what I would consider an appealer in the corpus, from Eric:

(24) What think you, *amiga* 'friend'? [EJ.5]

The utterance in (24) follows a request for Jane to come to campus on a day of the week that neither she nor Eric usually do. Although this utterance does not take the form of a tag question, it serves the function of appealing to Jane to agree with Eric's proposition, which has already been articulated. This proposition, i.e. the request, has been followed in the line immediately preceding the appealer with another statement, in which Eric states that he himself does not usually come to campus on the day in question, but that he will make an exception. 'What think

you, *amiga*?' is Eric's attempt to close the deal, so to speak, and secure Jane's agreement. In regard to the vocative *amiga*, Valdés (1981) concludes from her naturalistic data that switches to either Spanish or English can serve to mitigate or aggravate requests, and that they are used much the same way that monolingual speakers use other resources at their disposal, such as intonation. Hinrichs (2006) points out the facework function of switching to a different language to frame a request or criticism. His was a corpus of emails exchanged between friends writing in English and Jamaican Creole. See also Myers-Scotton (1993: 116) and Georgakopoulou (1997: 150) on the use of codeswitching as a politeness strategy and Callahan (2010) on the use of Spanish borrowings as a mitigation device.

The penultimate category involves closing formulae of 'thanks', 'thank you', *gracias*, or the like, which commonly co-occur with requests. And in fact we see this in 91 percent of Eric's messages, and over half of Marcos' (65%). So why is the number of 'thank yous' so much lower for Jane: just two and three times in her requests to Eric and Marcos? As alluded to above, in the discussion of query ability constructions, I would argue that closing one's first turn with a variant of 'thanks' expresses a presupposition that the request will be met with compliance. Such a presupposition is risk-free for the two supervisors in our corpus, because they have inherent power. As Bremmer observes, 'if writers hold 'inherent,' that is, 'real' power, they perhaps have a wider range of linguistic options at their disposal' (2006: 407). Eric and Marcos have the 'inherent status [that] results from holding a powerful position' with official recognition (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996: 637). They can thus count on compliance with their requests, especially with ones directed to a subordinate, and can close with a confident 'thank you'. Jane lacks inherent status and is therefore not assured of compliance. It might be expected then that her use of 'thanks' in request messages would be limited to those that have a higher probability of fulfillment, such as simple requests for information. What we see in the corpus, however, is just the opposite. Messages from Jane in which 'thanks' appears are ones involving high imposition or contentious issues. The two directed to Marcos contain apologies for previous messages and pleas for his forgiveness. Two of the three directed to Eric are likewise problematic; one asks him to undertake a time-consuming task in the interest of Jane's convenience, and the other involves a request that he has previously turned down and with which he ultimately does not comply.

The final category, signatures, is considered standard for much written correspondence. However, as has been noted, some writers treat email more as a spoken conversation, in which one would not necessarily use an addressee's name in every turn, and the speaker's name would not appear at all except for purposes of identification. This is the pattern seen in Marcos' email—only messages preceded by several weeks of no correspondence contain a summons. Marcos

does use signatures more than half the time, usually just the initials of his first name; Eric and Jane use one in 100 percent of their correspondence with each other, again, often just their first name initials. In contrast, Jane follows Marcos' practice of omitting her signature in some of her messages to him, although she still includes it two thirds of the time.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH. The research questions asked how the type and number of mitigators would differ in requests written in English and Spanish by supervisors who are native speakers of each language, and how the type and number of mitigators would differ in requests made by the supervisors to their subordinate versus those made by the subordinate to her supervisors. I hypothesized that there would be fewer mitigators in the requests from the Spanish-speaking supervisor, and that both supervisors' requests would contain less mitigation overall than the subordinates' requests, and finally, that the latter's would contain more mitigation, especially in the form of grounders.

These hypotheses appear to have been borne out. A glance at Tables 1 and 2 show that Marcos uses more direct strategies, fewer indirect strategies, and fewer mitigation devices than does Eric. As for Jane, her correspondence contains more direct strategies and less mitigation of certain types than does her supervisors' correspondence with her. She uses more imperatives with Eric than he does with her, and she directs fewer 'thank yous' to both Eric and Marcos than they do to her. However, as discussed above, more of her requests to Eric are accompanied by 'please', and her lower use of 'thank yous' to both supervisors may reflect a lack of presumption that her requests will be fulfilled, or, a preference for respecting their negative face. What is most telling, she uses many more preparators and grounders than do either Eric or Marcos, whose messages show less need for justification and self-explanation. This accounts for the fact that Jane's emails on average contain more words than do Eric and Marcos' messages. The two supervisors' messages average just twenty-two (Eric) and seventeen words each (Marcos), whereas Jane's messages to Eric average seventy-six words and to Marcos eighty-three.

However, a word of caution is in order here. Recall the preference shown by Márquez-Reiter's (1997) Uruguayan Spanish-speakers for imperative constructions. She observes that this preference 'can also be seen in Brown and Levinson's terms, as an 'optimistic' way of performing FTAs 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 1997: 163). Following from this, although we can conclude that Marcos' requests contain less mitigation, we cannot necessarily characterize them as more face-threatening than Eric's.

Jane uses more mitigation devices, but is less successful in gaining

compliance with her requests. Eric and Marcos use fewer, and less elaborate, mitigation devices, and are more successful in gaining compliance. A logical conclusion would be that this is due to their higher status in the request dyads studied here. That is, all of Eric and Marcos' requests are directed to a subordinate, Jane, while all of Jane's requests are directed to her superiors, Eric and Marcos.

The present study's contribution lies in its validation of previous literature in which similar differences in requestive behavior between English and Spanish have been found. As such, it suggests a need to remind second-language speakers of Spanish of this difference, especially those who may come into contact with Spanish speaking supervisors in the workplace, a common scenario in academic settings as well as other types of workplaces in the U.S. For, while Marcos' intention may have been to show positive politeness, Jane's interpretation of his imperatives and other direct strategies was often otherwise. This is possible for an L1 English speaker despite advanced linguistic competence and intellectual knowledge of Spanish pragmatic mores, especially given the fact that the workplace studied was in the United States, and Jane was thus in constant contact with other speakers who reinforced rather than challenged her own politeness system, in which direct strategies can be characterized as aggressive rather than supportive.

Jane's perceptions of Marcos' email messages may also have been affected by the lack of paralinguistic features available in the written form; as noted above, tone and volume of voice, smiles, gestures, and laughter can also serve as facework. This lack can be partially compensated for through the use of emoticons, but these were not employed by any of the three email writers in the present corpus. The researcher's knowledge of Jane, Eric, and Marcos permits the observation that each of the three writers' written requests did not differ appreciably from their spoken ones. That is, requests issued verbally by these three individuals contained similar types and amounts of facework.

As to language variety, both Jane and Eric are speakers of American English; Marcos is a speaker of Latin American Spanish; privacy issues preclude disclosure of his exact country of origin. While there are differences in the pragmatic conventions within both Spanish and English as used in different countries or regions (Bou Franch and Gregori Signes 1998; Curcó and de Fina 2009; Félix-Brasdefer 2008; Márquez Reiter and Placencia 2004; Tannen 1981), comparisons of Spanish to English have shown consistent differences between the two languages regardless of the varieties examined.

This is a case study and is not generalizable to all intercultural communication involving requests between native Spanish and English speakers. Two uncontrolled variables are the gender of the writers and the Spanish speaker's country of origin. If it were possible to obtain similar correspondence between Eric and Marcos and

a male subordinate, a comparison could be made to the present corpus. However, it would still not be possible to rule out idiosyncratic differences. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, direct strategies are characteristic of Spanish, and in the North American professional workplace, direct strategies can be characterized as aggressive rather than supportive. Hence, it would in general be helpful for workers in an intercultural setting to be aware of the possibility that an interlocutor's discourse strategies may have a motivation other than actual aggression.

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