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English or Spanish?! Language accommodation in New York City service encounters

Laura Callahan
Santa Clara University, Lcallahan@scu.edu

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LAURA CALLAHAN

Abstract

Speech accommodation theory refers to an individual's adaptation of his or her speech to more closely approximate that of an interlocutor. A change to the interlocutor's language is one of the most obvious and observable forms of accommodation. Language choices are shaped by the linguistic proficiency of both speaker and interlocutor, the ingroup or outgroup status of each, and the situational norms for the setting in which an exchange takes place. Language choices in the workplace are further influenced by company policies and by the asymmetrical power dynamic in worker-customer interactions.

This paper reports on data from service encounters with individuals who use Spanish and English in the workplace. Seven fieldworkers, acting as customers, entered businesses in New York City and initiated exchanges in Spanish, noting the worker's language of response. In the majority of encounters conducted for this project, accommodation to the customer's language choice came at the first turn. It was predicted that a customer's non-Latino ethnicity would be the most important factor in a worker's non-accommodation, but the worker's youth turned out to have the greatest effect on whether a non-reciprocal response was given.

1. Introduction: Communication accommodation and service encounters

Communication accommodation theory, originally known as speech accommodation theory, refers to a speaker adapting his or her speech or gestures or paralinguistic features to more closely approximate those of an interlocutor (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977). This can be accomplished via changes in pronunciation, and lexical and grammatical choices. A change to the interlocutor's language is one of the most observable forms of accommodation.

The traditional view is that a speaker accommodates in order to exercise a positive influence on the hearer's opinion; hence, more modification may occur in the speech of individuals who desire their listener's approval (Giles & Powesland 1997). Although accommodation may occur in any social interaction, the desire for approval is more inherent to some types of interactions than others. In exchanges between persons of unequal status, for example, the speaker with less status may accommodate to the speaker with more power. In this sense, accommodation follows patterns similar to those seen in the use of different forms of address depending on the social status of and relationship between speaker and addressee (Brown & Gilman 1960). So, for example, just as a speaker with less status may use the deferential pronoun such as *vous* or *usted* to address a person of higher status, a speaker might also attempt to approximate the speech style of a more powerful conversation partner, again, through the selection of certain pronunciation, lexical and grammatical features.

Just as with forms of address, signs of accommodation may occur for reasons other than deference to status. Speakers may accommodate to an interlocutor's speech style to show solidarity. If the accommodation is seen as inappropriate due to incongruence with a speaker's status or social group membership, for example as in the case of an adult attempting to use adolescent slang, the speaker's efforts may meet with derision or rejection. This has been referred to as overaccommodation (Shepard, Giles & LePoire 2001: 38). While overaccommodation can go in both directions, its social evaluation is conditioned by the relative prestige of each participant's speech variety. When a speaker of the variety that enjoys overt prestige—that is, the standard—accommodates downward, to a variety that perhaps enjoys covert prestige, it may be perceived as patronizing.

A speaker who wishes to differentiate himself or herself from an interlocutor may choose not only not to accommodate, but to maximize divergence from the interlocutor's speech, using features to make his or her own speech as different as possible. Fasold cites the case of an African American using African-American vernacular English when speaking to a white person (Fasold 1984: 189). The strongest form of divergence might seem to be the use of a language different from the one in which an interlocutor has just spoken, but a switch to another language may not always signal divergence. In situations in which the use of more than one language in a conversation is an unmarked behavior, a response in a language different from the one used to initiate the turn is likely to pass unnoticed. In previous research, as well as in data gathered for another phase of the present study, this condition holds only if the speakers in

question are intimates. For example, Pedraza, in his 1987 study of the Puerto Rican community of East Harlem, New York, notes that in age-asymmetrical intra-ethnic interactions, the younger person responds in the language in which he or she is addressed. In peer exchanges, adolescents "would often answer each other in English even if addressed in Spanish, assuming that the interlocutor was part of the group, *or at least familiar enough so that this would not be taken as an insult*" (Pedraza 1987: 38; my emphasis). In other words, to use English after being addressed in Spanish could be considered offensive, unless the degree of intimacy between addressor and addressee allowed for such liberties.

The service encounter is a situation characterized by a power differential as well as a desire to please the interlocutor. In the United States, the relationship between service provider and service consumer is inherently non-reciprocal, with the worker having an obligation to show deference to the customer. The opposite behavior is marked, and remarked upon, by consumers who complain of receiving bad service. This may be a reaction to factors not directly related to the actual words exchanged between customer and worker. Customer dissatisfaction may be a consequence of intercultural differences between what is appropriate behavior for an exchange between strangers, such as those, for example, noted by Bailey (1997) in his study of Korean shopkeepers and African-American customers in Los Angeles. He documented how different practices for displaying respect in face-to-face interaction were a cause of tension between immigrant Korean retailers and African-American customers. Communicative practices in service encounters involving Korean customers were contrasted with those involving African-American customers in 25 liquor store encounters, which were videotaped and transcribed. The restraint of immigrant Korean storekeepers in these encounters was perceived by many African Americans as a sign of racism, whereas the personable involvement of African Americans was seen by many Korean storekeepers as disrespectful. These contrasting interactional practices reflect differing concepts of the relationship between customer and storekeeper and about the speech activities appropriate to service encounters.[1]

Gumperz (1977) showed how paralinguistic features such as intonation can also cause misunderstandings. In a study done in Britain, Indian women working at a cafeteria would use a falling intonation, which to them indicated a question, as in "do you want gravy↓". In Standard British English a question is signaled by a rising intonation, as in "do you want gravy↑". A falling intonation signals a declarative statement, which in this context was seen as inappropriate and rude (Gumperz 1977, quoted in Maltz & Borker 1982: 201).

2.   Previous research on language choice in service encounters

This section is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on service encounters, which is beyond the scope of this paper, but rather a summary of the literature currently available that focuses specifically on the issue of language choice in service encounters.[2] Language choice in service encounters has been studied in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Hong Kong, China, Spain, France, Canada, and the United States.

Bernsten (1994) reported on English and Shona use in Zimbabwe. Reporting on her experience as a Westerner speaking Shona in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, she noted that special accommodation is sometimes given to less fluent speakers due to explicit recognition of their status as language learners (see also Callahan 2005). Bernsten also emphasized the importance of solidarity; the fact that she had established some acquaintanceship with her interlocutors led to their ultimate accommodation to her:

After a month of going to the same market, using Shona with the clerks, and being answered in English, I gave up. On the thirty-first day, I walked in and said "Good morning." The clerk frowned and said, "But you are the lady who always speaks to us in Shona." And I said, "Yes, and you always answer me in English." And he said, "We do?" Thus, I discovered another reason for the difficulties that learners experience in trying to speak Shona with bilinguals. The clerks in the store had not been *consciously* choosing English, but it had automatically been chosen as the appropriate language for a non-Shona conversation partner. When I made my desire to learn their language explicit, they made a deliberate effort to speak Shona with me. (Bernsten 1994: 415–416)

Myers-Scotton's codeswitching research does not concentrate specifically on service encounters. However, her data include an example of an encounter in a grocery store in Nairobi, in which a woman attempts to gain preferential treatment from her brother, the store owner, by strategic use of their shared mother tongue (Scotton & Ury 1977: 17 in Myers-Scotton 1993: 144–145).

Pan (2000a) used data from service encounters to study the possible effects of the return of sovereignty to China on the use of Mandarin and Cantonese in service encounters in Hong Kong, and the effects of economic reform and increased development on the choice between these two languages in Guangzhou province, People's Republic of China.

Torras and Gafaranga (2002) investigated language alternation and social identity in service encounters in Barcelona involving Catalan, Spanish, and English. Following the work of Sacks (1992), they see language preference as a Membership Categorization Device. Language

preference itself may be based on linguistic proficiency, or on an external ideology that dictates which language is to be spoken in a given speech situation.

Gardner-Chloros (1997) investigated the use of French and Alsatian in Strasbourg department stores. She found that Alsatian was more likely to be used in customer-to-customer and worker-to-worker interactions than in encounters between workers and customers.

Heller (1982) studied how French or English was selected for both in-person and over-the-telephone exchanges between staff members and patients at a hospital in Quebec. She described how "negotiations [as to language choice] have often to be made in explicit terms ..." (Heller 1982: 109). These explicit terms are manifested in questions about the interlocutor's ethnicity or about his or her language, with language and ethnicity being taken as synonymous. Heller also noted that in service encounters even Anglophones who spoke French fluently, but whose accent identified them as non-native speakers, were apt to be answered in English.

Weyers (1999) investigated language choice among bilingual workers in two commercial districts in El Paso, Texas. He reported that Spanish was "used as an ethnic marker by bilingual *paseños*, specifically young male speakers, to include or exclude other bilingual speakers from the in-group" (Weyers 1999: 103). This conclusion is based on the fact that there was a higher percentage of English responses from young males to questions asked in Spanish by an Anglo male. A second researcher in the El Paso study was a Mexican female; she received more answers in Spanish to questions in Spanish.

Valdés, García, and Storment (1982) investigated the relationship between speech accommodation and sex with respect to the customer's use of Spanish in New Mexico, finding that "male servers accommodated 100% of the time with the male customer and only 75% of the time with the female customer" (Valdés, García & Storment 1982: 194).

3.   Data collection and methods

Data were collected in New York City, where Latinos account for over a quarter of the total population.[3] English and Spanish share public space in a wide range of establishments in New York City. Candidates for public office are careful to include some Spanish in their campaigns, just as has been occurring in recent years in other parts of the United States (Callahan 2004). But New York City is not Miami, where Spanish has currency in all domains. Monolingual Spanish speakers in New York face difficulties, and, while Spanish is ever increasing in prestige, English

is still necessary for full participation in contexts such as higher education, government, and finance.

More specifically related to service encounters, Spanish can be heard in conversations between workers in many establishments. It is heard almost exclusively in stores located in neighborhoods with large Latino populations. In areas with a smaller percentage of Hispanic residents, Spanish is heard between workers, but less so between workers and customers.

Data for this study were collected during anonymous service encounters, that is, those in which the customer and worker are unknown to each other. Torras and Gafaranga (2002) refer to this as a first-time encounter. Neither person has any knowledge of his or her interlocutor except what can be judged by appearance, actions, and speech during the exchange.

Although service encounters can take place via telephone, e-mail, or other remote means, encounters for this study are restricted to face-to-face interactions in which a worker attends to a customer at a place of business. The service encounters reported on here were conducted by seven fieldworkers between October 2003 and August 2005. Acting as customers, each person entered businesses in New York City and addressed a service worker in Spanish, noting the worker's language of response. The interactions were brief, most not exceeding one or two turns each for customer and worker. The majority were thus what Bailey (1997: 333) characterized as socially minimal service encounters: ''limited to no more than greetings/openings, negotiation of the exchange, and closings.''

As shown in Table 1, the dependent variable is the informant's language of response at the first turn after being addressed in Spanish by the fieldworker. The independent variables are the fieldworker's ethnicity, the informant's sex, the informant's age, and the neighborhood in which the encounter takes place. Ethnicity is divided into Latino or non-Latino, age into under 30 and over 30 in appearance, and neighborhood into Hispanic minority and Hispanic majority, as based on the 2000 U.S. Census.[4]

Table 1.   *Variables*

Dependent variable	Values
Language of response	Spanish, English
Independent variables	**Values**
Fieldworker's sex	Male, Female
Fieldworker's age	Under 30 in appearance, Over 30 in appearance
Fieldworker's ethnicity	Latino, Non-Latino
Informant's sex	Male, Female
Informant's age	Under 30 in appearance, Over 30 in appearance
Neighborhood	Hispanic minority, Hispanic majority (based on 2000 census)

It is well known that there are differences in accommodation styles between males and females, with women more often than men matching their interlocutor's choice of language and register, especially when their interlocutor is male (Valdés-Fallis 1978; Valdés, García & Storment 1982; Kramarae 1982). Although Weyers (1999) ran no statistical analyses, the raw numbers in his data indicated the youth of his informants aged under 30 to be an important predictor of a non-reciprocal response given to a non-Latino male of the same age. Weyers collected data in two different places in El Paso, one near the border with Mexico where many Mexicans shop, and another in a shopping mall with a more ethnically mixed clientele. For the present study it was predicted that questions in Spanish from a non-Latino would be answered in English more often in an area in which Hispanics are a minority than in one in which they are a majority. This was based on the hypothesis that ingroup members have a stronger need to signal boundaries when their numbers are smaller. In a more homogeneous neighborhood, where one ethnic group is in the majority, such a need would be less critical.

For this study, businesses in which Spanish and English is used to attend to customers—as verified by observation—were chosen on the basis of their accessibility to the general public. The businesses in which encounters took place included pharmacies, convenience stores, grocery stores, delicatessens, clothing and shoe stores, electronics and other retail establishments. Although the business types were heterogeneous insofar as products for sale, they were homogeneous in other aspects. All were, as mentioned, easy for a member of the general public to enter. Unlike some establishments housed in large buildings in New York City, none of the businesses visited for this project required customers to show identification or sign an entrance roster. Most offered inexpensive items for sale, and this facilitated the process in that fieldworkers were able to make purchases for less than one dollar. Making a purchase gave their presence a legitimacy that might have been lacking if they had spent several minutes in a small store, for example, without buying anything. In other stores, fieldworkers were able to make the necessary observations while pretending to examine more expensive merchandise, such as a television set or stereo system. All of the businesses attracted a steady stream of customers, which made it possible for the fieldworker to observe the informant's language use with others.

Each exchange was initiated in a natural manner; therefore, no single uniform opening line was used. Marked behavior or context inappropriate utterances were avoided. Since the research concerns language choice, and monolingual speakers are unable to choose between two languages, fieldworkers verified that each language was used by the

informant before, during, or after the encounter. If the informant did not speak Spanish to the fieldworker, and was not heard to speak it to anyone else, the fieldworker returned later and tried to observe the informant speaking Spanish, either to co-workers or to other customers. Conversely, if the informant spoke Spanish to the fieldworker and was not heard speaking English, a verification visit was made later in which the fieldworker tried to engage the informant in English. A small number of encounters were discarded after fieldworkers were unable to establish that the informant had at least functional proficiency in both languages.

For the purpose of this study, informants were deemed functionally proficient in English if they were heard speaking English to other customers, or if they addressed the fieldworker in English, including English sentences or phrases in codeswitched utterances. Informants were deemed proficient in Spanish if they were heard speaking Spanish to other customers, or if they addressed the fieldworker in Spanish, including Spanish sentences or phrases in codeswitched utterances.

Codeswitched utterances were defined as those featuring both Spanish and English within the same conversational turn, spoken by the same speaker, to the same addressee. Under this definition, a participant who greeted the fieldworker in English, but then answered in Spanish a question asked in Spanish by the fieldworker, was not considered to be codeswitching. Spanish/English codeswitching was initially treated as a third value for the dependent variable, in addition to Spanish and English (see Table 1), but was later conflated with a Spanish response. This decision was made in part because the majority of the codeswitches occurred after the informant had produced at least one utterance entirely in Spanish, thus showing his or her willingness to accommodate to the customer's use of Spanish. In addition, most switches took the form of formulaic utterances that might be considered borrowings, such as ''Thank you'' and ''Bye,'' or price numbers, which the informant may have been accustomed to reciting in English, and one set phrase, ''Would you like a bag?''

The encounters were not audiotaped. Fieldworkers took notes immediately after each encounter, recording as much detail as possible about the interaction and surroundings, with attention to the informant's language use before, during, and after the encounter. Fieldworkers completed less than ten encounters in each session, and entered their fieldnotes into a Word document at the end of each session.

Members of the research team were hired as funds and fieldworkers became available. As can be seen in Table 2, it was not possible to hire the very large number of fieldworkers that would be necessary to yield highly significant results in regard to the fieldworker's sex, age, and ethnicity.

Table 2. *Research team*

	Non-Latino under 30	Non-Latino over 30	Latino under 30	Latino over 30
Male	F			B
Female	D, E, G	A		C

For this outcome, each cell in Table 2 would need to be filled with at least 6 individuals. The effect of these characteristics must therefore be interpreted with some caution, as will be seen in the discussion below. Nevertheless, these variables are of interest, fieldworker ethnicity especially so, as this has been shown to have an effect on language choice in previous research (Heller 1982; Bernsten 1994; Weyers 1999; Callahan 2005).

It is well known that Latinos as well as non-Latinos can be of any race. Nevertheless, popular stereotypes do exist, a fact which was expressed by workers in a previous study when they were shown photographs of hypothetical customers, and when they described how they decided which language to use for addressing customers in first-time encounters (Callahan 2005). Several informants in that study cited physical appearance as their main criterion.

Four of the five non-Latino members of the research team—D, E, F, and G—are blond and blue-eyed, thus coinciding in appearance with that of the individuals judged by informants in Callahan (2005) to be non-Latino and non-Spanish speaking. The fifth non-Latino team member, A, while not blond or blue-eyed, has often been described, by both Latinos and non-Latinos, as looking like ''a typical gringo.'' One of the two Latino fieldworkers, B, fits the description of a person who ''looks Hispanic,'' as noted by informants in Callahan (2005). However, C, the other Latino team member, does not, and prior to her participation on the project reported that she is routinely addressed in English in establishments where she has observed other customers being addressed in Spanish. Nevertheless, she speaks a native variety of Spanish, and as it happened she received the highest percentage of responses in Spanish once she had produced an utterance in that language.

All of the fieldworkers, both non-Latino and Latino, are Caucasian. If the research team had included persons of Asian or African racial phenotype, their appearance may or may not have had an effect as an additional independent variable. Despite the many Hispanics of African descent living in the Northeastern United States, a person with African phenotype may be perceived as being African-American and non-Latino (Bailey 2000; Toribio 2000; Callahan 2005). Asian Latinos, native speakers of Spanish, also have a considerable presence in New York City

Table 3. *Informant sample*

| Total sample | | | Sample per fieldworker: percentages are of category totals | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | A | | B | | C | | D | | E | | F | | G | |
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	**455**	**100**	80	17.6	53	11.6	80	17.6	74	16.2	36	8.0	80	17.6	52	11.4
Male	**223**	**49.0**	40	18.0	28	12.5	40	18.0	34	15.2	19	8.5	40	18.0	22	9.8
Female	**232**	**51.0**	40	17.2	25	10.9	40	17.2	40	17.2	17	7.3	40	17.2	30	13.0
Under 30	**225**	**49.5**	40	17.8	24	10.7	40	17.8	35	15.5	21	9.3	40	17.8	25	11.1
Over 30	**230**	**50.5**	40	17.4	29	12.6	40	17.4	39	17.0	15	6.5	40	17.4	27	11.7
Hisp min nbhd	**227**	**49.9**	40	17.6	23	10.1	40	17.6	40	17.6	15	6.6	40	17.6	29	12.9
Hisp maj nbhd	**228**	**50.1**	40	17.5	30	13.2	40	17.5	34	15.0	21	9.2	40	17.5	23	10.1

(The Century Foundation 2001). Nevertheless, members of this group are likely to be perceived as non-Latino in a first-time encounter (Callahan 2005).

In addition to physical appearance, speakers' ethnicity is often judged by the native-like quality of their speech (e.g., Heller 1982; Urciuoli 1996; Callahan 2005). Despite contestations of the definition of a native speaker (e.g., Paikeday 1985; Cook 1995), many native speakers of a language are able to recognize a non-native speaker (Inbar-Lourie 2005). Hence, it was believed that the speech of the non-Latino fieldworkers, all L2 Spanish speakers, would, in combination with their appearance, identify them in the informants' perceptions as outgroup members.

As shown in Table 3, the informant sample was stratified by the worker's sex and age, and the neighborhood in which the encounter took place. Due to the anonymous nature of the data collection, in which the informants were unaware of their participation in the research, it was not feasible to include additional independent variables common to research involving ethnic minorities, such as age of arrival in the U.S., number of years in the U.S., and country of origin. In order to observe spontaneous behavior and due to the high number of encounters as well as restrictions imposed by the researcher's Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects, the collection of demographic data from each informant was deemed impractical. In many cases it might have been possible to guess the informant's country of origin or that of his or her family, on the basis of a combination of factors such as the dialect of Spanish spoken, physical appearance, and neighborhood of the encounter. However, it was decided that this method would be too imprecise. In regard to age, we were confident that we could categorize the informant as being either under or over 30 with a high degree of accuracy.

The total sample comprises encounters with 455 informants. The seven members of the research team engaged individually in total numbers of encounters ranging from 36 (Fieldworker E) to 52 and 53 (Fieldworkers G and B) to 74 and 80 (Fieldworkers D, A, C, and F).

4. Results: Accommodation and non-accommodation of the customer's language choice

The distribution of the language of response for the total sample and for each fieldworker is shown in Table 4.

In the majority of cases, 86% (N = 390/455) overall of the service en-counters engaged in by the research team, accommodation to the cus-tomer's language choice came at the first turn. That is, fieldworkers were addressed in Spanish after addressing the worker in Spanish. Even if the worker addressed the customer first, using English, the worker changed to Spanish at his or her next turn, after hearing the customer use that lan-guage. This is illustrated in (1), in which the worker changes to Spanish at turn W2:

(1) W1: YES, HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?
    C1: *¿Café? ¿Se puede tomar café nada más?*
        'Coffee? Can one just get coffee?'
    W2: *No, no tenemos café.*
    'No, we don't have coffee.'
    (A.10)[5]

Workers also accommodated when customers changed languages in mid-exchange, as shown in (2), wherein the customer changes during turn C2, and the worker changes at turn W2:

(2) C1: HI.
    W1: HI, HOW ARE YOU?

Table 4. *Language of response: Total sample and per each fieldworker*

Total sample			Sample per fieldworker: percentages are of fieldworker's sub-sample													
			A		B		C		D		E		F		G	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spanish	**390**	**85.7**	74	92.5	45	84.9	77	96.2	58	78.4	23	63.9	70	87.5	43	82.7
English	**65**	**14.3**	6	7.5	8	15.1	3	3.8	16	21.6	13	36.1	10	12.5	9	17.3

C2: Fine, thank you. I'm just looking for something to eat.
   ¿Cuánto cuesta esto?
   'How much does this cost?'
W2: *Un dólar.*
   'One dollar.'
(B.17)

The worker in (3) employed a proactive accommodation style, using both languages before the customer had spoken, as shown in turn W1. This exchange took place in a Hispanic majority neighborhood with a non-Latino fieldworker, who was examining some merchandise with her back turned to the worker during his first turn in the conversation. The worker may have mistaken the customer's lack of an immediate response for non-comprehension of one or the other language. It has been observed that whereas a monolingual speaker would just repeat or rephrase an utterance in the same language, a bilingual will often repeat it in the opposite language (Heller 1982). It should be noted that the worker in (3) changed to monolingual Spanish in turn W2, immediately after hearing the customer answer in that language.

(3)   W1: Good morning, *buenos días. ¿Le puedo ayudar?* If you don't
          see, ask.
                         'good morning. Can I help you?'
      C1: *¿Tienen cortinas de baño?*
          'Do you have shower curtains?'
      W2: *Cortinas de baño, no. Vaya a la* [store name]—*en esa misma
          acera . . . con McDonald.*
          'Shower curtains, no. Go to [store name]—on this same stretch
          . . . at McDonald [Street].
      (A.45)

In some cases, workers accommodated to the language choice of the customer after one or two turns of the customer using Spanish and the worker answering in English. In (4)–(6), the worker changes to Spanish at turn W2. Note that in (6), turn W2, the worker accommodates to the customer's language choice while addressing a co-worker in English, within the same speech event. This co-worker had not been observed speaking Spanish, whereas other workers present were heard to use both languages.

(4)   C1: *¿Cuánto vale el jabón* [brand name]*?* [Places other purchases on
          the counter.]
          'How much is the [brand name] soap?'
      W1: These?

    C2: *No, el* [brand name].
       'No, the [brand name].
    W2: *Ciento cuarenta y cinco.*
       'One forty-five.'
    C3: *Ah, bueno.*
       'Ah, OK.'
    W3: *El total es tres y setenta y ocho.*
       'The total is three seventy-eight.'
    (A.29)

(5) C1: *¿Tiene El Diario?*
       'Do you have *El Diario* [Spanish language newspaper]?'
    W1: No, ONLY THE DAILY NEWS.
    C2: *¿Tienen café?*
       'Do you have coffee?'
    W2: *¿Para beber?*
       'To drink?'
    C3: *Sí.*
       'Yes.'
    W3: *Claro.*
       'Certainly.'
    C4: *Bueno. Un café, por favor.*
       'OK. A coffee, please.'
    W4: *¿Con leche?*
       'With milk?'
    C5: *Sí.*
       'Yes.'
    W5: *¿Cuánto azúcar?*
       'How many sugars?'
    C6: *Dos.*
       'Two.'
    (E.14)

(6) C1: *Hola, ¿no tienen botellas más pequeñas de spray fijador?*
       'Hi, do you have any smaller bottles of hair spray?'
    W1: No, I DON'T THINK SO. YOU WANT [brand name]? [Starts
       walking toward the aisle with hair products.]
    C2: *No me importa la marca, pero necesito algo más pequeño, como*
       de tamaño de viaje.
       'The brand doesn't matter, but I need something smaller, like
       travel size.
    W2: *No creo que lo tenemos, pero vamos a revisar aquí. No, no*
       hay.

'I don't think we have any, but we'll take a look here. No,
there isn't any.'
[Addresses co-worker:] Do WE HAVE ANY OF THOSE TRAVEL-SIZE
BOTTLES OF HAIR SPRAY? [Co-worker answers in English.
Worker then addresses customer.]
Lo siento, no tenemos nada de ese tamaño.
'I'm sorry, we don't have any of that size.'
(D.5)

A non-reciprocal response, that is, encounters in which the worker an-
swered in English after being addressed in Spanish, occurred in 14% (N =
65/455) of the total number of encounters. All members of the research
team experienced cases of non-accommodation. As was already men-
tioned, most of the conversations were very brief, with each person having
just one or two turns. Because of the brevity of the exchanges, we can only
conjecture as to whether the workers might have eventually switched to
Spanish if the conversation had lasted longer, as we see in (4)–(6), above.
In (7)–(9), below, we see examples of cases in which the exchange did go
on and the worker maintained English throughout the entire conversation.

(7)   C1: *Hola.* [Places purchases on the counter.]
          'Hi.'
      W1: HI, PRECIOUS. YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL EYES.
      C2: *Gracias.*
          'Thanks.'
      W2: YOU SPEAK SPANISH?
      C3: *Sí.*
          'Yes.'
      W3: OH, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
      C4: *De Finlandia.*
          'From Finland.'
      W4: OH, THAT'S CONFUSING.
      [Addresses co-worker] *¿Sabes que ella habla español?*
                              'Do you know that she speaks Spanish?'
      [Co-worker responds in Spanish: *Sí, lo sé, Es muy importante.*]
                                       'Yes, I know. It's very important.'
      C5: *Sí, es muy útil aquí en Nueva York. Bueno, gracias.*
          'Yes, it's very useful here in New York. OK, thanks.'
      W5: BYE.
      (D.8)

(8)   W1: NEXT.
      C1: *Papas fritas, por favor.*
          'French fries, please.'

W2: YES.
C2: *Y nada más.*
   'And nothing else.'
W3: TO STAY OR TO GO?
C3: *Para llevar.*
   'To go.'
W4: [Brings fries to counter.]
C4: *¿Cuánto vale?*
   'How much is it?'
W5: ONE FIFTY.
C5: *Gracias.*
   'Thanks.'
W6: THANK YOU.
(E.1)

(9) C1: *¿Dónde se agarra el tren A?*
   'Where does one get the A train?'
W1: WHAT?
C2: *El tren A.*
   'The A train.'
W2: LOOK, I'LL SHOW YOU. YOU SEE THOSE BIG LAMPS UP THERE?
C3: *Sí.*
   'Yes.'
W3: ENGLISH OR SPANISH?! [Visibly frustrated and impatient.]
C4: *No importa.*
   'It doesn't matter.'
W4: THAT'S IT RIGHT THERE.
C5: *¡No sabía que estaba tan cerquita! Gracias.*
   'I didn't know it was so close! Thanks.'
W5: YOU'RE WELCOME.
(F.11)

In (9), turn W3, the worker makes an explicit request for clarification, similar to what Heller (1982) recorded in Quebec. In (9) the request is ostensibly for language clarification only, but note that in (7), turn W3, the worker requests information as to the customer's ethnic or national affiliation. This is a common occurrence whenever an individual's language choice is incongruent with physical appearance and the stereotypes associated with it.

In this study, there are three ways in which the informant's characteristics may be affecting the language chosen to respond to a customer who initiates an exchange in Spanish: the informant's sex, age, and the type of neighborhood in which the encounter takes place. As shown in Table 5,

Table 5.   *Language of response: Informants by sex, age, and neighborhood*

	Men Sub-sample total: 223		Women Sub-sample total: 232		Under 30 Sub-sample total: 225		Over 30 Sub-sample total: 230		Hisp min nbhd Sub-sample total: 227		Hisp maj nbhd Sub-sample total: 228	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spanish	196	88	194	84	185	82	205	89	195	86	195	86
English	27	12	38	16	40	18	25	11	32	14	33	14
	Pearson Chi-Square = 1.694 p = 0.1				Pearson Chi-Square = 4.433 p = 0.02				Pearson Chi-Square = 0.13 p = 0.5			

Table 6.   *Language of response: Fieldworkers by sex, age, and ethnicity*

	Male FWs N = 133*		Female FWs N = 322		Under 30 FWs N = 242		Over 30 FWs N = 213		Latino FWs N = 133		Non-Latino FWs N = 322	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spanish	115	86.5	275	85.4	194	80.0	196	92.0	122	91.7	268	83.0
English	18	13.5	47	14.6	48	20.0	17	8.0	11	8.3	54	17.0

* N = number of informants sampled by each type of fieldworker

there were no significant correlations between the language of response and the informant's sex, nor were there any with the neighborhood in which the encounter took place. However, there does seem to be an association between the informant's age and language. The younger informants answered in English when addressed in Spanish at a significantly higher rate than did the older informants.

The informants' language of response per each type of fieldworker is shown in Table 6. As mentioned above, the number of fieldworkers is too low to have complete confidence in correlations between the fieldworkers' characteristics and the informants' language choice. Nevertheless, it appears that fieldworker ethnicity might be having an effect on informant language choice, in the expected direction. As shown in Table 6, the percentage of non-accommodation experienced by the non-Latino fieldworkers was more than twice as high—17% compared to 8%—as the percentage for the Latino fieldworkers. In all of the cases of non-reciprocal language use, the workers were observed to speak Spanish with co-workers or other customers.

Table 7. *Bivariate analysis of informants' use of English correlated with informants' age and fieldworkers' characteristics*

Male FWs N = 133*	Female FWs N = 322	Under 30 FWs N = 242	Over 30 FWs N = 213	Latino FWs N = 133	Non-Latino FWs N = 322
Pearson .073 Sig .403	Pearson −.167 Sig .003	Pearson −.145 Sig .024	Pearson −.024 Sig .725	Pearson .016 Sig .855	Pearson −.133 Sig .017

* N = number of informants sampled by each type of fieldworker

However, four of the five non-Latino fieldworkers are women, and four of the five are under 30. So, it is possible that with a larger sample of fieldworkers we would find that either, or both, the customer's female sex and youth also have a significant effect on receiving answers in English to questions asked in Spanish in service encounters with younger workers. As Table 7 shows, there appears to be an association between the fieldworker's youth, female sex, and non-Latino ethnicity and her receipt of non-reciprocal responses from informants under 30.

5. Discussion

Lo (1999), in an analysis of the discourse between two young men in Los Angeles, showed how English is used to rebuff use of an ingroup language. When one of the men, Chazz, a Chinese-American learner of Korean, uses Korean with a Korean-American man, he is answered in English by the latter, who "withholds validation of Chazz as a competent speaker of Korean and as an ingroup member of the Korean-American community" (Lo 1999: 472).

In encounter (9) above, the customer does not facilitate the language choice for the worker, and this forces the worker to take an active stance in choosing the language (cf. Heller 1982: 116). Heller noted in 1982 that "... speaking French constitute[d] a favor. However, for a Quebecois to accept that 'favor' let [...] the Anglophone keep his position of power in the conversation" (Heller 1982: 114). Similar to this, a Latino's refusal to accommodate to the Spanish of an outgroup member is an assertion of control, a refusal to accept what in popular terms is sometimes described as "slumming." In other words, returning to a point mentioned at the beginning of this paper, if the use of an ingroup variety is seen as inappropriate due to incongruence with a speaker's status or social group membership, its use by the outgroup member may not be accommodated.

That the under-30 informants were significantly more likely to give a response in English to a question asked in Spanish may be related to

two factors. One possibility comes from the greater psychosocial need associated with youth to establish boundaries. As Weyers (1999) noted, ''It appears reasonable to assume that older speakers demonstrate less need to establish their cultural identity via linguistic choice than younger speakers, perhaps due to the heightened awareness of self that naturally comes with age'' (Weyers 1999: 111). However, my informants' use of English might also be associated with the higher use of English overall seen among the younger members of bilingual populations in the U.S. (e.g., Hinton 2001; Callahan 2005; MacGregor-Mendoza 2005).[6] The association between younger workers answering younger customers in English, even after the latter had spoken in Spanish, may be due to the tendency for younger people to be perceived as being more likely than older people to have English proficiency, if not English dominance (Callahan 2005).

In regard to the fieldworker's ethnicity as a factor, recall that Weyers, in his study of service encounters in El Paso, Texas, concluded that his non-Latino status garnered him more non-reciprocal responses, while his Latina research partner received close to 100 percent accommodation. Urciuoli's (1996: 170–173) New York Puerto Rican informants stated that the use of Spanish by a white, non-Hispanic person to address a Latino person is invasive. Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory offers some useful perspectives. If a language is used to maximize the distinctiveness of a minority group, its value as an identity resource is weakened when that language is no longer exclusive to ingroup members, that is, if it is used by outsiders (Galindo 1993: 26; García 1993: 80; Amery 1995: 71). Ingroup members thus have powerful motives to discourage outgroup members' use of their language. One way to do this is to withhold acceptance—expressed via accommodation to language selection—of its use by non-native speakers (Hewitt 1982; Rampton 1998).

The lack of effect from neighborhood replicates the results of Weyers' study, who did not find location of the encounter to have an effect on workers' language choice in service encounters either. Since there are larger numbers of encounters in the present study, we can say that it confirms the relative non-importance of the Latino concentration in an area in regard to language choice in interethnic exchanges.

6.   Conclusion

Workers base their language choices on both linguistic competence and episode-external ideological factors (Torras & Gafaranga 2002). Linguistic competence has to do with in what language(s) participants in an

exchange can produce utterances, and episode-external ideological factors have to do with questions of allegiance to and ownership of a language. English in the U.S. is available for use by all parties in most public situations, so in that sense it is neutral. Spanish in the U.S. is not neutral. Spanish may be used by ingroup members between themselves and to address others they categorize as Spanish-speakers.

This study has established the fact that there is a high percentage of language accommodation during service encounters, regardless of the ethnic constitution of the neighborhood in which the encounter takes place. Outgroup members may attempt to use Spanish in commercial encounters, and their status as customers assures them a higher rate of success than they may enjoy in other situations. However, although a causal link seems logical, to establish such a connection a comparison with non-service encounters needs to be done. This is an area for future research. Both anecdotal evidence and qualitative data suggest that, absent the desire to please the customer, there might be more non-reciprocal language choice, and less accommodation to the outgroup member trying to initiate an exchange in Spanish (e.g., Urciuoli 1996: 74–75).

A pattern of younger Latino workers opting more for English to answer, in particular, younger, female, and non-Latino customers has been identified. The characteristics of the customer should be studied with a larger and more evenly distributed research team to see whether this pattern holds.

An investigation in which the businesses sampled are limited to two types might also be undertaken. A study of service encounters in franchises of large commercial chains, such as, for example, Wal-Mart, McDonald's, and Starbucks, could be compared to those in small, independently owned establishments.

Finally, a closer examination of the fieldnotes from a discursive analytic perspective might prove informative. Despite the brevity of each encounter, the corpus in its entirety may reveal interesting patterns in interethnic workplace language use.

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Appendix

Fieldworkers in the service encounters that are reproduced in this paper:

A: Female, non-Latino, early 40s
B: Male, Latino, early 40s
D: Female, non-Latino, mid-20s
E: Female, non-Latino, mid-20s
F: Male, non-Latino, early 20s

Informants in the service encounters that are reproduced in this paper (all are Latino):

(A.10): Male, late 40s
(A.29): Male, late 40s
(A.45): Male, mid-50s
(B.17): Female, early 40s
(D.5): Female, mid-20s
(D.8): Male, mid-20s
(E.1): Female, early 20s
(E.14): Female, early 20s
(F.11): Female, early 20s

Notes

1. However, see Ryoo (2005).
2. Most of the literature on service encounters focuses on one or more aspects of pragmatics, such as, for example, politeness, discourse strategies, intercultural communication, cross-linguistic comparisons, gender, and race. Many of the following studies fit into multiple categories. The interested reader is referred to the full citation in the References section: Anderson 1994; Antonopoulou 2001; Bayyurt & Bayraktaroglu 2001; Brodine 1990; Buttny & Williams 2000; Coupland 1983; David 1999; Gardner 1985; Gavioli 1995; Gibbs & Mueller 1988; Hall 1993; Iacobucci 1990; Ide 1998; Kalaja

1990; Kidwell 2000; Kong 1998; Kulik & Holbrook 2000; Lamoureux 1988; Lovik 1983; Márquez Reiter & Placencia 2004; Martin & Adams 1999; Merritt 1976, 1980; Pan 2000b; Placencia 2004; Siehl, Bowen & Pearson 1992; Taylor 2002; Traverso 2001; Van Leuven 1998, 2002; Vélez 1988; Ventola 1987; Winsted 1997; Yamazaki, Satake & Hosaka 1993.

3. Hispanic population 2,160,554; total population 8,008,278. Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2001).

4. New York City neighborhoods classified as Hispanic majority for this study included Washington Heights and East Harlem; those classified as Hispanic minority included the Upper West Side, the Lower East Side, and the East Village. Source: New York City Department of City Planning.

5. In the encounters that have been reproduced in this paper, English appears in capital letters, Spanish in italics, and my translation of the Spanish is given between single quotation marks. "W" stands for Informant (i.e., the service worker), and "C" for fieldworker (i.e., the customer). The number following the "W" or the "C" refers to the number of that speaker's turn. So, for example, "W2" refers to the second turn of the informant in the encounter with the fieldworker. The letter in parentheses corresponds to the fieldworker involved in the encounter (note that not every member of the research team is represented in the encounters that are reproduced in this paper; the encounters cited were chosen to illustrate certain phenomena). These fieldworkers' characteristics are given in the Appendix for quick reference, and in more detail in the Data collection and methods section. The numbers were assigned in chronological order to each fieldworker's encounters. The characteristics of the informant in each of the encounters cited are also given in the Appendix, listed with the full code of the encounter.

6. It must be emphasized that all of the informants in the present study were observed to be capable of maintaining Spanish throughout a service encounter.

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