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Chapter 14

Face Work in Spanish Language Service Encounters between Native and Non-native Speakers in the U.S.

Laura Callahan

14.1 Introduction

Linguistic politeness plays an important role in the opinions people form of one another, especially when it offers one of the few clues an individual may have of his or her interlocutor's disposition, as is the case in anonymous, first-time service encounters. Face is a fundamental concept in politeness theory. To borrow a summary from Callahan (2011):

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 face work.¹ Face work attenuates, or mitigates, the force of face-threatening acts. (28)

A request that the addressee perform some action is likely to threaten his or her independence and autonomy, i.e. his or her negative face. A request given with no face work would be a bald imperative, as in example (1):

- (1) Give me a bran muffin and a croissant with ham and cheese.

In service encounters there may be no verb, as in (2):

- (2) A bran muffin and a croissant with ham and cheese.

Linguistic mitigators of the request take various forms, and all constitute face work, or, as they will be referred to in the present analysis, *face markers*. 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 (3) – (7). Other forms of face markers will be elucidated below.

- (3) Give me a bran muffin, please.
 (4) A bran muffin, please.
 (5) I wanted a bran muffin and a croissant with ham and cheese.
 (6) Could I get / I’d like a bran muffin and a croissant with ham and cheese, please.
 (7) Are you still making breakfast croissants?

A service encounter is a commercial exchange, which often involves the purchase of an item or service. While service encounters can, and increasingly do, take place via remote means such as telephone or internet, for this study they were restricted to in-person exchanges in which a worker and customer speak to each other at a place of business. As Antonopolou observes,

“[b]rief service encounters involve mainly requests besides optional greetings and leave-takings” (Antonopolou 2001: 241). As will be seen in the next section, the nature of the service encounter—to accomplish a specific purpose, often with an unknown interlocutor—sometimes appears to lessen the need to engage in the type or amount of verbal politeness, or face work, that might be seen in other situations. Nevertheless, a certain amount of face work does occur in service encounters, and this paper’s purpose is to investigate whether and how it differs in service encounters between native and non-native speakers of Spanish in the U.S., and between older and younger interlocutors. The results will have relevance for language educators and others who prepare people for intercultural encounters.

Greeting and farewell formulae, calling an addressee by name, compliments, and self-disclosure are characteristic of involvement, as opposed to independence, and thus attend to positive face. Some of these types of face work are slightly less common in service encounters, given the essentially transactional nature of the exchange. The basic pattern for a service encounter is call-answer-topic, or call-answer-face work-topic (Scollon and Scollon 2001). The call-answer part is a pre-sequence in which the customer may greet the worker and ask for help, and/or the worker may greet the customer and offer help. Alternatively, this part of the sequence may be omitted altogether, with the customer introducing the topic, to proceed to the transaction without preamble. This is one of the patterns we will see in the data for the present analysis.

14.2 Previous Research on Face Work in Service Encounters

A comprehensive review of the literature on service encounters is beyond the scope of this paper; the following is a brief summary of research that focuses specifically on the issue of face work in the service encounter.² The available literature can be divided into the following

primary, if often overlapping, categories: first, and the one into which the present study fits, there are intercultural comparisons and encounters; second, intracultural encounters; and third, intracultural encounters between shopkeepers and their regular customers.

14.2.1 Intercultural Comparisons and Encounters

Winsted (1997) compared Japanese and U.S. expectations of service encounters, finding that “in personal interaction in Japan, there is an overriding concern with not hurting anyone or causing anyone to lose face” (Winsted 1997: 17). Interactions follow a specific pattern, and negative politeness is valued over positive face work. Hence, for example, some of the informants in Winsted’s investigation, Japanese graduate students studying in the U.S., found U.S. workers’ practice of using customers’ names to be slightly jarring.

Kong (1998) notes that “[o]ne of the most puzzling features of Chinese politeness behavior to Westerners has been the direct and blunt approach people take in casual service encounters, in which almost no greeting and face work are required of both participants involved” (Kong 1998: 555). Whereas the Western service encounter pattern is call-answer-topic—even if the first two elements are sometimes skipped—the normal Chinese pattern is \emptyset - \emptyset -topic. This is attributed to the distinction made by Chinese between inside, or *nei*, and outside, or *wai*, relationships. Kong notes the criticisms that have been made of Brown and Levinson’s model—namely, that it is too Western-oriented, insofar as the high value it accords independence—and he proposes “a more context-specific model for understanding Chinese politeness behavior in service encounters” (Kong 1998: 556), that takes into account the problems of a neatly polar division between inside and outside relationships.

Ide (1998) analyzed small talk in U.S. service encounters, noting that “[f]rom a Japanese perspective, greeting people with a smile, joke, or telling people some private matters are typical behaviors observed among acquaintances and intimates such as family and friends” (Ide 1998: 32). Ide videotaped service encounters at a convenience store and at a florist shop in Austin, Texas. She examined the management of face threat through small talk, as in cases where a worker was unable to satisfy the customer’s request. Ide observes that small talk functions as politeness, just as, for example, does self-disclosure, in which workers reveal personal information.

Bailey (1997) examined interactions between Korean shopkeepers and African American customers in Los Angeles. African American customers valued positive politeness in service encounters, such as might be manifested in expansions of the transactional nature into interpersonal conversation, whereas the Korean shopkeepers favored negative politeness, or, relative lack of engagement. Both groups were using behavior that was considered respectful in their culture, but which was perceived as exactly the opposite in the other. As Bailey notes, “[t]he intercultural (mis)communication of respect between African American and immigrant Korean retailers is particularly significant for interethnic relations because behavior that is perceived to be lacking in respect is typically interpreted as actively threatening” (Bailey 1997: 329).

Ryoo (2005) studied the same two groups, but in contrast to Bailey’s large urban setting, the interactions between Korean store owners and African American customers she observed took place in a mid-sized city. She documented face work on the part of both workers and consumers, including the use of ingroup identity markers, joking, compliments, and phatic speech such as gossip and small talk. David (1999, 2005) highlighted the positive interactions

between African American customers and a different immigrant group, Arab shopkeepers in Detroit.

Danblon et al. (2005) and Callahan (2005; 2007; 2009a; 2009b) observe that language choice can be a politeness issue—with accommodation to the customer’s choice seen as a demonstration of positive politeness—but one which is complicated by factors such as ingroup/outgroup distinctions, among others. Subjects in Danblon et al. were speakers of Dutch and French in Belgium, while Callahan focused on interactions between native and non-native speakers of Spanish in the U.S. As discussed below, language accommodation was treated as one more form of face work in the present corpus, but it is not the main focus of the present paper.

Márquez-Reiter and Placencia (2004) compared workers’ language use in Uruguay and Ecuador, in Montevidean and Quiteño service encounters, finding that the former feature involvement and closeness between participants, “whereas in Quito participants appear to value distance-maintenance” (Márquez-Reiter and Placencia 2004: 123). This was manifested from the opening turn, in which Quiteño speakers used the Spanish equivalent of the more formal ‘Good morning’ instead of a greeting along the lines of ‘Hi, how are you?’ They also used more V, or deferential or distancing, address forms, in contrast to the Montevideans, who used more T, or familiar, forms (Brown and Gilman 1960). Montevideans also used intensifiers as warrants—utterances that signal the speaker’s desire to end the interaction. So, for example, whereas the Quiteños limited themselves to neutral warrants such as *‘bueno’* ‘Ok’ and *‘ya’* ‘Ok’, intensifiers such as *‘está bárbaro’* ‘excellent’ and *‘muy bien’* ‘very good’ occurred in the Montevideans’ utterances. Montevideans also gave more personal information, and their informality was manifested in their selection of forms of address, as noted, plus their choice of titles and discourse markers.

14.2.2 Intracultural Encounters

Although variation within a single culture does not attract as much attention as intercultural differences, social factors involving members of the same culture nevertheless contribute to diverse styles of communication in a service exchange. Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu (2001) studied the use of pronouns and terms of address in Turkish service encounters, investigating gender differences as reflected in responses to a questionnaire. The authors detail the strategies used and find that familiarity and affluence of setting provoke more polite behavior. They found that bald imperatives are attenuated by the use of kinship terms, and that indirect requests are framed as interrogatives. Other attenuators they observed were the use of the past tense, and lack of reference to the addressee—i.e. self-oriented requests. Also, in their corpus men used familiar pronouns more often than women did.

Antonopoulou (2001) focused on gender and politeness in brief service encounters at a magazine store in Athens, Greece. She concluded that both men and women use politeness strategies, and that each uses them more when addressing members of the opposite sex. She points out that since service encounters are goal oriented, with an unequal distribution of power—in which the customer is in a privileged position—the face-threatening quality of requests is suspended, requests being the purpose of the encounter for both participants.

Traverso (2001) examined Syrian service encounters, which she describes as characterized by an emphasis on ritual formulae, which make the exchange fixed and conventional (see also Merritt 1976). The exception to this predictable pattern occurs when the customer issues a challenge, usually to the quality of the product. Like Antonopoulou (2001),

Traverso observes that the nature of the service encounter motivates a suspension of the normal rules of conversation.

14.2.3 Intracultural Encounters between Shopkeepers and their Regular Customers

Placencia (2004) examines a variety of devices, such as small talk, the use of first names, diminutives, teasing, and language play to build rapport. Her data come from small neighborhood store interactions in Quito, Ecuador. Although Márquez-Reiter and Placencia (2004), discussed above, found more formality in Quiteño encounters in their comparison of data from Montevideo and Quito, the interactions examined in Placencia (2004) differ in that the customers and workers were in regular contact with one another. This would explain the type of face work seen between these participants.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005) investigated service encounters in a bakery in Lyon, France, finding that both customers and workers attended to both positive and negative face, and used what the author refers to as “face-flattering acts” to counteract face-threatening acts. These face-flattering acts include, for example, apologies and expressions of gratitude. She emphasizes the contextually dependent nature of face-threatening acts, which in some circumstances are no longer considered to instantiate same (cf. Sifianou 1992).

Montgomery (1995) investigated the effects of gender, ethnicity, and social proximity in closing sequences. She observes that “[i]t is friends and other acquaintances who must constantly consider the ‘face’ of the other and simultaneously protect their own. Conversation closings among acquaintances or casual friends tend to be elaborate, for in this situation there exists the potential for increasing or lessening the social distance” (Montgomery 1995: 88). Montgomery cites Wolfson’s Bulge Theory (Wolfson 1988), which “holds that strangers can be brief and

intimates need not stand on ceremony” (Montgomery 1995: 88). And indeed in the present corpus, in which the participants were strangers to each other, there are many encounters with little or no face work.

Also in regard to social distance, Pan (2000), like Kong (1998), focuses on the inside vs. outside relations dichotomy in Chinese culture; specifically, on how it is manifested in state-run vs. private enterprise stores. In the latter, what is in fact an outside relation is treated as an inside one, for the furtherance of business objectives. During an inside relationship service encounter, phatic speech foregrounds goals of a socio-relational nature over those of an informational nature, creating rapport and sharing involvement. Pan observes that although specific linguistic features marking politeness—such as the phrases to be examined in Section 14.4 of the present paper—are absent from Chinese, politeness is manifested in certain types of speech acts. These include openings that are initiated by the server rather than the customer, linguistically expressed closings, prolonged interactions with detailed explanations, suggestions and assurances, small talk, and emphasis on the interpersonal relationship, sometimes with an explicit mention of connectedness. This is very different from an outside relation service encounter, in which there is no face work. In these, there are bald imperatives, zero expressions of gratitude, and no closing formulae.

14.3 Method

This study uses data that were collected during anonymous service encounters, i.e. those in which the customer and worker were unknown to each other. A total of 731 service encounters, a small portion of which are reported on here, were conducted by nine fieldworkers in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area between October 2003 and June 2006.³ The

original purpose of data collection was to investigate language choice. Acting as customers, each person entered businesses and addressed a service worker in Spanish, noting the worker's language of response. The majority of the interactions were what Bailey (1997: 333) characterizes as socially minimal service encounters: "limited to no more than greetings/openings, negotiation of the exchange, and closings." The encounters were not audiotaped. Fieldworkers completed less than ten encounters in each session, and entered their notes on each exchange into a Word document at the end of each session.⁴

From this corpus, a subset of dialogues was selected for an analysis of the face work engaged in by both the worker and customer. For this first approach to face work in this corpus, only those encounters in which the worker was female were selected. It has been established that men typically engage in less face work than women (see, for example, Fishman 1984; Montgomery 1995), and there tend to be more women than men in service worker positions. Since other researchers have found that more face work occurs in mixed sex dyads,⁵ it was decided to exclude this as a possible confounding factor; accordingly, only female fieldworkers' encounters were chosen for the present analysis. Exchanges conducted by four of the fieldworkers were chosen—two female native speakers of Spanish, and two female non-native speakers of Spanish. Among both the native and non-native speakers, there was one woman in her mid to late thirties—either in fact or appearance—and one woman in her mid to late twenties. Approximately half of each fieldworker's encounters took place with younger workers—under 30 in appearance—and half with workers judged to be over thirty years of age. All of the workers were Hispanic, and were considered to be native speakers of Spanish based on observation of their interactions either with the fieldworkers or with other customers. The corpus for the present paper includes a total of 151 encounters, 32 to 40 per fieldworker.

Although the small number of customers would not validate any statistical analysis, a raw numbers tabulation was used as a point of departure for the analysis. Face markers in both Spanish and English were tabulated for each encounter and for each participant, i.e. for both the worker and customer. The number of speaking turns per participant was also tabulated; silent turns were not counted. The total number of face markers in each subset of encounters was divided by the total number of turns in that subset; the product is what I refer to as the face work quotient, discussed below. Face markers fell into various categories. As has been mentioned, those most common in service encounters are greeting and closing formulae. These attend to positive face and most often take the form of ‘hello’ and ‘good-bye’ and their equivalents. Other types of locutions heard at this point in an exchange include expressions of interest in or wishes for the interlocutor’s welfare, enjoyment, or endeavors, such as ‘How are you?’, ‘Take care,’ ‘Enjoy,’ and ‘Have a nice day.’ Expressions that acknowledge negative face are perhaps the next most common type of face markers in U.S. service encounters, since, as has been noted, such exchanges by definition involve a certain degree of imposition⁶ to complete the transaction; examples are ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Attention is also paid to negative face through the use of conditional and past tense verb forms, titles, and in Spanish, the use of deferential second person pronouns, i.e. V forms. In addition, as noted above, in this corpus the worker’s language accommodation to the customer was tabulated as a form of face work. Language accommodation was considered to have occurred in cases where the worker addressed the customer in English at least once before switching to Spanish, after the customer had produced a turn in Spanish.

14.4 Results

[Table 14.1 inserted about here]

Although the small sample size permits no generalizations, some patterns can be seen from the data in Table 1. In all but one of the groups, the worker produced more linguistic face markers than did the customer, with a difference of at least 6 points. An exception was seen in the encounters between the younger non-native speaker customer—Fieldworker D—and younger workers, in which it is the customer who outdoes the worker in face marker use, by 18 points. Other differences might stem from individual personality factors, such as the fact that Fieldworker D seems to be the most polite, and Fieldworker A the least so. However, a pattern can be noted here in the sense that among the native speaker customers (i.e. Fieldworkers H and R), there are no extremes, with the customers having a face marker index in the mid 40s to 50s, and the workers in the 60s, in comparison to the non-native speaker customers (i.e. Fieldworkers D and A), in which the customers' face marker indexes go from a low of 11 to a high of 67. The workers' indexes here are also lower than those seen in the encounters with native speaker customers.

Following are transcriptions of eight dialogues, with the face markers in bold type. These dialogues were chosen at random from each subsection of the corpus from among those exchanges having exactly three verbal turns for each participant.

In (8), the sole explicit face marker, *gracias* 'thank you,' uttered by the customer, attends to the worker's negative face. However, the worker's switch from English in her first turn to Spanish in her second turn, after the customer has addressed her in that language, is also considered a form of face work, as it instantiates the language accommodation discussed above.

(8) Female native speaker customer under 30 and female native speaker worker under 30⁷:

W1: NEED SOMETHING?

C1: *¿Tiene harina Pan la colombiana?*

‘Do you have the Colombian flour Pan [brand name]?’

W2: *Lo que ves ahí.*

‘What you see there.’

C2: *Esa es de Venezuela.*

‘That one’s from Venezuela.’

W3: *Esa es toda.*

‘That’s all there is.’

C3: ***Gracias.***

‘Thank you.’

(H.38)

In (9), the worker opens with three face markers—two invitations to make a request of her, punctuated by an affectionate vocative—all aimed at the positive face of the customer, who responds in kind two turns later, with a compliment on the attractiveness of the merchandise. The customer closes the exchange with the imposition mitigator thank you.

(9) Female native speaker customer under 30 and female native speaker worker over 30:

W1: ***Dime, bella, ¿en qué te puedo ayudar?***

‘Yes, [lit.: tell me], honey, how can I help you?’

C1: *¿Cuánto cuesta?*

‘How much does this cost?’

W2: HUNDRED AND TWENTY TWO.

C2: *Está lindo.*

‘It’s pretty.’

W3: WE ALSO *hace* LAYAWAY.

‘ We also do layaway.’

C3: *Gracias.*

‘Thank you.’

(H.78)

In (10), the worker issues two greetings, positive face markers which the customer reciprocates with her own greeting. The customer then utters an overt second person plural subject pronoun, *ustedes*, use of which could be considered a positive face marker, since Spanish is a pro-drop language and the verb alone would suffice for grammatical purposes.⁸ Use of the deferential pronoun can serve as a positive facemarker in dialects of Spanish in which the use of overt pronouns has pragmatic value (as opposed to dialects in which all or most pronouns are overt and therefore without pragmatic value). The use of *ustedes* in (10) equates to a form of address. The use of an address term is a way to pay attention to an interlocutor’s face (Scollon & Scollon 2001: 40-41). The worker then switches to Spanish, showing language accommodation to the customer. The customer at her next turn utters an indirect request in the form of a question, using a modal verb in conditional form, which serves to mitigate the force of her petition, thus attending to the worker’s negative face.

(10) Female native speaker customer over 30 and female native speaker worker under 30:

W1: **Hi. GOOD AFTERNOON.**

C1: ***Hola. ¿Ustedes hacen delivery?***

‘Hello. Do you deliver?’

W2: ***Sí.***

‘Yes.’

C2: ***¿Me podría dar un menú?***

‘Could you give me a menu?’

W1: ***Sí, aquí tiene.***

‘Yes, here you go.’

C2: ***Gracias.***

‘Thank you.’

(R.65)

The exchange in (11) features no face work until the classic adjacency pair of ‘thank you / you’re welcome.’ Note that the customer proceeds straight to the topic.

(11) Female native speaker customer over 30 and female native speaker worker over 30:

C1: ***¿Un cepillo de cerdas gruesas para limpiar tiene?***

‘Do you have a cleaning brush with thick bristles?’

W1: ***¿Como este?***

‘Like this one?’

C2: ***Sí.***

‘Yes.’

W2: *Ciento ochenta y cuatro.*

‘One eighty-four.’

C3: *Gracias.*

‘Thank you.’

W3: *De nada.*

‘You’re welcome.’

(R.45)

In (12) the worker opens with an offer of service, and then accommodates to the customer’s language choice at her next turn (W2). For her part, the customer utters the classic imposition mitigators ‘please / thank you.’

(12) Female non-native speaker customer under 30 and female native speaker worker under 30:

W1: **WANT TO TRY THOSE ON?**

C1: *Sí, por favor.*

‘Yes, please.’

W2: *¿Cuántos tiene?*

‘How many do you have?’

C2: *Son cinco.*

‘There are five.’

W3: *Entra allí.*

‘Go in over there.’

C3: *Gracias.*

‘Thank you.’

(D.38)

In (13), the worker offers no face markers; in addition, her failure to accommodate to the customer’s language choice could be considered a face-threatening act.

(13) Female non-native speaker customer under 30 and female native speaker worker over 30:

C1: *Y, ¿cuánto es esto?*

‘And how much is this?’

W1: ONE SIXTY-FIVE.

C2: *Está bien.*

‘Ok.’

W2: THREE TWELVE.

[The customer hands the worker the money.]

W3: DO YOU WANT A BAG?

C3: *No, gracias.*

‘No, thank you.’

(D.66)

The worker’s final turn in (14) features face work that is less formulaic than what has been seen in the examples so far. She engages briefly in interpersonal involvement with the tag question ‘Huh?’ in response to the customer’s positive reaction to the price of the merchandise.

Here we can also note some language accommodation, as the worker translates her utterance ‘It’s good’ into Spanish, as she seems to remember that the exchange up to this point has been conducted in that language.

(14) Female non-native speaker customer over 30 and female native speaker worker under 30:

C1: *¿Tienen Kleenex? ¿Los paquetitos chiquitos?*

‘Do you have Kleenex? The little packets?’

W1: *No entiendo qué... Lo que hay está en la isla cuatro.*

‘I don’t understand what... What we have is on aisle four.’

C2: *¿Al fondo?*

‘In the back?’

W2: *Sí, allí.*

‘Yes, over there.’

C3: *¿Todo eso a noventa-nueve centavos?*

‘All this for ninety-nine cents?’

W3: *Sí, todo eso a noventa-nueve centavos. **IT’S GOOD, HUH? Está bueno.***

‘Yes, all that for ninety-nine cents.’ ‘It’s good, huh? It’s good.’

(A.48)

The exchange in (15) presents the familiar pattern of greeting and offer of service from the worker, followed by her accommodation to the customer’s language choice, and closing with the familiar ‘thank you’ from the customer.

(15) Female non-native speaker customer over 30 and female native speaker worker over 30:

W1: **Hola.** [The customer turns around to face the worker.] **CAN I HELP YOU?**

‘Hello.’

‘Can I help you?’

C1: *Busco lentes, pero de puro vidrio.*

‘I’m looking for eyeglasses, but just plain glass ones.’

W2: *De cristal.*

‘Glass.’

C2: *Sí. Para un disfraz.*

‘Yes. For a costume.’

W3: *No, eso no tenemos.*

‘No, we don’t have those.’

C3: **Gracias.**

‘Thank you.’

(A.49)

I close this section with transcriptions of two more dialogues, selected for their length, a minimum of four or five turns per participant. As noted in the beginning of this paper, most of the conversations in the corpus were brief, with the customer and worker having just one or two turns each. One could hypothesize that if more of the encounters had been of longer duration, there might have been a higher occurrence of face work overall. However, that hypothesis is not supported in the two exchanges that follow. The one in (16) has just one face marker, in the customer’s first turn, and the one in (17) has two per participant, including the worker’s accommodation to the customer’s language choice.

(16) Female non-native speaker customer over 30 and female native speaker worker over 30:

C1: *Un café pequeño y una de esas galletas, por favor.*

‘A small coffee and one of those cookies, please.’

W1: *¿Cuál? ¿De sprinkles?*

‘Which one? With sprinkles?’

C2: *No, abajo.*

‘No, below.’

W2: *Oh, la de chocolate.*

‘Oh, a chocolate one.’

C3: *Sí.*

‘Yes.’

W3: *¿Y qué más?*

‘And what else?’

C4: *Un café pequeño.*

‘A small coffee.’

W4: *¿Cuánto azúcar?*

‘How many sugars?’

C5: *Uno.*

‘One.’

W5: *Un dólar.*

‘One dollar.’

(A.66)

(17) Female native speaker customer under 30 and female native speaker worker under 30:

W1: **YOU NEED HELP?**

C1: *Sí, ¿tiene estos en talla veintitrés?*

‘Yes, do you have these in size twenty-three?’

[W looks for but does not find the size requested.]

W2: **WAIT, *le pregunto a él para que te lo busque.***

‘Wait, I’ll ask him to go look for you.’

C2: *Bueno.*

‘Ok.’

[The customer waits for a while.]

C3: *¿Lo tienen?*

‘Do you have it?’

W3: *No, esa es la talla más pequeña.*

‘No, that’s the smallest size.’

C4: *Qué pena, **están tan lindos.** ¿No sabe si les va a llegar?*

‘What a shame, they’re so pretty. Do you know if you’re going to get some in?’

W4: *Eso no sé.*

‘That I don’t know.’

C5: ***Muchas gracias.***

‘Thank you very much.’

(H.61)

14.5 Discussion

The higher incidence of face markers in the workers' in comparison to the customers' speech seen in the present study has also been noted in many, if not most, other studies (e.g. Danblon et al. 2005; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005). It is not surprising, if we consider the power differential in U.S. service encounters, with the customer having the higher status.

A first glance at Table 1, reproduced below for convenience, might suggest that the non-native speaker fieldworkers (Fieldworkers D and A) were treated with less politeness than their native speaker counterparts (Fieldworkers H and R). On closer examination, however, we see that while this does appear to be the case for encounters between Fieldworker A and workers both under and over 30 years of age—who have a face work quotient of W.42 and W.38, respectively—it is less true in the case of Fieldworker D, whose encounters with younger workers yielded a quotient of W.49, as well as a corpus high of W.68 for her encounters with workers over 30, matching native speaker Fieldworker H. Nevertheless, in three out of four cells showing workers' interactions with non-native speaker customers, the quotient is indeed lower than the corresponding cells for native speaker customers, with differences from 11 to 25 points.

[Table 14.1 inserted about here—again; this same table appears twice]

One might be tempted to attribute the lower W face work quotients garnered by Fieldworker A to her own very low face work quotients: C.11 with younger workers and C.25 with older ones. However, aside from the fact that a much larger sample would be needed to establish a cause and effect relationship between the customer's and worker's lower face work

totals, Fieldworker D's high quotient—C.67—is still answered by the relatively low W.49 in her encounters with workers under 30 years of age.

14.6 Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The research questions were whether and how face work differs in service encounters between native and non-native speakers of Spanish, and between older and younger interlocutors. Although no pattern emerged in regard to either the customers' or workers' age, overall the workers did use less face work with the non-native speaker customers than they did with the native speakers. This is clear even though the actual dialogues sampled for this paper evidence little difference between the amount and type of face markers directed at native vs. non-native speaker customers. Based on this preliminary sample then, it could be concluded that non-native speakers may expect to receive less face work than their native speaker counterparts when speaking Spanish in service encounters with native speakers of that language in the U.S. However, more research needs to be done before this can be framed as an unequivocal conclusion and shared with, for example, language educators or others who prepare people for intercultural encounters.

To have more confidence in—or to disprove—the aforementioned conclusion, would require the incorporation of more variables. One of these is gender. A comparison of the corpus analyzed here with one in which both workers and customers were male should be done, followed by a comparison of both same-sex corpora to a set of encounters consisting of both male and female workers in interactions with both male and female customers.

An additional variable is the type of store. Recall that in Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu's (2001) study of the use of pronouns and terms of address in Turkish service encounters, it was

found that affluence of setting provoked more polite behavior. In the present study, all of the businesses visited—retail establishments easily accessible to the general public— could be described as neither very affluent nor extremely impoverished with respect to neighborhood and clientele. A comparison of business types on both extremes of the scale might show a difference in the amount of face work used on the part of both customer and worker.

Two geographic variables must be taken into account as well. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both workers and customers in New York City engage in less face work than is common in other parts of the United States. In fact, in other parts of the country, both urban and rural, New York City residents have a reputation of being at best indifferent, and at worst, downright rude. This popular stereotype—understandable if undeserved—comes from a culture that places a high value on negative face in interactions between strangers, and hence discourages interpersonal involvement in this context. This translates into what we see in this paper: a low use of face markers in service encounters. The present investigation should be compared to one that duplicates its parameters in a different U.S. region or regions. Such a study could be conducted both in large urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Houston, or Chicago, for example, as well as in smaller regions where there are Spanish speakers working in service industries.

The second geographic variable concerns the fact that within the United States, Spanish is a minority language, regardless of how many speakers it has. This situation “contributes to its status as an ingroup mode of communication, which in turn imposes restrictions on its employment. These restrictions include to whom Spanish is available for use” (Callahan 2009b: 77; see also Callahan 2004). A study with the same parameters as the present one, insofar as

having native and non-native speaker customers, but conducted in a Spanish-speaking country, would be of great interest for purposes of comparison.

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Notes

¹ Paralinguistic features such as tone and volume of voice, as well as smiles, gestures, and laughter, can also serve as face work, complementing or at times substituting speech. See also Pan (2000), for an interesting exposition of what happens when a language lacks the types of structures referred to as face markers.

² For an extensive bibliography on service encounters, see Callahan (2006; 2009b).

³ The service encounters that form the corpus for this study come exclusively from the New York City portion of the larger corpus. The businesses visited were all retail establishments easily accessible to the general public, and included pharmacies, convenience stores, grocery and

clothing stores. It was verified by observation that Spanish and English were both used to attend to customers in these businesses.

⁴ Despite the potential limitations, as I have stated in an earlier paper that reports on this corpus, “[t]he decision not to audiotape was made for three reasons. The first and most important reason is that I believe it is unethical to record people’s speech or image without their knowledge, and to do so with their prior consent would have made observation of spontaneous behavior impossible. Secondly, it would have been much more difficult to secure approval from my Institutional Review Board had the investigation involved electronic recording. And finally, audiotaping would have increased the cost of the investigation, funding for which barely covered the fieldworkers’ wages” (Callahan 2007: 20).

⁵ See, for example, Montgomery (1995).

⁶ Imposition is not universally recognized as a face-threatening act; see, for example, Sifianou (1992).

⁷ 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. As already noted, face markers appear in bold type. “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. The numbers were assigned in chronological order to each fieldworker's encounters. Finally, the letter and number in parentheses at the end of each encounter are codes corresponding to the fieldworker and encounter number in the original corpus.

⁸ In many varieties of Spanish, an overt subject pronoun carries pragmatic value. But in Caribbean Spanish, the macrodialect with the strongest presence in New York City, overt subject pronouns are used without pragmatic meaning. Otheguy et al. (2007) have shown an increase in subject pronoun usage by speakers of all varieties of Spanish the longer they live in New York City. Whether this was a factor in Fieldworker R's utterance of *ustedes* can only be speculated, but indications are that it was not: R is a speaker of a non-Caribbean variety, who at the time of data collection had lived in New York (and in the U.S.) less than five years.

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