



THE EXPRESSION OF THE INTERLOCUTOR'S IMAGE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF POLITENESS (BASED ON SPANISH LANGUAGE MATERIALS)

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Abstract

This article presents a linguopragmatic analysis of the formation of the interlocutor's image based on the principle of politeness in Spanish. The study uses examples of both formal and informal communication to demonstrate the influence of the interlocutor's social status, age, and gender, as well as social distance and communicative context, on politeness strategies. It examines how lexical units, grammatical constructions, discourse markers, phonetic devices, and pragmatic mitigators contribute to the expression of the interlocutor's image. The results show that positive and negative politeness strategies in Spanish communicative culture have distinct pragmatic features.

Keywords: Principle of politeness, interlocutor's image, Spanish language, tú-usted opposition, pragmatic mitigators, linguopragmatics.

Introduction

Modern pragmalinguistics analyzes the communicative process between speech participants on the basis of principles such as face-saving, the expression of respect, and the regulation of social distance. Within this process, the principle of politeness occupies a central position. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, as well as Leech's (1983) pragmatic maxims, provide the theoretical foundation for expressing respect toward the interlocutor through linguistic means.



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The construction of the interlocutor's image is particularly important in Spanish communication, as the communicative culture of this language is characterized by openness, sincerity, and a strong emphasis on social roles. For this reason, the degree and form of politeness in Spanish vary significantly depending on the interlocutor's social status and the type of communicative situation.

The interlocutor's image is one of the central categories of linguopragmatic analysis and refers to the cognitive model formed by the speaker during interaction concerning the interlocutor's identity, status, and the speaker's attitude toward them. In other words, the interlocutor's image reflects how the speaker conceptualizes the interlocutor and selects speech strategies based on this conceptualization. This perception directly influences the content, form, and choice of linguistic means in communication.

From a linguopragmatic perspective, the formation of the interlocutor's image is primarily determined by the following factors.

Social distance indicates the degree of closeness or unfamiliarity between interlocutors. The closer the distance, the more informal language, sincerity, shortened forms, and emotional units prevail. Conversely, as social distance increases, formal forms of address, modal mitigators, grammatical complexity, and caution become more prominent. In Spanish, this distinction is clearly manifested through the tú–usted system.

Another determining factor is the difference in social status, position, age, experience, or institutional role between the speaker and the interlocutor. Relations of superiority, equality, or subordination guide linguistic choices. For example, when addressing a person of higher status, Spanish frequently employs forms such as usted, señor/señora, and don/doña. These units represent the interlocutor as a respected subject occupying a higher position within the social hierarchy.

The formal or informal nature of communication also plays a significant role in shaping the interlocutor's image. In formal situations, dialogue is based on strict speech norms, cautious modality, and a greater reliance on negative politeness strategies. In informal situations, communication becomes freer, more emotional, and enriched with expressions of closeness, shaping the interlocutor's image as a friendly or intimate participant in interaction.



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Every linguistic community possesses its own historical, cultural, and social norms related to politeness. These norms determine how the interlocutor's image is constructed. In Spanish culture, where open, emotional, and sincere communication is highly valued, positive politeness strategies often prevail. However, in interactions with elderly people, teachers, service personnel, or official representatives, negative politeness strategies are strictly maintained.

In Spanish communication, the interlocutor's image is primarily determined through the choice of form of address: tú or usted. One of the key means aimed at strengthening closeness, sincerity, and solidarity is the use of tuteo (the tú form). This form is actively used in informal, friendly relationships and indicates minimal social distance between communicators.

For example:

Oye, tía, ¿vienes conmigo?

("Hey, girl/friend, are you coming with me?")

In this example, the use of the lexeme tía expresses familiarity toward a close friend of the same gender. The selected speech unit constructs the interlocutor's image as oriented toward intimate and friendly interaction, demonstrating an almost complete absence of social distance.

In Spanish communication, the use of friendly speech units plays an important pragmatic role in creating an atmosphere of closeness, informality, and mutual trust. Such units shape the interlocutor's image as a sincere and approachable person, fostering solidarity and reducing social distance. This can be observed in the following examples:

Hombre, no te preocupes.

("Hey, don't worry.")

The unit hombre functions as a familiar form of address and serves to gently alleviate the interlocutor's concern.

Mira, te explico...

("Look, I'll explain it to you...")

Here, the discourse marker mira attracts the interlocutor's attention and allows the conversation to continue in an informal tone.

Vale, vamos juntos.

("Alright, let's go together.")



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The unit vale is a commonly used expression of agreement in spoken Spanish and conveys a sense of friendly acceptance or support.

All of these speech units contribute to interpreting the interlocutor as a communicative image grounded in close and friendly relations.

An important component of positive politeness strategies consists of speech acts aimed at supporting the interlocutor's "positive face," that is, their need for appreciation, recognition, and approval. In Spanish, such strategies are realized through praising and encouraging the interlocutor's ideas, initiatives, or personal qualities. This form of interaction strengthens social closeness and enhances trust and solidarity.

For example:

Me encanta tu idea, es muy creativa.

("I love your idea; it's very creative.")

Through this expression, the speaker highly evaluates the interlocutor's idea, acknowledges their creativity, and reinforces their positive image. Such praise increases warmth, cooperation, and mutual respect in the communicative process. Negative politeness, by contrast, is a communicative strategy aimed at not restricting the interlocutor's freedom, avoiding imposition, maintaining respect, and establishing formal social distance. In Spanish, this strategy is expressed through the following means:

- *Ustedeo (usted, ustedes)*: formal grammatical forms used when addressing elderly people or individuals with higher social status;
- Mitigated modal constructions such as *¿Podría...?*, *¿Le importaría...?*, *¿Sería posible...?*, which express requests or demands in a cautious and formal manner;
- Formal forms of address such as *señor/señora* and *don/doña*, which emphasize the interlocutor's social status.

For example:

¿Podría usted explicarme el informe?

("Could you explain the report to me?")

This example emphasizes respect, distance, and caution in the interlocutor's image and illustrates the functioning of negative politeness strategies.

In constructing the interlocutor's image, Spanish employs a wide range of linguistic and paralinguistic means, which can be classified as lexical,



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grammatical, discursive, and phonetic. Spanish communicative culture plays a decisive role in shaping the interlocutor's image. Linguopragmatic research shows that cultural norms determine the interlocutor's social status, communicative distance, and degree of sincerity.

Emotional openness is characteristic of Spanish culture, where expressing emotions openly in communication with close friends and family is considered normal. This is particularly evident in the frequent use of discourse markers such as *oye*, *mira*, and *¿sabes?*, which convey closeness and sincerity.

Respect for social roles is maintained through the consistent use of *usted* in communication with elderly individuals or people in official positions, marking formality and distance. In contrast, sincere interaction with family and friends is characterized by the use of *tú* and minimal modal constructions, expressing equality and intimacy.

Spanish society exhibits a clearly defined social hierarchy, and forms of address and speech means reflect the interlocutor's status and role within interaction. Speech examples in Spanish demonstrate how the interlocutor's image is shaped across different communicative contexts—formal, informal, and neutral.

Thus, Spanish culture and linguopragmatic means play a crucial role in shaping the interlocutor's image. In formal, informal, or neutral contexts, lexical, grammatical, discursive, and phonetic elements work together to define the interlocutor's social status, communicative distance, emotional openness, and degree of sincerity. Real speech examples show that the interlocutor's image is effectively, constructively, and appropriately expressed through linguistic means. The principle of politeness in Spanish strongly influences the formation of the interlocutor's image. Forms of address, modal constructions, discourse markers, mitigators, and intonation are selected according to the level of distance and respect between participants. While Spanish communicative culture tends to favor positive politeness, negative politeness strategies are also highly required in formal situations. The results of the study demonstrate that the linguopragmatic formation of the interlocutor's image is grounded in the grammatical system of the language, cultural values, and the communicative context.



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