

Summary in Spanish

PERCEPCIONES DE LA (DES)CORTESÍA EN EL ESPAÑOL DE VENEZUELA: EL PAPEL DE LA EVALUACIÓN EN LA INTERACCIÓN

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Uno de los mayores problemas en las teorías de la cortesía es conocer lo que las personas de una misma cultura evalúan como comportamiento cortés y/o descortés. Se complica más el panorama cuando el alcance de la investigación se extiende al análisis crítico del discurso, donde la construcción de los valores culturales no puede verse desprovista de la carga histórica e ideológica (Eelen 2001; Bolívar 2001a, 2001b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). Desde esta última perspectiva es (casi) imposible estudiar la cortesía o la descortesía desprovista de la dinámica social en la que se construye y, todavía más, sin considerar los cambios en esta dinámica. Tampoco puede dejarse de lado el hecho de que las personas que participan en los corpus recogidos para las investigaciones, además de pertenecer al grupo escogido, forman parte de una red más amplia de relaciones en las que se construyen como personas y como integrantes de una sociedad. Suponemos entonces que, cuando hablamos de participación en la sociedad, las personas asumen diferentes roles que se entrecruzan, entran en conflicto, y cambian en el discurso concebido como práctica social (Fairclough 1992; Wodak & Meyer 2001).

En mi investigación sobre la cortesía en el español de Venezuela comencé por tratar de entender este fenómeno en el ámbito público, especialmente en la interacción política (Bolívar 1992, 1999a, 1999b). Aunque podría pensarse que el ámbito de la vida privada y el de la interacción política no tienen mucha relación, considero que es importante interconectar lo que las personas dicen y hacen en los diferentes contextos donde construyen su imagen individual y social, incluyendo el contexto político nacional en el que viven, particularmente cuando éste se caracteriza por una polarización que afecta la toma de decisiones y las selecciones lingüísticas (Bolívar, 2002). También porque la afiliación política lleva a las personas a escoger opciones que, desde una perspectiva normativa, pudieran ir en contra de lo que se considera “comportamiento político”, es decir, la conducta lingüística y no lingüística que los participantes evalúan como “apropiada” en la dinámica de la interacción social (Watts 2003: 21). Por otro lado, en la interacción entre familiares y amigos, en la que el tema de la política se evita en bien de la armonía, podría esperarse que las personas aludan a un comportamiento cortés “ideal” que está por encima de cualquier diferencia. Por esta razón, en este trabajo me concentro en el contexto de la vida familiar y de los amigos, como una primera aproximación para comprender cómo los venezolanos perciben el

comportamiento ‘político’ (*politic*) y (des)cortés en el ámbito privado. Luego discuto los comportamientos y los valores que los venezolanos evalúan como “apropiados” y muestro que los participantes en cuestionarios no pueden evitar hacer evaluaciones sobre el contexto en el que viven, incluyendo el político.

Un número cada vez mayor de estudiosos de la (des)cortesía en el mundo hispano ha hecho señalamientos sobre los problemas que se encuentran al aplicar el influyente modelo de Brown y Levinson (1987), entre ellos que la cortesía se ve desde la perspectiva del hablante solamente o que el concepto de cortesía “amenazante” no funciona de la misma manera en el mundo hispano (Bravo 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; Hernández Flores 2002; Briz 2004). Además de los problemas teóricos se han señalado los problemas metodológicos sobre la construcción de la imagen social en el sentido de (Goffman 1961, 1967). Hernández-Flores (2003) destaca cuatro posibilidades para acceder a los datos, que pueden ser complementarias: 1) los aportes de las ciencias sociales y humanas, 2) las evaluaciones de informantes nativos sobre los datos recogidos, 3) las inferencias a partir de corpus de conversaciones naturales, y 4) los tests de hábitos sociales. En relación con el uso de tests se debe destacar que, aparentemente, existen dos tendencias: Por un lado, como fuente de datos para el análisis (Márquez Raiter y Placencia 2005) y, por el otro, para elaborar premisas culturales en torno a la imagen y a los comportamientos sociales (Boretti 2001; Murillo Medrano 2003, 2004; Hernández-Flores 2002, 2003, 2004). La meta fundamental de estos tests es comparar los contenidos de la imagen social desde una perspectiva no etnocentrista en diferentes comunidades de habla hispana (Bravo y Briz 2004). Mi investigación, que bien puede ser una tercera forma de ver los tests, se basa en el supuesto de que, desde la perspectiva del análisis del discurso, los tests escritos son más que un instrumento para obtener o apoyar datos porque, si bien es cierto que ellos ofrecen una oportunidad para controlar ciertos aspectos de la investigación (estrategias, situaciones y roles), se trata también de un tipo de interacción en las que los encuestados representan verbalmente su experiencia del mundo en la forma de prácticas discursivas conocidas y reconocidas, a petición de alguien con ciertas características culturales y personales de su misma cultura, de manera que no se pueden evitar las evaluaciones, centrales en todo discurso (Labov 1972; Bolívar 1986, 2001c, 2005; Winter 1994; Hoey 2001; Hunston y Thompson 2001).

Una de las propuestas más recientes en el desarrollo de las teorías sobre la cortesía es la de Watts (1992, 2003), quien plantea la distinción entre lo que él denomina cortesía de *primer orden* y de *segundo orden* (científica) y argumenta que las teorías de la cortesía no pueden escapar de lo que los hablantes y/ o participantes en una interacción consideran cortés o descortés, según las evaluaciones que hagan dentro de su propia cultura y en la dinámica social. Como él dice: “Politeness and impoliteness- and of course their rough equivalents in other languages- are items referring to ways on which individuals use language socially, so the model of (im)politeness 2, can never be stripped of its evaluative clothing” (Watts 2003: 48). Desde mi perspectiva, el punto clave de la investigación reside en la forma en que se analizan las evaluaciones en la interacción social, tanto en el plano micro de conversaciones o debates, u otros, como en la dinámica cambiante a lo largo del tiempo (Bolívar 2001a, 2005a, 2005b).

Los estudios sobre la identidad cultural e imagen social venezolana desde otras disciplinas, como la psicología social, indican que es muy difícil categorizar a la sociedad venezolana porque las percepciones cambian a lo largo del tiempo e incluso en las regiones (Salazar 2001). En el campo de la cortesía, en estudios basados en *role play*

se sostiene que los venezolanos favorecen la camaradería y que pertenecen a una cultura de cortesía positiva (García 1999), pero también se ha mostrado en estudios más recientes que, comparados con los peruanos, los venezolanos no tienen una actitud deferente ante el jefe que los reprime porque valoran la simetría, y en este contexto pueden ser evaluados como agresivos (García 2004). Algunos estudios desde la psicología social destacan rasgos estereotipados de los venezolanos, negativos como la pasividad, la incompetencia, el autoritarismo, el pesimismo; positivos como la generosidad, el coraje y el igualitarismo (Montero 1984); u otros que se adjudican a la herencia cultural del mestizaje como alegres, inteligentes, afectuosos, flojos, desorganizados, derrochadores (Domínguez 1993).

Por otra parte, estudios realizados desde una perspectiva crítica del discurso político (Bolívar 2001a, 2003, 2005^a, 2005b, 2005c) muestran que la afiliación política influye en las evaluaciones de las personas puesto que, cuando se trata de defender o atacar un proyecto político, las personas reaccionan de manera diametralmente opuesta en relación con la (des)cortesía y la violencia. Aún así, existen algunas evidencias que indican que, a pesar de estar en bandos contrarios, los venezolanos defienden valores humanos iguales como la libertad, el respeto y la independencia (Bolívar et al. 2003; Erlich 2003).

El estudio que se presenta aquí es de tipo sociopragmático; se toman en cuenta las categorías sociales de sexo, edad y nivel de instrucción, y las categorías pragmáticas de situación, roles y actos discursivos. La categoría central es la evaluación concebida como la expresión lingüística de la visión de mundo, de opiniones, sentimientos y valores (Bolívar 1986, 1994, 2005c). Se analizan los datos desde la dimensión de la representación de la experiencia de los encuestados (en situaciones hipotéticas y roles simulados) y la interacción auténtica entre los participantes reales (entre encuestadores y encuestados). Participaron en el estudio 54 personas, 27 hombres y 27 mujeres, de distintas regiones de Venezuela, de tres grupos de edad, y de tres niveles de instrucción. Se emplea el mismo test de hábitos sociales de Hernández-Flores (2002), adaptado al español de Venezuela, por considerar que su diseño permite recoger información sobre los aspectos que nos interesan y, además, permite la lectura que le hemos dado como texto desde el análisis del discurso. En el test se evalúan comportamientos entre familiares y amigos y, al mismo tiempo, los roles asociados con esos comportamientos. El test contiene dos partes, la primera que solicita reacciones ante situaciones hipotéticas enfocadas en los actos discursivos con los amigos y con la familia; la segunda parte solicita directamente la opinión al encuestado o encuestada sobre lo que significa la cortesía, solicita ejemplos de situaciones corteses, indaga sobre la utilidad de la cortesía, y pide comentarios sobre el test.

Los resultados obtenidos indican que los venezolanos encuestados están conscientes de la imposición que colocan sobre las acciones de sus interlocutores, y dan evidencia de ello haciendo uso de la cortesía indirecta convencionalizada, de fórmulas de cortesía y de atenuadores. No obstante, se observan diferencias interesantes entre hombres y mujeres, según la situación (familiares o amigos) y el rol que asignan a sí mismos y a los otros en cada situación. La edad y el nivel de instrucción no parecen tener mayor influencia, aunque se ve una tendencia a una mayor expresión de afecto entre las personas del nivel de instrucción más bajo y deferencia hacia las de mayor edad.

Las peticiones se hacen en tres contextos diferentes: A una amiga (María) para que vaya a la tintorería a recoger la ropa, lo que implica el esfuerzo de salir a la calle; a

otra amiga (Rosa) a quien se le pide azúcar para el café en la cocina de su casa, lo que significa menor esfuerzo y, luego, a la madre, a quien se le pide que compre el periódico. En este último caso se supone que el esfuerzo no será tan grande porque la madre va saliendo, pero se presupone una relación familiar estrecha. Los resultados en el caso de la petición a las amigas muestran que con la amiga María predomina la petición indirecta convencionalizada (62%), un poco más en las mujeres (59%) que en los hombres (41%). Le sigue el uso de fórmulas de cortesía con un 48%, preferiblemente las mujeres (60%) más que los hombres (40%). De manera similar, hombres (51%) y mujeres (49%) emplean marcadores discursivos (*María, chama, ¡hola!, ¡coño!*). Ambos también justifican escasamente la petición (13%) y aluden muy poco a la posibilidad de María (21%). Aunque no se alude a la relación se emplea predominantemente la forma pronominal “tú”, (dos excepciones con “usted”). Se hace evidente que los hablantes están conscientes de la petición de un favor ya que las referencias explícitas a “favor” ocurren 44 veces (*hazme el favor, por favor, porfa*). Las respuestas de las mujeres resultan ser más elaboradas que las de los hombres: *¡María! ¡Hola! Necesito que me hagas un favor, yo no voy a poder pasar a recoger la ropa en la tintorería ¿será que tú me la puedes pasar a recogerla por favor? Gracias no sabes cuánto te lo agradezco* (ma2g) versus *Ay María, yo en la tintorería tengo una ropa. Te pido el favor de que me la recojas* (hc1g). Sin embargo, los hombres son más directos (65%) *María, hazme el favor y me recoges una ropa en la tintorería* (hb1y), *María, por favor, búscame la ropa en la tintorería* (hb3y). En el caso de la petición a Rosa encontramos que también predomina la petición indirecta (27%), un poco más en las mujeres (15%) que en los hombres (12%); enseguida viene la petición directa con fórmulas de cortesía (17%) en que los hombres muestran mayor empleo (59%) que las mujeres (17%). Las fórmulas de cortesía (*por favor, gracias, disculpa*) son usadas de manera similar por hombres y mujeres (50%). Tanto hombres como mujeres usan marcadores discursivos atenuantes (*Rosa, Rosita, mira, oye, coye, etc.*) en un total de 35%. Las fórmulas de cortesía se usan en un 78%, por igual hombres (50%) y mujeres (50%). Los hombres justifican la petición (77%), más que las mujeres (33%), quienes prefieren disculparse (*disculpa la molestia*). Como mitigadores se usan los diminutivos del nombre (*Rosita*) y de cantidad (*un poquito*).

En el caso de la madre, los resultados muestran que tanto los hombres como las mujeres prefieren las peticiones directas, y hacen uso de formas indirectas y de marcadores discursivos con valor atenuante, pero las mujeres tienden a usar más formas directas (51%) (*tráeme, cómprame*) y menos fórmulas de cortesía (41%) que los hombres (59%). Los hombres aluden mucho más al hecho de que la madre va a salir y no será tan grande el esfuerzo (70%); las mujeres justifican más no poder ir ellas mismas (14%). La compensación al esfuerzo es casi nula (1 vez hombres y 1 vez mujeres), pero la fórmula “*por favor*” se emplea regularmente (16 veces). Los hombres son más deferentes que las mujeres. Todos usan la forma pronominal “tú” con dos excepciones de “usted”. Como marcadores discursivos apelativos se usan *Vieja, viejita, mamá, mami, má, maá*, y como mitigador la palabra *gracias* (32 veces).

Los consejos se dan a un amigo, para que compre unos muebles rústicos, y a una hermana, para que se compre un carro marca Renault Clio. En ninguno de los dos casos se dan los nombres, como se hizo en las situaciones anteriores, y llama la atención que tanto hombres como mujeres inventan nombres para indicar su acercamiento con el amigo: *Carlos, Ángel, Luis, Starky*, y con la hermana: *Rosma, Alexandra, Estela, Brigitte*. Igualmente, se usan marcadores discursivos apelativos como *Mira José, Oye*

pana, *Caramba Ángel*, etc. Los consejos, en las dos situaciones, tienden hacerse con aseveraciones explícitas (45%) (*te aconsejo*, *te sugiero*, *te recomiendo*), seguido de aseveraciones implícitas (25%) (*te quedaría bien*, *me encanta el Renault*), y mandatos directos, 15% en el caso de los muebles (*cómprate esos muebles*), y 31% en el caso del carro, especialmente los hombres (62%). Es interesante notar que en el consejo sobre los muebles las mujeres ofrecen argumentos de calidad y estética, mientras que los hombres se refieren a la calidad y al precio.

Las invitaciones se hacen a los amigos y a la familia. Se observa una diferencia en el foco de la invitación porque con los amigos se usa primero la sugerencia (43%) (*¿por qué no se vienen?* y luego la voluntad (25%). En la familia se alude primero a la voluntad del anfitrión (57%) (*Voy a hacer una parrilla*) y luego a la sugerencia (23%) (*¿querrían acompañarnos?*). Con los amigos, la secuencia de actos más común sería *Voy a hacer una parrilla, vénganse, vamos a pasar un buen rato, traigan a alguien más, traigan algo*. En la familia la secuencia parece ser *Quiero hacer un almuerzo, los espero a todos, vengan para que pasemos un buen rato juntos*.

Los cumplidos son los actos no impositivos en la escala. Con los amigos que hicieron una cena, se usan las fórmulas de despedida (63%) y se dan cumplidos sobre la cena (41%). Las mujeres tienden a enfocarse en el momento agradable y los hombres en la comida. Al amigo Miguel que se compró un traje nuevo tanto hombres como mujeres le hacen cumplidos, pero los hombres hacen uno solo (40%), mientras las mujeres tienden a decir dos (52%) y tres (78%). Las mujeres resaltan el aspecto y la personalidad de Miguel mientras que los hombres se concentran en la calidad del traje y el precio.

En la segunda parte de la encuesta, relacionada con la opinión directa, los encuestados dan evidencia en su discurso de las distintas formas de representar la cortesía: *Una actitud*, *una contraseña*, *una entidad valiosa*. Todos declaran usar la cortesía con los amigos y declaran que la cortesía es diferente con la familia porque con esta última hay “confianza”. Los valores asociados con la cortesía difieren entre hombres y mujeres. Los primeros favorecen la educación (12) y luego la amabilidad, las normas y “ser atentos” (11) mientras que las mujeres colocan en el mismo nivel la amabilidad y la educación (7). Hay consenso en la necesidad de incluir los saludos, *gracias* y *por favor* en la interacción cotidiana.

La última pregunta, concebida para obtener sugerencias sobre el test como técnica de investigación, revela interesante información que, posiblemente, no estaba prevista porque fue concebida para los encuestados en su rol de informantes (*Si desea hacer algún comentario sobre esta encuesta, hágalo por favor*). Se encuentran escasas evaluaciones sobre el test como instrumento, pero los participantes hacen cumplidos a los investigadores por tratar el tema (*Felicitaciones por su interés en hacer reconocer la obligación que tiene el ser humano con la cortesía*, hc1g), se quejan contra la descortesía observada en los espacios públicos, recomiendan dar el test a *los altos miembros que dirigen este país* (mb2) y también hacen preguntas que indican sospecha de por qué se hace esta encuesta. Esta última parte nos indica que los encuestados van más allá de evaluar situaciones hipotéticas, porque no pueden evadir las evaluaciones sobre su propio contexto socio-cultural y político, que sólo pueden ser interpretadas si se conoce mejor el contexto social y político del momento de la encuesta.

Los resultados de la investigación en cuanto a las definiciones y actividades de cortesía nos orientan hacia algunos supuestos culturales sobre el comportamiento social que valdría la pena estudiar más a fondo. Los venezolanos y venezolanas,

aparentemente, desean ser vistos como personas educadas y amables que respetan las normas y fórmulas de cortesía. Las mujeres defienden su autonomía individual como respetuosas, que no imponen, que no molestan, que mantienen la unión y la armonía familiar, son halagadoras, buenas organizadoras, colaboradoras e igualitarias. Los hombres se presentan como educados, asertivos, conocedores de asuntos económicos, respetuosos de la madre, no impositivos con las amigas, igualitarios. Hombres y mujeres se afilian para defender a la familia. Con los amigos la casa está abierta a todos con mucha generosidad y afecto para compartir y divertirse, pero cuando se trata de la familia el foco es la confianza para conversar cosas de la familia y estar juntos. Aquí, hombres y mujeres ejercen el rol de controladores para asegurar la presencia de “todos”. Los casos que desde la teoría de Brown y Levinson pudieran considerarse como amenazantes a la imagen de las mujeres, de las hijas con respecto a la madre, de los hombres en el trato a las amigas o a la hermana, no parecen ser considerados autoritarios en este contexto sino parte de la confianza en que se basa la comunicación entre familiares y amigos. La imposición para que la familia se reúna (*quiero que vengan todos, vengan, no me vayan a embarcar*) se percibe positivamente porque se trata de preservar el grupo familiar. La aplicación del test de hábitos sociales resulta una valiosa herramienta para obtener datos sobre recursos lingüísticos y valores asociados con la cortesía como fenómeno cultural, pero también revela que la interacción entre los participantes y la investigadora no está exenta de ideología. Por lo tanto habría que tener en cuenta que las evaluaciones expresadas en estos tests pueden ser diferentes a las que se manifiestan en otras interacciones y contextos.

PERCEPTIONS OF (IM)POLITENESS IN VENEZUELAN SPANISH: THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN INTERACTION

Adriana Bolívar

1. Introduction¹

One of the biggest problems for (im)politeness theories derives from the fact that it is difficult to find out how people belonging to the same culture evaluate what is polite or impolite in everyday life, and ultimately politeness itself. Research becomes more difficult when the questions the analyst asks go beyond the boundaries of particular situations and take into account the social dynamics from a critical perspective in which the construction of cultural values must be viewed within the framework of history and ideology (Eelen 2001; Bolívar 2001a, 2001b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). From this perspective, it is almost impossible to approach (im)politeness without considering the social dynamics in which it is constructed and, what is more, without paying attention to the changes in its dynamics. We cannot ignore the fact that the people we focus on in our studies, who tend to be seen merely as the ones who provide the corpus for the investigation, form part of a wider network of relationships in which they construct themselves as persons and as members of a society. I assume then that when we talk about participation in social life, we mean people who take up different roles, which may intersect, come into conflict, and change in discourse. (Fairclough 1992; Wodak & Meyer 2001).

In my own research on (im)politeness in Venezuelan Spanish I started by trying to understand this phenomenon in the public sphere, mainly in political interaction (Bolívar 1992, 1999a, 1999b). Although it might be thought that everyday casual interaction and political interaction are not directly related, I believe it is important to interconnect what people say and do in the different contexts in which they construct their individual and social image, including the overall national political context in which they live, particularly when this is characterized by political polarization that affects their decision making and language choices (Bolívar 2002), and also because political affiliation makes people choose and evaluate options which, from a normative perspective, might go against what is considered “politic behavior”, that is, linguistic and non-linguistic behavior that the participants construct as being “appropriate” to the ongoing social interaction (Watts 2003: 21).

It may be ideally thought that in the family context, in which talking about politics is avoided for the sake of harmony, the participants will represent behavior and will express their views with reference to the social image they feel is “right”, that is, how they want to see themselves and be seen by others. For this reason, in this paper I

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focus on how Venezuelans perceive politeness in the context of family and friends as a first approximation to a better understanding of what is perceived as “politic behavior” (Watts 2003) in discourse. Then I discuss the values that participants attach to the meanings of appropriateness, and present evidence to confirm my claim that the individuals who act as participants in questionnaires cannot escape from making evaluations about the wider context in which they live, which includes the political space.

In the ongoing theoretical discussion on politeness research, the question of methods has arisen, particularly with respect to how to obtain data to describe the characteristics of the socio-cultural contexts in which (im)politeness is observed. Methods vary, and while the observation of natural interactions is desirable, different types of test are also used. Hernández-Flores (2003) presents a good survey of the most common research techniques preferred in pragmatics studies, among which four stand out: Information from human and social sciences regarding cultural premises in the communities under scrutiny (and so confirming or enhancing the analyses and interpretations of the data); confirmation for the data collected by the researcher through the opinions and impressions of native informants; metapragmatic information from the corpus itself, such as evaluations of the participants in family conversations about social behavior and cultural beliefs, and *questionnaires or tests of social habits*, which she describes as “forms, often written, which contain questions about social behavior of interest to the researcher” (Hernández-Flores 2003: 187). In this last respect it is worth mentioning that in politeness research in the Spanish world, there seem to exist two tendencies in the use of elicited data: On the one hand, data collection as role play, rating scales, verbal reports, discourse completion tests and multiple choice questionnaires, as explained by Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2005: 220-228), and on the other, “tests of social habits”, whose aim, rather than obtaining data for analysis, is mainly to describe and explain some of the cultural premises that provide contents for face (Boretti 2003; Murillo Medrano 2003, 2004; Hernández-Flores 2002, 2003, 2004; Bravo & Briz, 2004). Based on the assumption that tests or questionnaires and interviews are more than a research instrument to obtain data or confirm cultural assumptions (Bolívar & Grindsted 2005), I claim that tests of social habits are themselves an instance of social practice, in which the participants represent their experience in the form of accepted and recognized discourse practices, and reply to real people (the researchers) in their own culture, thus inevitably making evaluations about their society, which are fundamental in almost any type of discourse (Labov 1972; Bolívar 1986, 2001c, 2005; Winter 1994; Hoey 2001; Hunston & Thompson 2001). So, to the two tendencies in the use of tests we could add a third one, in which the test is seen as an instance of interaction in which the participants, apart from responding to the researchers’ questions, may also express their views of the world in terms of values and feelings.

In this paper I shall use a test of social habits in order to unveil the different types of interactions and meanings observable in it: First, the interactions represented in hypothetical situations which reflect the expectations of a group of speakers concerning what they believe it is appropriate to say in particular situations, that is, mainly “politic behavior”; second, the interaction between participants (informants) and researchers as seen in the responses given to opinion questions, which reinforce and expand the perceptions of “politic behavior” and politeness; and third, evaluations that bring out the links with the “real” world in the wider Venezuelan social context.

2. The theoretical framework

2.1. Politeness in social interaction

Several researchers in the Spanish speaking world have already pointed out theoretical as well as methodological problems derived from Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential model of politeness; for example, that politeness is mainly seen from the perspective of the speaker and that the notion of negative politeness, particularly the concept of face threatening acts, does not work in the same way in the Hispanic world. New interpretations are being offered to replace terms such as positive and negative politeness, for example *autonomy* and *affiliation*² (Fant 1989; Bravo 2001, 2002, 2004) or *codified* and *interpreted*³ politeness, in order to make room for the role of evaluation (Briz 2004). Also, changes in focus have been proposed, such as the search for "equilibrium" in the relations between speakers and hearers (Hernández-Flores 2002, 2003). My own efforts have focused on giving evaluation a central role in the description of spoken and written interaction and extending the scope of the analysis to the political context in which the struggle for social and cultural values is ideologically biased (Bolívar 2001a, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c), bearing in mind the fact that the combination of micro and macro analysis is important in order to obtain a wider view of the problem.

From the above it can be inferred that the description of (im)politeness that I favour is not Brown and Levinson's universalistic model. However, like others (Bravo 1999, 2000; Hernández-Flores 2002; Watts 2003), I agree that Goffman's concept of face (Goffman 1961, 1967) is relevant and necessary, particularly when the focus is on interaction that takes social theory into account (Watts 2003; Mills 2003). I also support the view that we have to distinguish between mitigating and enhancing politeness as suggested by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) because this distinction has already proved to be relevant in politeness studies in Spanish speaking communities (Abelda 2004; Hernández-Flores 2002, 2004; Briz 2004).

One of the most demanding proposals in politeness theory comes from Watts (1992, 2003), who distinguishes between *first-order politeness* and *second-order politeness* (*politeness 1* and *politeness 2* for Eelen 2001) in order to differentiate what people actually evaluate as "mutually shared forms of behavior" in a given culture from theoretical models constructed by scientists (Watts 2003: 30). One of the arguments for this distinction is that politeness 2 "can never be stripped of its evaluative clothing" (2003: 48), and so conceptualizations of politeness and impoliteness may be highly unstable because they are subject to change in social interaction.

I share the view that the focus of politeness research should be on politeness 1, and that in order to describe (im)politeness 1 we have to rely on what actual speakers

² *Autonomy* refers to the desire of the individual to see him/herself and to be seen as different from the group while *affiliation* refers to identification with the group (Bravo 1998: 336; also in this volume). I have mainly used the concept of *affiliation* in the political sense, but I believe it may be applicable to other contexts.

³ In Briz's terms, *codified* politeness is equivalent to conventional politeness and *interpreted* politeness is behavior evaluated in ongoing interaction, which could be considered neutral, polite or impolite.

say and do in interaction where behaviors are evaluated from the standpoint of degrees of appropriateness. If we embrace Watts's proposal (1992, 2003), we can evaluate social practices on a scale that accounts for *politic behaviour*, that is, what speakers take as acceptable behaviour; *politeness*, namely what is perceived as an addition to politic behavior, and subject to positive or negative evaluations; and *impoliteness*, interpreted as a violation of politic behavior, and open to negative evaluations (Watts 2003: 30).

We must also include *overpoliteness* to explain exaggerated use of politeness (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004: 49), and *self-facework* (Hernández-Flores 2003: 59), also called *self-politeness* (Boretti 2000; Haverkate 2001; Chen 2001), to refer to positive evaluations that enhance the speaker's face. While the literature discussing these terms differs (for example, Briz 2004 relates excess of autonomy with impoliteness and excess of affiliation with some type of violation), Watts's explanation serves as a general framework to understand perceptions of (im)politeness centered on the concept of "consideration" for others in a given culture.

In social interaction, evaluations regarding (im)politeness are seen mainly as the responsibility of the participants in their role of listeners (Eelen 2001: 119), and it seems to be agreed that evaluations of (im)politeness can be measured by the number of mitigators, as well as by their force, in the situational context (Briz 2004). Briz suggests that evaluations form part of a process which in an initial stage is mental, in the experiential sense, and then social when it acquires a social rank during the interaction (Briz 2004: 79). This is similar in some respects to what I have termed *evaluations in language* (knowledge of the world and of the linguistic resources available) and *evaluations in text* (the actual use of evaluative language in the flow of the discourse and its function in shaping text structure) (Bolívar 1986, 1994, 2005a, 2005b). In this paper, we shall assume that evaluations are made both by speakers and hearers in the course of an interaction, either spoken or written, because the speaker/writer makes evaluations based on presuppositions concerning the state of knowledge and system of evaluation of the hearer/reader, and the hearer/reader responds with evaluations about the hearer or writer's position or views of the world.

2.2. Venezuelans' perceptions of themselves

Studies in other disciplines such as social psychology have shown that it is very difficult to categorize Venezuelans as a cultural group because, as Salazar observes (2001: 116), perceptions change with time and even in different regions of the country. Within social psychology, three main perspectives have been favoured in order to explain the perceptions of national identity and social image: Intercultural studies, stereotypical beliefs on cultural identity, and research on social identity.

In trans-cultural studies carried out in the context of transnational corporations, Venezuelans have been reported as the lowest in individualism and as one of the highest in distance from power. In Salazar's view this means that Venezuelans belong to a paternalistic society where people depend on the Organization in order to obtain benefits, and so they easily accept that "the boss is the boss" (Salazar 2001: 119). In a study by Triandis et al. (1993), Venezuelans were classified as belonging to a collectivist culture (where collectivist is equated to *familism*), and were assigned very low rates in independence and high rates in sociability. This view of collectivism based on the permanence of family bonds was confirmed later by Ephraim (1996). Studies

focusing on cultural values have indicated that Venezuelans give great importance to *love, happiness* and the *security* of the family (Cadenas 1976).

As for self-perceptions of the national image, several studies have called attention to the fact that Venezuelans seem to see themselves and their country very negatively (Montero 1984; Salazar 1988). Based on research done in the seventies and eighties, with representative samples of residents in Caracas, Salazar considered that Venezuelans perceived themselves as *lazy* and *irresponsible* but at the same time as *hospitable, cheerful* and “*simpáticos*” (*nice* or *easy going*) (Salazar 2001: 123). In an investigation which covered publications from the end of the XIXth century written by Venezuelan pioneers in the field of social sciences, Montero (1984) analyzed self-perceptions and authors’ perceptions of the Venezuelan social image and found negative features, which she described as *passiveness, incompetence, authoritarianism, pessimistic fatalism, emotivity, violence, destruction instinct* and *lack of a sense of history*; and positive features, namely *generosity, courage, and equalitarianism*. In a study carried out with Venezuelans living in France, Banchs (1992) found that the positive qualities mentioned more often were *nice* (46%), *affectionate* (35%), *generous* (28%) and *kind* (24%), while the defects mentioned were *irresponsible* (43%), *lazy* (37%), *disorganized* (35%), and *aggressive* (28%).

In research focused on the construction of work-related stereotypical beliefs in an intercultural setting, it has been found that Venezuelans perceive themselves as *affectionate, family minded* and *disorganized*, but *ingenious* (‘*vivos*’) because they can solve things at the very last minute. These perceptions are confirmed by their colleagues from another culture (Danes), who add other features to the negative picture such as *no sense of time* and a hierarchical view of relations at work (Bolívar & Grindsted 2000, 2005).

There have been several attempts at explaining why Venezuelans tend to perceive themselves negatively, and how these features are reinforced through school textbooks (Quintero 1993) and through historical stereotypes that refer back to the Spanish conquerors, the Amerindians, and the Africans that were originally brought as slaves in colonial times (Banchs 1992). Many believe that the concept of “*mestizaje*” (a sort of *melting pot* of the “Whites”, the “Blacks” and the “Indians”) explains Venezuelans’ self-perceptions: Thus, positive features may be associated with the Spanish and African origin (*cheerful*) or the combination of Spanish and Amerindian ancestors (*intelligent*), or may derive from the indigenous peoples (*affectionate* and *generous*); on the other hand, negative features may be associated with the natives (*lazy*), Africans (*disorganized*) or the Spaniards (*spendthrift, disrespectful, violent*) (Domínguez 1993).

In pragmatic studies and politeness research, Venezuelans have received attention with respect to how, in role play situations, they show disagreement, make and respond to invitations, make and respond to reprimands, exhibit camaraderie and solidarity at service-encounters (García 1988, 1991, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004). As a result, within Brown and Levinson’s framework, Venezuelans may apparently be seen as belonging to a positive politeness culture (García 1999), although there are reasons to believe that, compared with other cultures, they may be perceived as aggressive. In García’s view (2004), this is probably due to the fact that Venezuelans seem to value symmetry in all contexts⁴.

⁴ It can be claimed that Venezuelans cannot be classed as inherently “aggressive” because what is perceived by members of other cultures as an imposition or a lack of consideration has its origins in the

Research carried out in the public space has shown that, in a context of political polarization, Venezuelans defend opposing identities and social images in regard to what they consider accepted behaviour and tolerable degrees of aggression (Bolívar 2001b, 2003, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b). The overall picture in the public sphere seems to be that of a country struggling over two diametrically opposed systems of evaluation, what one half accepts and perceives as impolite, the other sees as polite or at least “politic” and acceptable because the final social and political aim justifies the non-politic behaviour. However, when both sides are examined from the perspective of what they share, values such as *freedom*, *respect* and *independence* are favoured in equal measure (Bolívar et al. 2003; Erlich 2003).

All these studies only provide a glimpse of the internal forces at work in the social dynamics where decisions are made concerning the definition of the self and the Venezuelan social world. For this reason, and given the complexity of Venezuelan society, it would be advisable to take into account the views of social psychologists who claim that we cannot talk about the existence of one national identity applicable to all Venezuelans (Salazar 2001: 122), which in turn means that we need to be cautious when discussing the general characteristics of the socio-cultural context.

3. The method

Having decided to use a test of social habits in order to read the interactions and the evaluations made by a group of Venezuelans⁵, we then proceeded to apply the test from a socio-pragmatic perspective. We took into account social variables (sex, age, and level of instruction) as well as pragmatic variables (situations, roles, and the discourse acts of requests, advice, invitations and compliments)⁶.

3.1. *The test of social habits*

The test used in the study was taken from Hernández-Flores (2002), which she adapted from Sifianou’s investigation on English and Greek (1992). No alterations were made to the test in relation to structure and content, except for adjustments in language to adapt it to Venezuelan Spanish. The test consisted of two main parts. The first contained nine hypothetical situations which expected the participants to adopt the roles of speakers either to friends (female and male) or to family members (mother, sister). The situations forced them to speak in the role of daughters, sons or friends. The second part contained six questions in which the participants were asked 1) to define politeness and give their views on its meaning; 2) provide examples of polite behavior; 3) give reasons why politeness is used; 4) discuss the use of politeness with the family; 5) discuss the uses of politeness with friends, and 6) give their opinions about the test itself.

assumption that this is an “equalitarian” country (“we are equals” so “we can afford to be direct and to the point”) (personal communication with Carmen García). Also, notice that in Banchs (1992), *aggressiveness* gets the lowest rate (28%), and that *passiveness* is one of the highest features detected by Montero (1984).

⁵ The tests were administered in 2005, during the government of President Hugo Chávez.

⁶ We assume that, in terms of degrees of imposition, requests are the most imposing because the hearer has to perform an action; advice is also imposing but the hearer has a choice; invitations are face flattering but may generate some discomfort, and compliments are non-imposing. See Haverkate (1979).

3.2. The evaluations presupposed in the test

One of the main requirements in studies on evaluation is to find out what is being evaluated (Bolívar 2001c; Hunston & Thompson 2001). In my reading of the test of *social habits*, I assumed that evaluations by the participants would be made in accordance with the expectations of the researcher who elaborated it, as indicated in the second column of table 1 below:

The structure of the test	What is evaluated
Part I: hypothetical situations	a) the interlocutor's roles b) the relation between Speaker and Interlocutor c) the language choices "appropriate" for the situation
Part II: opinion questions on politeness (questions 1 to 5)	a) the definition of politeness b) examples of polite behavior c) the function of politeness in social interaction
Part II: opinion question on the test itself (question 6)	a) the researcher's role in the test b) the research instrument (as questionnaire)

Table 1: The types of evaluations presupposed in the test

3.3. The data and procedures

The data for the analysis came from the answers of 54 persons, 27 women and 27 men of different age groups and levels of instruction. The participants were mostly from the Metropolitan area of Caracas (the capital and surrounding districts) and belonged to a wide range of professions and discourse communities, including students, housewives, lecturers, school teachers, accountants, administrators, salespersons, teachers, cooks, workers, drivers, seamstresses and secretaries. The tests were given personally to each participant. They were asked to write exactly what they would say in a "normal" interaction⁷. The code used indicated their sex (m: woman; h: man), age (a: between 18-30; b: between 31-50; c: between 61-80), and level of instruction (1: primary; 2: secondary; 3: university or technical). The letters g, y, and d were added in the code to keep a record of the name of the person responsible for the test. This proved very useful at the moment of interpreting the data (examples: m1ag, hc2d).

⁷ The tests were administered by three graduate students who contacted 18 persons each. They had to find three groups of women and three of men with the features 1, 2, 3 and a, b, c.

4. The responses in hypothetical situations

The overall results after studying the hypothetical situations in part I, indicated that Venezuelans are aware of the degrees of imposition on the other and give evidence of this by making use of conventionalized politeness (indirectness and politeness formulas) as well as mitigators such as diminutives and signals of informality (*porfa* instead of *por favor*). However, there are interesting differences with respect to gender and the type of relation with the friends and the family. Age and level of instruction do not seem to impinge on the results but it may be asserted that the participants in the younger group with only primary instruction appeared to be more affectionate and that women tended to give more elaborate responses.

4.1. Request to a friend named María

The reply to the question in the test⁸ showed that men and women made similar use of conventional politeness with indirect requests (62%), although men showed a slight tendency to be more direct than women (65%) and made less use of conventional politeness formulas (40%).

(1) María **¿me puedes hacer el favor** de recogerme la ropa? (mb1d)
María, can you do me the favour of picking up my laundry?

(2) **¿podrás hacerme el favor** de recoger mi ropa en la tintorería? (hc3y)
Will you do me the favour of picking up my clothes from the laundry?

Both women and men used initiators in a similar manner (men: 51%, women: 49%) as seen in vocatives, *María*; attention getters, *Oye amor* ('Hey love!'); greetings, *Hola María* (*Hello María*), politeness formulas: *Por favor* (*Please*); exclamations: *¡Ay María!* Neither women nor men alluded directly to the relation with the friend but in making contact they strongly tended to use the name (women use *María* 20 times and men 18, accompanied with expressions that indicate a close relation, *chama* (*pal*) *amor* (*love*), *Linda* (*cute*), *amiga* (*friend*). They also use the pronominal form *tú* (only 2 instances of *usted* were found). Women and men rarely offered to compensate for the effort they were imposing on the friend; instead they gave enough evidence to show they were asking a favour (44 references to *favor*) and found it necessary to make it explicit, either using the magic formula *Por favor* (women: 8, men: 12), (do me *the favour* (women: 8, men: 6) or *un favor* (*a favour*) (women: 2, men: 4), or using more informal equivalents such as (*hacer*) *la segunda* (*to give a hand*), *por fa* (*Please!*), *un favorzote* (*a huge favour*).

(3) Ay María, **¿me haces la segunda?** ¿me puedes recoger la ropa, **porfa?** ¡un millón de gracias! (mc1d)
Oh María, can you give me a hand? Can you pick up my clothes? Please!! !thanks a million!

⁸ The situation was *You ask your friend María, who lives near the laundry, to pick up some clothes for you. Write exactly what you would say (my translation).*

(4) Coye, María, hazme **la segunda** de buscarme la ropa en la tintorería, por favor (ha2d)

Listen, María, give me a hand and get my clothes from the laundry, please

(5) Ay María, yo en la tintorería tengo una ropa. **Te pido el favor** de que me la recojas. **Gracias** (hc1g)

Oh María, I have some clothes at the laundry. I ask you the favour to get them for me. Thanks.

The participants also gave evidence that the tone of voice is important and showed it by putting exclamation marks in their written responses. While men were more direct and preferred more imperatives (65%) than women (35%), they made use of supporting moves to mitigate the imposition.

(7) **Chama**, hazme un favor, recógeme la ropa **de la tintorería, por favor** (hc3g)

Pal, do me a favour, pick up my clothes from the laundry, please

(8) **María**, un favorzote. Retira por mí esta ropa **de la tintorería y yo paso por tu casa esta noche a buscarla**. (hb3d)

María, a huge favour. Get the clothes for me at the laundry and I will go over to your place for them tonight

As seen in the examples above, the imposition that the favor implies is mitigated in most cases, so we can say that what is perceived as politic behavior is either indirectness or directness mitigated by politeness formulas such as *por favor* and *gracias(thanks)* (6 times). The rare justification on the part of the speaker for not doing it herself (4 cases) or himself (3 cases) may show that this is a type of favor that can be asked to friends without much explanation. However, women tended to give more elaborate answers, as in *¡María! ¡Hola! Necesito que me hagas un favor, yo no voy a poder pasar a recoger la ropa en la tintorería ¿será posible que tú me la puedas pasar a recogerla por favor? Gracias no sabes cuánto te lo agradezco* (ma2g) ('*María, Hello! I need you to do me a big favour, I will not be able to get my clothes from the laundry, will it be possible for you to go for them, please? Thanks, you don't know how much I appreciate it*') which could be considered a case of addition to politic behaviour bordering on overpoliteness.

4.2. Request to another friend (Rosa, in the kitchen)

In this situation, the participants had to ask their friend for some sugar⁹ for their coffee, which required less effort on the part of the friend than in María's case. Here, we found that indirect conventional politeness in interrogative form was dominant (53%), being used slightly more by women (56%) than men (44%). Women tended to apologize more often.

(9) Rosa, ¿**me puedes traer** un poco de azúcar por favor? (mb3g)

⁹ The situation was: *You are having coffee at your friend Rosa's house and, as she is on her way to the kitchen, you ask her to bring you some sugar* (my translation).

Rosa, can you bring me some sugar please?

(10) Rosa, **podrías traerme** un poco de azúcar? ¡por favor! Y disculpa la molestia (mb1y)

Rosa, could you bring me a little sugar, please! And sorry to bother you

The second most frequent use was direct politeness combined with politeness formulas (33%), mainly in the case of men (59%), who seem to be more direct but use justifications far more (77%) than women, although in some cases the justification may sound like a complaint (*the coffee needs sugar, it is too bitter for my taste, I like it sweeter*).

(11) El café **está un poco amargo** ¿me traes azúcar? Por favor (ha2d)

The coffee is a little bitter, can you bring sugar? Please

(12) Por favor ¿podrás traerme un poquito de azúcar? Es que **le falta un poco** para mi gusto (hb2d)

Please, will you bring me a little bit of sugar? It needs some more for my taste

(13) Rosa, por favor, me puedes traer un poquito de azúcar, ya que **está un poco desabrido** (hc2y)

Rosa, please, can you bring me a little sugar, this is a bit tasteless

(14) Rosa podrás echármele dos cucharaditas de azúcar al café. Lo que pasa es que **está muy fuerte**. Gracias (ha2y)

Rosa, can you put two spoonfuls of sugar to the coffee. The thing is that it is too strong. Thanks

(15) Ay Rosa por favor tráeme un poco más de azúcar que **a mí me gusta más dulce**. Gracias (ha2g)

Oh Rosa, please bring me a little more sugar cause I like it sweeter, thanks

It might be argued that, on occasions, both women and men may threaten the “positive face” of the friend by calling attention to the bad taste of the coffee. They may also threaten their own face when criticizing the other, but apparently this can be taken as a joke (Rosa **no seas pichirre**, tráeme azúcar que **el café está como mi suegra amarga** ‘Rosa don’t be miser, bring me sugar, the coffee is as bitter as my mother-in-law’ (hb3y)). When women focus on the coffee they mitigate with compliments and focus on themselves rather than on the friend.

(16) **Muy bueno tu café**, pero **para mí le falta azúcar**, para aprovechar tu viaje a la cocina, tráeme un poquito (ma1d)

Your coffee is very good, but for me it needs more sugar, as you are on the way to the kitchen, bring me a little

(17) Rosa **está muy sabroso el café**, pero me regalarías un poco de azúcar (ma3y)

Rosa, your coffee is very nice, but would you give me some more sugar

Both men and women tend to refer to the favor (33 times) less than in María's situation. The tendency to use the friend's name remains (women: 17, men: 14), and diminutives are used by both -- *Rosita!* (4 times), and also *un poquito* (a little) (17 times).

4.3. Request to the mother

The participants were requested to ask their mother to buy the newspaper for them¹⁰. In this case there was a change of attitude because both women and men preferred direct requests (women, 51% and men, 49%).

(18) **cómprame el periódico** que lo necesito (mc3g)
Buy me the newspaper that I need it

(19) **hazme el favor de comprarme** el periódico (mc1y)
Do me the favour of buying me the newspaper

(20) **mamá aprovecha y cómprame el periódico, por favor** (ha3d)
Mom as you are going out buy me the newspaper, please

(21) **mamá por favor cómprame el periódico ya que vas a pasar por el kiosko** (hb3y)
Mom please buy me the newspaper as you are going past the kiosk

There is a similar use of indirectness and discourse markers but women tend to use fewer politeness formulae than men (women: 41%, men: 59%). The preferred pronominal form of address is *tú* (only 2 men use *usted*). With only two exceptions, neither men nor women thought it necessary to compensate for the effort but used *por favor* regularly (16 times each). Men were more deferential than women, alluding more to the fact that the mother is going out so that the request will not be seen as a great effort. They all used vocatives such as *Viejita*, *mami*, *mamá* (the women), or *vieja*, *mama mai*, *maá*, *madre* (the men). They all took extreme care to express their thanks to the mother (32 times), which shows that thanking the mother is perceived as more important than thanking friends. The results show that, apparently, women assume that they can be more direct with their mother on account of their mother- daughter relation and gender solidarity. Men, however, show more deference and interest in not imposing.

5. Giving advice

Two situations were compared, advice to a friend and to a sister who were given no name in the test. The most important finding here was that the participants in both cases, in general, tended to make explicit assertions. Also, they gave evidence of their close relationship with the friend or sister by inventing names - women selected *Carlos*, *Ángel*, *Luis*, and men gave life to *Luis*, *Starky*, *Ángel*, *José* - and also by adding

¹⁰ The situation was: *Your mother is going out for bread and you take advantage of this and ask her to buy the newspaper for you.* (my translation)

discourse markers with attention getters plus name or forms of address - *Mira José, Mira pana (look José, look partner), Oye pana (Hey partner), Caramba Angel, Caray (Dear Lord)* - whose function was to mitigate the imposition. Differences between women and men with respect to their roles and thematic focus of the advice were also noticeable.

5.1. *Advice to a friend*

In this case¹¹ both women and men made explicit assertions more often (45%) (*te aconsejo 'I advise you', te sugiero 'I suggest', te recomiendo 'I recommend', te aconsejaría 'I would advise you'*, followed by implicit assertions (*te quedarían bien 'they would look good'* - mainly women (69%), but both used suggestions in a similar manner (*¿por que no...? 'why don't you...?'*).

(22) **Yo te recomiendo que compres** los muebles rústicos porque son más duraderos (hb1g)

I recommend that you buy the country style furniture because they last longer

(23): **Yo te aconsejo que te compres** unos muebles tipo country, ya que te quedarían bien en tu casa nueva (haly)

I advise you to buy furniture that is country style since they would look good in your new house

(24) ¡Oye que casa tan bonita! Aquí **quedarían perfectos esos muebles** que vimos en Hogar Rústico (mb3g).

Wow, what a lovely house! This is the right place for the furniture we saw at Country Home

Also, offers for help were found, but while women offered their help and company to look for the right furniture, men were willing to find information about where to get them. The thematic focus of the advice also differed: Quality and aesthetics were more important for women, while quality and good price were relevant for men.

5.2. *Advice to a sister*

The replies to the question in the test¹² indicated that men made more explicit assertions (61%) and provided more directives (62%) than women, who preferred implicit assertions (58%) and suggestions (80%). Both women and men provided names for the sister (*Rosma, Alexandra, Estela, Brigitte*), and also used forms of address that gave account of their relationship (*hermana, hermanita 'sister''sis'*). As for the arguments, women focused more often on quality and personality, and men on comfort and price.

¹¹ The situation was: *A good (male) friend of yours has to buy some furniture for his new house. You think that some country style furniture would be suitable and want to advise your friend to buy some.*(my translation)

¹² The situation was: *Your sister needs to buy a car and you like Renault Clio very much for her. You decide to advise her to buy it* (my translation)

(26) **Cómprate mejor un Clio que es pequeño y cómodo** para ti (hb2d)
You'd better buy a Clio, it is small and comfortable

(27) Mira, el carro perfecto para ti es el Renault, **va muy bien con tu modo de ser** (mb3g)
Look, the perfect car for you is the Renault, it goes very well with your personality

Women were careful not to invade the sister's space, as evidenced by expressions such as "you know better", "this is my opinion but do as you prefer", and also replies that were not considered valid (3) but which showed the respect for the sister's own opinion: "I would not advise her".

6. Invitations

Two types of invitations were compared¹³: One to friends to a barbecue, and the other to the family to have lunch. A difference was observed in that with friends there were more explicit assertions (43%) (*los invito 'I invite you'*) followed by expressions of willingness of the host (25%) (*estoy organizando una parrilla en mi casa 'I am organizing a barbecue at home'*), especially from women (62%). In the family lunch expressions of willingness went up to 57% with similar frequency in men (53%) and women (47%).

(28) **Voy a preparar una parrilla este fin de semana**, me gustaría compartirla con ustedes, están invitados, cuento con ustedes (mb2d)

I am going to have a barbecue this week-end, I would like to share it with you, you are invited, I am counting on you

Direct invitations were also present (23%), especially from men (58%). Mention of the wishes of the guests were rare, but in contrast plenty of references to the food appeared.

(29) Tengo una parrilla el fin de semana y estás invitado, te puedes traer una botellita de vino (hc3g)

I am having a barbecue this week-end and you are invited, you can bring a bottle of wine

(30) Coño, pana, tengo una parrilla en la casa, vamos para que me acompañen y nos comamos una carnita asada (hc2d)

Come on buddy, I am having a barbecue at home, come and join me and we can have a good grill

It is interesting that drinks were often mentioned in the barbecue (beer, wine, "caña" 'booze'), but in the lunch only one man refers to beer, in relation to playing

¹³ The situations were: *To friends: You have the idea of organizing a barbecue this weekend so you call two good friends of yours to invite them to come. To the family: You decide to organize a family lunch this week end in your place and you call the family for them to come.*(my translation)

dominos and having a “cruzado”¹⁴, which might suggest that Venezuelans perceive that there is more control on drinking in the family context than in the company of friends.

7. Compliments

Two situations were compared, the compliments to friends after a dinner party and to a male friend who had bought a new suit¹⁵. It was found that farewell formulas (*buenas noches*, *chao* ‘good night’bye’) were used (67%) and compliments on the supper (41%). Women tended to focus on the pleasant time spent together (64%) and men on the good food (55%).

(31)!Qué buena estuvo la cena! Gracias por acordarse de mí. La próxima invito yo (ma1d)

What a good supper! Thanks for thinking of me. Next time I invite

(32) Oye, la cena estuvo exquisita, me vas a dar la receta, para dársela a mi novia. Chao, nos vemos. Gracias por invitarme (ha3g)

Listen, the supper was gorgeous, you must give me the recipe to give it to my girlfriend. Bye, see you. Thanks for inviting me.

Women also tended to thank slightly more (54%) than men (46%) but both perceived thanking as important. They also expressed their wish to repeat the event (women 59%, men, 41%), so reciprocity was stressed (*next time at my place*).

Having to leave was seen as an interruption of the pleasant moment, hence the justifications (women, 45%, men, 54%).

On the compliments to Miguel for his new suit, it was found that both men and women paid compliments but while men tended to give only one (40%), women made two (52%) and three or more in a sequence (78%), focusing on Miguel’s appearance and style.

(33) Oye, te han dicho que te ves guapísimo con ese traje, pues te queda estupendo, creo que hoy serás el centro de atracción (ma2g)

Hey, have they told you that you look very handsome in that suit, well it suits you perfectly, I think you will be the centre of attention today

8. Responses to opinion answers: Interacting with the researchers

In the second part of the test, the participants gave their opinion on what politeness meant to them. They gave a wide variety of words as synonymous with politeness: Education, respect, kindness, trust, sincerity, loyalty, sweetness, principles, consideration, affection, hypocrisy, good manners, good relations, etc., but the tendency

¹⁴ A “cruzado” is a kind of soup which has chicken and a mixture of meats, or fish and a mixture of meats, which some families prepare on special occasions in some regions of the country.

¹⁵ The questions were: 1) After a very pleasant dinner at some friends’ house, you are about to leave and decide to say good bye; 2) Your friend Miguel has bought himself a new suit that you like very much and so you decide you want to tell him this.

was for women to associate it with *kindness* (“*amabilidad*”) and *education* (at the same level), while men felt more inclined for *education*, *kindness* and *norms*, thus proving to be more conventional than women in some respects (also evidenced by their need to act as *Caballeros* ‘*gentlemen*’). There is consensus in that *Thank you* and *Please* are seen as obligatory in everyday interaction, and only women thought politeness meant hypocrisy (3 cases).

As for the value and functions given to politeness, besides general behaviors such as giving up your seat to an old lady and/or helping pregnant women, etc., we found basically three meanings for appropriate politeness behaviour:

As an expected social attitude: *La forma como tratar a las personas, que debe ser muy agradable* ‘The way to treat people, which must be agreeable’ (ma1d); *Ser agradable, amable, cariñosa con las demás personas* ‘be agreeable, kind, affectionate with other people’ (mc1y)

As a password for social success: *Lo esencial de una persona. Una persona cortés tiene las puertas abiertas donde sea* ‘The essential thing in a person. A polite person has the doors open anywhere’ (ma2d)

As an entity you take with you: *Para mí la cortesía es lo primero que uno tiene que llevar* ‘To me politeness is the first thing you have to take with you’ (mc2g); *Algo necesario para las buenas relaciones humanas* ‘Something necessary for good human relations’ (hc3y)

One woman in the lower level of instruction said twice that politeness was good for nothing and out of fashion: *En mi opinión no sirve para nada* ‘in my opinion it is good for nothing’ (mb1d), *eso ya no se usa* ‘that is out of use’ (mb1d).

In the explanations of why they used politeness, the replies of women focused on the self (*to feel good, to generate trust, to communicate better*), the others (*to please others, to reach them, for them to be polite with me*), and the social world (*a habit you learn*). Similarly, men focused on themselves (*to give a good impression, to have better relations, to be a better citizen*), the others (*to please others, to reach harmony, or show them I am educated*), and the world (*a tradition, a social value, a sign of being human*).

As for the differences between politeness with friends and family, the participants agreed they behave politely with their friends. This means that the direct and explicit assertions in the case of requests, advice and invitations should not be considered to be “threatening” or damaging to the interlocutor’s face. The function of politeness with friends seems to be more on the side of reinforcing affection and respect for each other. Politeness with the family was perceived as different because there is more intimacy, so things can be discussed openly in private. Family bonds and respect seem to be highly valued. There is also mention of politeness at work associated with recognition (*es otra cortesía, que no halaga al otro, sino que reconoce* ‘it is another type of politeness, not one that flatters the other but one which gives recognition’ mc3y), which indicates that some participants are aware of the need of enhancing politeness in this context.

9. The link with the “real” world: On the evaluation of the test

The last question of the second part of the test revealed evaluations that provided interesting hints for the researchers to take into account in future uses of the test¹⁶, but also, most importantly, it revealed attitudes to (im)politeness not made explicit in the first part.

Together with evaluations of the test as a research instrument, the participants appreciated the opportunity of talking about politeness, made compliments to the researchers for their interest on the subject, and also made requests and gave recommendations for action to change “impolite” behavior. Of the 54 participants, 30 answered the question (more than 50%) with mainly positive evaluations on the test and on the work of the researchers who received thanks and compliments, accompanied with comments that reinforced values associated with polite behavior:

(34) **Gracias por permitirme decir y expresar** eso que tengo adentro. **¡Qué bonito!** Y repito con verdadero **amor**, comunicación y **respeto** se consigue todo. **Gracias.** (mc1)

Thanks for allowing me to express myself and say what I have inside me. How nice! I repeat that with real love, communication and respect you can get everything. Thanks

(35) **Muy agradable**, permite expresarte con **sinceridad** sobre mis actuaciones. (ma3y)
Very nice, it allows you to speak sincerely about your actions

(36) **Sí, me gustó mucho la encuesta** porque trata de algo **bueno para uno y para la familia** y hace que uno reflexione. Yo tengo hijos pequeños y **quiero que sean buenos y educados.** (ha1g)

Yes, I liked the test very much because it is something good for oneself and the family and makes you think. I have small children and I want them to be good and educated

(37) **Felicitaciones** por su interés en hacer reconocer **la obligación que tiene el ser humano** con la cortesía. (hc1g)

Congratulations for your interest in making us aware of the obligation every human being has with politeness

Negative evaluations pointed to an “excessive” number of questions (3 cases only) but mainly consisted of complaints about a noticeable loss of politeness, and directives for the researchers to use the results in order to change or improve what was perceived as impolite behavior in public spaces and in government officials, particularly the President of the Republic. Examples 38, 39 and 40 refer to changes observed in social behavior that imply that people are not showing consideration for others, including the family. Example 41 is a directive for action about behavior in public

¹⁶ For example, ask for representations of dialogues to obtain the reaction of the hearers in each situation, and make room for open questions on how (im)politeness works in contexts other than the family.

spaces (*do something about it*), and 42, another directive for action making explicit reference to the government leaders, particularly the President¹⁷.

(38) La cortesía en Venezuela **en los últimos tiempos se está perdiendo**. Lo que **hay que** hacer es **educar** a los niños, para que sean unos buenos ciudadanos. (hb3)

Politeness in Venezuela in recent time is disappearing. What has to be done is to educate children for them to become good citizens

(39) ¿Me pueden explicar para qué hacen una encuesta sobre **algo que ya no se usa**? Gracias. (mb1d).

Can you explain to me why you do a test on something that is no longer in use. Thanks.

(40) me llamó la atención porque **hoy en día no se le presta mucha atención al tema** de la cortesía y **menos entre tus familiares** (ha3y)

... it called my attention because nowadays no attention is given to this topic of politeness and even less in the family

(41) Me gustaría **que alguien haga algo por el comportamiento de la gente**. Si me subo en la camioneta nadie da los buenos días, eso me desagrada. **Si esta encuesta trata de hacer algo, hágalo** (ma1d)

I would like someone to do something about the people's behaviour. If I get on the bus nobody says good morning, I dislike that. If you are willing to something with this test, do it

(42) Esta encuesta **debería pasarla a los altos miembros que dirigen este país**, empezando por el **Presidente de la República** (mb2)

You ought to give this test to the high members who lead this country, starting with the President of the Republic

We also found participants who expressed curiosity and suspicion, probably because government leaders have been harshly criticized for their "threatening rhetoric" (Montero 2003).

(43) ¿Por qué tanto empeño con la cortesía? (ha2y)

Why insist so much on politeness?

But there were a few who found it important to make others think about the meanings of politeness in social life.

(44) Me gusta mucho esta encuesta por la razón que **uno reflexiona** cada día más (mc2)

I like this test very much because one thinks more and more

¹⁷ This can be explained by the fact that since 1999 there has been a major change in Venezuelan political discourse characterized by aggressive and insulting language, often used as a strategy to weaken adversaries (Bolívar 2001a, 2005b, 2005c; Montero 2003).

10. Conclusions

We started with the assumption that the application of a test of social habits would give us some of the evaluations Venezuelans make about what they consider to be politic, polite, and impolite behavior. We assumed that replies to hypothetical situations and opinion questions would carry evaluations that supported the representation of what was considered appropriate or not. Also, we expected to discover links with the real world of the participants beyond the hypothetical situations presented by the researcher.

The results obtained have shown that there is a great deal of variation associated with the situations, the assumed and allocated roles, and the role relations. By convention women have been thought to be more indirect, but the results show that due to gender solidarity and more familiarity with the mother, they are more direct with her when making requests, do not take into account the mother's wishes, and can do without politeness formulas in the daughter-mother relation. Men, while more direct than women in general, show deference to the mother and compensate directness with the use of mitigators, affectionate terms of address, and politeness formulas, so the son-mother relation is represented as more respectful.

In advice giving, the sister-sister relation seems to be different from the friend-friend relation, as women are concerned with not invading the sister's space. Invitations and compliments, which are both face flattering acts, also exhibit variation. An invitation to a barbecue is perceived as a kind of party, open to collaboration, so it is natural to ask friends to bring something, and also to bring along other friends (*tell others, bring a friend*). But in the family lunch, the perception is that it is mainly an event to reinforce family bonds, to show and receive affection, and sort out problems, in private, in a pleasant atmosphere around a good meal.

As politeness is perceived differently with friends and family, we may conclude that we should be talking about different types of politeness. For example, politeness formulas may function as evidence of politic behavior when used to compensate for directness, but might also be taken to be polite if used to show consideration and respect.

What is appropriate in each situation is assessed on the basis of values that may also vary in the perceptions of women and men. The test of social habits was designed to deal mainly with polite behavior as seen by the participants in particular situations. However, there is evidence to indicate that they also evaluate the social and political world. Their complaints about the loss of politeness in public spaces, and their petition for the researchers to do something about the impolite behavior of government authorities, is only the tip of an iceberg that hides a social struggle over what is appropriate, in private and public settings, and in their society.

This study has shown that neither women nor men can avoid making evaluations about the world they live in, either in the representation of their experience in hypothetical situations or in their interaction with the researchers. There is evidence in the test to sustain the claim that the participants form part of a wider network of relations and that politeness and impoliteness are perceived as social behavior that can be positively or negatively evaluated according to the perceptions of roles and role relations in situations, but mainly taking into consideration views of the world and what this should be like.

The study also indicates that there may exist coincidences with findings in the field of social psychology with respect to the perceptions of Venezuelans' cultural

identity, particularly when they see themselves as *affectionate, family-minded, cheerful, "simpáticos" (nice), generous, hospitable and equalitarian*, all positive evaluations. But it seems that negative features such as *passive, aggressive, authoritarian*, need further study in order to answer questions such as: Passive with respect to what? aggressive when and how? authoritarian with whom, in which contexts? These questions suggest the need to pay more attention to the on-going social interaction in the social dynamics where evaluations of different kinds are made in different contexts with different purposes.

The test of social habits has shown to be a valuable tool in obtaining information on linguistic resources and cultural assumptions on politeness, but it also reveals that the real interaction between the participants and the researchers is not exempt from ideology. Therefore, it would be important to have in mind that the evaluations expressed in hypothetical or elicited situations may be different from those constructed jointly by participants in the test and in other situations and contexts.

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