

## **FIRST-ORDER POLITENESS IN RAPPROCHEMENT AND DISTANCING CULTURES: UNDERSTANDINGS AND USES OF POLITENESS BY SPANISH NATIVE SPEAKERS FROM SPAIN AND SPANISH NONNATIVE SPEAKERS FROM THE U.S.**

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### **Abstract**

The close link between politeness and culture has often been highlighted, with some scholars having proposed taxonomies of cultures based on the diverse uses and conceptions of politeness. Generally, research (Hickey 2005; Ardila 2005) places Spanish-speaking cultures in the group of *rapprochement cultures*, which relate politeness to positively assessing the addressee and creating bonds of friendship and cooperation; and English-speaking cultures in the group of *distancing cultures*, which primarily use politeness to generate respect and social differentiation. This means that English politeness is not only supposed to be different from Spanish politeness, but diametrically opposed to it. The main goal of this study is to check these predictions against the understandings and use of politeness by native speakers of Spanish from Spain and nonnative speakers of Spanish from the U.S. Thus, this research is grounded in first-order politeness norms, which are then correlated with the informants' behavior as reported in written questionnaires. The results confirmed these predictions and further showed that the more advanced learners were able to align themselves better with Spanish norms. Nevertheless, even they found some aspects of Spanish politeness — such as the turn-taking system — harder to adapt to, suggesting that certain aspects of native norms may be more difficult to abandon. We propose that first-order notions of politeness may be prototypically structured, with some aspects being more central to its definition and therefore less easily foregone than others.

**Keywords:** First-order politeness; Peninsular Spanish; American English; Nonnative speakers; Rapprochement cultures; Distancing cultures.

### **1. Introduction**

The close link between politeness and culture has often been highlighted, with politeness sometimes defined as adequacy of the speaker's behavior with respect to the expectations created by one culture for that particular setting (e.g., Braun 1988: 49; Escandell-Vidal 1998: 46). Some scholars have proposed taxonomies of cultures based on the diverse uses and conceptions of politeness, following Brown and Levinson's (1987 [1978]: 245) distinction between *positive* and *negative politeness cultures*. The former are defined as societies where politeness strategies are predominantly based on

displaying affection and solidarity between the interlocutors, whereas negative politeness cultures use politeness strategies aimed at maintaining one's personal space. For instance, English-speaking cultures are often characterized as negative politeness cultures, and Spanish-speaking cultures as positive politeness cultures (Hickey 1991, 2005; Ardila 2005). Haverkate (2004) also makes a distinction between societies which predominantly use politeness strategies to generate respect and social differentiation, namely *distancing cultures*, and other communities where politeness strategies are related to positively assessing the addressee and creating bonds of friendship, cooperation, and affiliation — called *solidarity* or *rapprochement cultures*. Generally, research places Peninsular Spanish in the latter (Piatti 2003; Haverkate 2004; Hernández-Flores 2004; Hickey 2005), and U.S. American culture in the former (García 1989; Mir 1992; Koike 1994; Ruzcicowka 1998; Díaz Pérez 2003; Pinto 2008, 2010, 2011), reflecting a preference in Peninsular Spanish for establishing supportive and close relationships between interlocutors, and a preference in American English for respecting the interlocutor's right to privacy and recognizing differences in social status between interlocutors.

The characterization of Peninsular Spanish as a positive politeness or *rapprochement* culture goes hand-in-hand with the predominance, in daily interaction, of Face-Enhancing Acts (FEAs)<sup>1</sup> at the expense of avoiding/mitigating Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) (Barros García 2011). And vice versa, the characterization of American English as a negative politeness or distancing culture goes hand-in-hand with the prevailing understanding of politeness as the avoidance/mitigation of FTAs, to which the production of FEAs is secondary. The avoidance/mitigation of FTAs is concerned with protecting the face of the interlocutors from threat or potential damage, while the production of FEAs is independent from the perception of threats and is justified, not by the wish to avoid or mitigate face damage, but by the wish to satisfy the interlocutors' face-wants. This does not imply a complete dichotomy but rather a difference in the relative importance and frequency in each culture of manoeuvres to constitute and reinforce or, conversely, to protect face.

## 2. Rationale

Since U.S. American culture is defined as a distancing culture and Peninsular Spanish as a *rapprochement* one, their conceptualizations and uses of politeness are supposed to be not merely different, but diametrically opposed. These differences can be explained by taking a closer look at the content of face in these two cultures. Spanish face is described as the need for positive self-affirmation<sup>2</sup> and being treated with familiarity and closeness, what has been called *confianza* (Bravo 1999: 160); Anglo face, on the other hand, as, primarily, the desire not to be imposed upon, intruded upon, or otherwise

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<sup>1</sup> Face-Enhancing Acts are communicative activities aimed at affirming or bolstering the face of the other, and have been variously termed: *Face Boosting Acts* (Bayraktaroglu 1991), *anti FTAs* (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992), *Face Enhancing Acts* (Sifianou 1995; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997; Terkourafi 2005; Suzuki 2007; Leech 2007), *Face Supporting Acts* (Sifianou 1995), *Face Flattering Acts* (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Related with the concept of honour and the claiming of one's own worth. In verbal interaction, Thurén (1988: 217) considers that self-affirmation means to express personal opinions strongly, with sincerity and conviction.

put upon (Brown and Levinson's definition of *negative face* [1987]), and, only secondarily, as the desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved of (Brown and Levinson's definition of *positive face* [1987]).

Different contents of face<sup>3</sup> generate different realizations of politeness. For this reason, it is of major importance not to transfer any particular model of politeness directly from one culture to another but rather to base explanations of politeness on knowledge of what constitutes face in a given community. Divergences in the use of politeness are found even in countries with the same official or dominant language, as is the case across different English- and Spanish-speaking countries. English is a *de jure* official national language in 55 countries and in 28 non-sovereign entities, and a *de facto* language in 3 countries. Spanish is a *de jure* official language in 14 sovereign states and in 2 dependent states, and a *de facto* official language in 6 countries. The global spread of these two languages has resulted in the emergence of distinct varieties and, thus, of diverse understandings and uses of politeness within each culture. Several of these differences have been discussed in the literature. For instance, a recent study by Goddard (2012) investigates practices of getting acquainted in different national varieties of English, and explains that Australian English is notable for its horizontal individualism, which means that speakers prefer to be seen as equals and, thus, prefer the use of informality and closeness, as well as the avoidance of self-praise. In contrast, American English is notable for its vertical individualism, which results in a communication style that revolves around the display of the self as someone unique. In Goddard's words (2012: 1039), in the American cultural context "identifying one's own achievements and abilities [...] is expected and accepted in many contexts." Another recent study that explores the differences in the expression of politeness between two varieties of English was conducted by Merrison et al. (2012). The authors compare e-mail requests from students in higher education in Britain and Australia, and conclude that British students made frequent use of address terms and apologies to express deference, whereas Australian students were more inclined towards egalitarianism through displaying geniality. In sum, if distancing and rapprochement cultures were to be placed at the two ends of a continuum, British and U.S. American cultures would be closer to the distancing end, due to their emphasis on individual differences, and Australian culture closer to the rapprochement end, due to its concern for social equality and projecting solidarity. This in turn would translate into a preference in British and American English for avoiding or mitigating face-threats, and a preference in Australian English for face-enhancing politeness.

As for Spanish, in a study conducted by Curc6 and De Fina (2002) about the expression of politeness in Mexican and in Peninsular Spanish, the authors conclude that Mexicans appreciate showing deference in interaction, that is, explicitly acknowledging the interlocutors' social status, whereas Spaniards accord a higher value to spontaneity, and deference is implicitly understood rather than expressed on record. In the same vein, F6lix-Brasdefer (2008) asserts that Peninsular, Venezuelan, Dominican and Colombian Spanish show a preference for the expression of *involvement*, that is, for the expression of endearment, closeness, and intimacy between

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<sup>3</sup> We are adopting here a distinction between Face1 and Face2 proposed by O'Driscoll (1996) and elaborated by Terkourafi (2007). The difference between Spanish and Anglo face is at the level of Face1, that is, the culture- and situation-specific contents of face that are "filled in under particular socio-historical circumstances yielding distinct, but motivated, conceptualizations of Face1" (Terkourafi 2007: 322).

in-group members. Other Spanish varieties, such as Chilean, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Mexican and Uruguayan Spanish prefer showing *independence*, and as a result invest more in expressing respect, using indirect formal speech and attenuation. In other words, even though Spanish-speaking cultures have been characterized as positive politeness cultures overall (Hickey 2005; Ardila 2005), researchers have noted a preference for the production of FEAs in the first group of Spanish varieties, and a preference for the avoidance and softening of FTAs in the second one.

All in all, it is not claimed here that there is a single Chilean, Australian, U.S. American or Peninsular Spanish culture, much less a single Spanish or English culture. We are aware that different dialects within a national language can have different cultures associated with them,<sup>4</sup> and that the conceptualization and use of politeness can also vary across those cultures, and even across social groups, communities, and members of the same family. However, as Haugh and Schneider (2012: 1017) point out, although observation of the use of politeness might be restricted to a particular speaker in a given situation — as in a large body of work in interactional linguistics, conversation analysis and related fields — comparative studies can help identify similarities and differences applicable across varieties of a language and sometimes reflected in its structure. Those similarities and differences enable us to provide overall descriptions of cultures and to identify trends in the use of politeness. It is understood that generalizations should be made with caution, but as Culpeper (2012: 1131) reminds us, “[a] farmer in the North of England is, one might suppose, likely to have more cultural similarities with someone living in London than a farmer living in the South China.” In other words, affinities between the politeness norms of different groups might be expected based on, among others, geographical, linguistic or ideological affinity, and comparative research can help uncover those. Besides, empirical studies show that different varieties of the same language may be grouped closer together, when compared with other languages (e.g., Hofstede 2001). Hence, in spite of the differences in preferred communication styles between speakers of different varieties of the same language, it can be said that there exists a modicum of shared expectations across national varieties regarding the understanding and use of politeness. We believe that non-essentialist generalizations are necessary in the study of politeness, and can be valuable in empirically grounding the investigative process.

With these theoretical considerations in mind, our starting point is the idea that American English and Peninsular Spanish conceive of politeness in different terms and, consequently, make a different use of politeness in communication. The opposite usage of politeness in these two cultures gives rise to several questions: how do members of these two different groups view the foreign politeness system? Do these divergences produce intercultural misunderstandings? Do students of Spanish as a second language learn about these two different systems? Are they able to switch from their own politeness system to the foreign system when interacting with Spaniards and Americans, respectively? If so, is there any influence of the speaker’s level of proficiency and

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, recognized semi-distinct cultural regions of the United States include New England, the Mid-Atlantic States, the Southern United States, the Midwestern United States and the Western United States and these areas can be further subdivided on the basis of the local culture. However, there are also some common features shared by most U.S. Americans. These basic cultural traits can be found in books, travel guides and other informational guides about the United States. For example, offices of International Services at colleges and universities often list key cultural differences found in all of the U.S. that can be helpful for international students.

experience with the other culture on his/her perception and use of politeness in the foreign language? These are the research questions that this study sets out to answer, focusing on Spanish native speakers from Spain and U.S. American learners of Spanish, their own notions of politeness, the understanding that nonnative speakers have of politeness in Spanish-speaking communities, and the use of politeness in Spanish interaction by native and nonnative speakers. The objective is to determine the balance of influence between the native and the target language/culture in the assessments and performance of nonnative speakers of Spanish. This comparison will allow us to determine whether nonnative speakers' viewpoints and use of politeness in Spanish are closer to English or to Spanish expectations, i.e., whether they transfer their own cultural norms from one system to the other or are able to adapt to new norms, and what this depends on.

### 3. Aims

In everyday interaction, speakers are not always explicitly aware of shared understandings and uses of politeness. Nevertheless, they form expectations and appear to follow certain guidelines when interacting with each other, as their reaction when these expectations are frustrated seems to suggest. This study aims to elucidate the content of politeness and the expected politeness strategies used by Spanish native speakers from Spain and Spanish nonnative speakers from the United States in a number of experimental scenarios. To achieve this goal, the performance of nonnative speakers has been examined while participating in the same tasks as Spanish and English native speakers. Thus, this research is grounded in *first-order politeness* or *politeness<sub>1</sub>*<sup>5</sup> norms, which are then correlated with the informants' behavior as reported in written questionnaires.

By targeting three types of informants, Spanish Native Speakers from Spain (SNS), Spanish Nonnative Speakers from the United States (SNNS) at three levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), and English Native Speakers from the United States (ENS), our goal is to provide empirical support for the psychological reality of the postulated differences between Peninsular Spanish and U.S. American cultures summarized in Sections 1 and 2 above. These differences might further have implications for mutual misperception, miscommunication, and negative evaluation of the other culture. Therefore, our goal is to determine whether nonnative knowledge of Spanish causes inadequacies when interacting in Spanish and an idiosyncratic/divergent comprehension of the target language/culture.

It has been suggested (e.g., Cook and Liddicoat 2002) that language learners use both pragmatic and linguistic knowledge when interacting in the foreign language, but that they apply their knowledge with varying success depending on their ability levels. We predict that participants who have studied abroad in a Spanish-speaking country and advanced Spanish learners will perform closer to Spanish native speakers than the novice group. Furthermore, their answers to the written questionnaire are expected to

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars have proposed a distinction between folk and scientific definitions of politeness. As a folk term, politeness is described as good manners, showing respect and deference; as a scientific term, politeness is a notion that accommodates every communicative contribution that has an impact on face. The first is called *politeness<sub>1</sub>* or *first-order politeness*, while the second is called *politeness<sub>2</sub>* or *second-order politeness* (Watts et al. 2005 [1992]; Eelen 2001; Terkourafi 2008, 2011).

differ from those of beginners when judging the need for politeness with English-speaking and with Spanish-speaking friends. Finally, any differences found in the conceptualization and use of politeness by the different levels of learners polled may be attributable to the fact that beginners are still influenced by their own cultural parameters. In order to explore these hypotheses, five research questions (RQs) are addressed:

1. Does the performance of native speakers of English from the United States (ENS) on the questionnaire indicate a preference for the avoidance of FTAs?
2. Does the performance of native speakers of Spanish from Spain (SNS) on the questionnaire indicate a preference for the production of FEAs?
3. Is SNNS's performance in Spanish more like that of SNS or of ENS?
4. To what degree do the answers of SNNS and their level of proficiency correlate?
5. To what degree is the performance of SNNS on all the tasks influenced by their native culture?

#### **4. Methodology**

Data were collected between February 2012 and February 2013 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Granada in Spain, and Knox College in Illinois. Before any data were collected, participants were given a short explanation about the research goals and procedures. Those who agreed to participate were given a written consent form to sign. Participants were able to refuse to consent or withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. To protect participants' anonymity, all personally identifying information was removed.

##### **4.1. Participants**

The study involves a sample of 66 informants (N = 66, 43 female and 23 male), consisting of 43 SNNS from the United States (14 beginners, 14 intermediate, and 15 advanced), 12 SNS from Spain, and 11 ENS from the United States.

##### *4.1.1. Spanish nonnative speakers (SNNS)*

43 nonnative speakers of Spanish (30 female, 13 male), consisting of 32 undergraduate and graduate students of Spanish taking part in *Mi Pueblo* meetings, and 11 undergraduate students of Spanish at Knox College, participated in the study. *Mi Pueblo* is a student network of Spanish conversation groups hosted by the Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The aim of *Mi Pueblo* is to provide informal opportunities to improve Spanish learners' speaking abilities outside of the classroom. Activities range from casual conversation, to guided discussions around topics pertinent to the Spanish-speaking world, to attendance of events around campus. There are novice, intermediate, and advanced level Spanish groups led by other students. For more information, visit the *Mi Pueblo* website:

<https://wiki.cites.uiuc.edu/wiki/display/UIUCMiPueblo/Mi+Pueblo>

All SNNS are U.S. citizens who were between 18-27 years old at the time of the study (mean age 20.81,  $SD = 1.967$ ). Their native language is English, and they have been studying Spanish for a period of 1 to 12 years (mean 6.63,  $SD = 2.646$ ). Half of these students have studied abroad in different Spanish-speaking countries (Spain, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Nicaragua, and Honduras). The duration of their stays abroad ranges between 4 and 24 months (mean 6 months,  $SD = 4.802$ ). Hence, the group of SNNS varies widely in terms of their exposure to Spanish in native environments. Moreover, as discussed in section 2 above, the conceptualization and uses of politeness vary greatly among Spanish-speaking countries. Therefore, these respondents' results may have been influenced by background knowledge and personal experiences. While this may limit the generalizability of the findings of this study, this situation is closer to the actual situation teachers of Spanish are faced with in the classroom, hence we feel this does not compromise the aims of the research itself.

Regarding informants' level of Spanish proficiency, 14 were beginners, 14 intermediate, and 15 advanced. According to University of Illinois and Knox College general guidelines, a novice speaker is a student who has taken at least one Spanish introductory course at either the high school or collegiate level or equivalent, and is or has been enrolled in a 100-level Spanish course. Students in intermediate sessions have been or are currently enrolled in 200-level Spanish courses, or are preparing to, but have not yet studied, abroad. Finally, students in advanced sessions are typically enrolled in 300-level Spanish courses or higher, have returned from study abroad, or have work experience in the language.

#### *4.1.2. Spanish native speakers (SNS)*

Spanish native speakers were students taking part in a summer course at the University of Granada at Motril, Spain. All 12 Spanish native speakers (8 female, 4 male) are from Spain. They were between 20-33 years old at the time of the study (mean age 24.50,  $SD = 3.802$ ). They all have studied English for a period of 5 to 22 years (mean 12,  $SD = 5.527$ ) and most of them have studied or worked abroad in a foreign country. However, they all lived in Spain as of the time of the study.

#### *4.1.3. English native speakers (ENS)*

A total of 11 English native speakers (5 female, 6 male) took part in the study. They were undergraduate students at Knox College, Illinois, at the time of the research. They were born in the United States and always lived in the United States. All members of their immediate family are also from the United States. Informants were between 18 and 23 years old at the time of the study (mean age 20.18,  $SD = 1.401$ ) and their native language is English.

Putting this group and the group of SNNS together, since they are all native speakers of English from the U.S., we have a total of 54 Americans<sup>7</sup> (35 female, 19 male) with mean age 20.88 years ( $SD = 2.148$ ).

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<sup>7</sup> We will use the term *Americans* to refer to both the group of English Native Speakers from the U.S. (ENS) and the group of Spanish Nonnative Speakers from the U.S. (SNNS).

## 4.2. *Data collection procedures*

To design our experimental materials, we began by investigating the perceptions and variables that influence the understanding and uses of politeness in Spanish. To this end, informants completed a questionnaire that included general questions and judgment tasks asking them to rank the importance of politeness in five different types of relationships. They also ranked the importance of some communicative behaviors connected to the production of FEAs and to the avoidance of FTAs. The questionnaire was preceded by a background survey that collected information about their demographics and language background, such as level of Spanish proficiency, and experience studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. The English version of the survey and the questionnaire may be found in Appendices 1 and 2 below.

## 5. The study

Participants completed a written questionnaire that asked them to compare English and Spanish politeness, and to answer who they think is a polite speaker and what they themselves do when they try to be polite. They also had to rate the need for politeness with different types of interlocutors, and to judge the importance of five communicative behaviors when interacting with friends in their native and nonnative languages.

All questions in the questionnaire were distributed in Spanish to SNS and in English to ENS and SNNS. The use of Spanish/English in the questionnaire was intended to maximize the spontaneity of the responses, removing any difficulties and complications to the analysis that might arise when asked to respond in a foreign language. The questions and the answers given by the different groups of informants are presented next.

### 5.1. *How would you describe a polite speaker?*

This question sought to uncover participants' perceptions and intuitions about politeness in general. The expectation was that informants would describe politeness as manners and formal speech — first-order politeness. This kind of description could, however, be influenced by the culture of origin of the informants. Therefore, the results will show if Americans mention polite behaviors linked to the avoidance of FTAs, and SNS to the production of FEAs.

As this was an open-ended question, informants were not given options to choose from and rank. Rather, we grouped together their open-ended responses into different categories based on the areas they identified as important. In order of frequency, definitions of a polite speaker by Americans highlighted the following: a) *Consideration*: Answers dealing with being considerate to others were given by 50% of participants. For example, respondents mentioned that “a polite speaker is someone considerate who does not intentionally aim to harm the other with their words”, and “someone that makes a genuine effort to be conscious of the places/situations that demand them to be respectful.” b) *Engagement with the interaction*: 36.5% of Americans commented on the importance of showing engagement with the interaction



in order to be considered a polite speaker. For instance, they defined a polite speaker as “someone who responds to what you say,” “someone who pays attention to other speakers,” and “someone who indicates an interest in the conversation.” c) *Manners or courtesy*: Equally prevalent (36.5%) was the number of answers connected to manners or courtesy. Participants said that a polite speaker is gracious and uses courtesy, honorifics, titles, and forms of address such as “sir”, “ma’am”. They also explained that someone who is polite is deferential, thankful, and says “please”, “excuse me”, and “you are welcome”. d) *Appropriateness*: This quality characterizes the use of words in terms of their adequacy to each particular setting and/or turn-taking move in conversation. In this sense, the notion of appropriateness appears in 32.7% of English native speakers’ definitions of a polite speaker. e) *Niceness*: Finally, 9.6% of the definitions have to do with the concept of *niceness*. For example, ENS talked about “speak[ing] nicely even if in a bad mood,” “[being] pleasant,” “us[ing] kind words,” and “not say[ing] mean things.”

Definitions of a polite speaker given by SNS identified the following areas as important: a) *Appropriateness*: 58.3% of SNS gave answers dealing with the notion of appropriateness, such as “a polite speaker behaves in accordance with social expectations,”<sup>8</sup> “uses the appropriate language register,” and “attends to cultural conventions.” b) *Consideration*: 41.7% of SNS’s answers allude to the idea of being considerate. For instance, they stated that “a polite speaker is someone who is respectful,” and “he/she does not offend or insist on topics that are uncomfortable for the other person.” c) *Manners or courtesy*: 33.3% of SNS’s definitions involve the notion of a well-mannered speaker. d) *Confianza*: 16.7% of the answers described a polite speaker as “someone who shows verbal and non-verbal empathy,” and “someone that creates a familiar atmosphere that makes the other person feel comfortable.” e) *Engagement with the interaction*: Lastly, 8.3% of SNS highlighted the importance of showing engagement with the interaction in order to be considered a polite speaker.

Overall, Americans and SNS share some traditional ideas about the concept of politeness, such as the importance of consideration, good-manners and appropriateness. However, these are ranked differently by the two groups. Table 1 summarizes these results.

**Table 1.** Key concepts in the description of a polite speaker

AMERICANS	SNS
1. Consideration (50%)	1. Appropriateness (58.3%)
2. Engagement with the interaction (36.5%)	2. Consideration (41.7%)
3. Manners or courtesy (36.5%)	3. Manners or courtesy (33.3%)
4. Appropriateness (32.7%)	4. <i>Confianza</i> (16.7%)
5. Niceness (9.6%)	5. Engagement with the interaction (8.3%)

Table 1 shows that consideration was ranked first by Americans, and second by SNS. Thus, both groups of informants appear to associate politeness closely with consideration. Answers related to manners or courtesy were also prevalent in data from

<sup>8</sup> Quotes in Spanish have been translated into English.

both groups. The most noticeable differences between Americans and SNS concern the prevalence of answers that deal with the notion of engagement with the interaction (36.5% in Americans' data versus 8.3% in SNS's data), and the importance of the adequacy of the speaker's behavior to the particular setting where communication takes place — appropriateness —, which ranked first for SNS, but only fourth for Americans. In addition, two notions were highlighted by only one group each: Those of niceness and of *confianza*. It could be argued that the notion of *confianza* is similar to the description of consideration for Americans (i.e., “a polite speaker makes sure their listeners are comfortable”). However, the notion of consideration is more encompassing than *confianza*. *Confianza* is better characterized as intimacy and being close with others, while consideration is motivated by respect. The fact that *confianza* only appears in SNS's responses is especially indicative of the characterization of Peninsular Spanish as a rapprochement culture, and the description of one of the components of Spanish face as the need for being treated with intimacy (Hernández Flores 1999; Briz 2004).

In sum, Table 1 confirms that Americans attribute more importance than SNS do to the strategic use of politeness to avoid/mitigate FTAs. Moreover, notions such as familiarity and empathy were only found in SNS's data, confirming the importance that showing closeness and intimacy — *confianza* — carries for Spaniards. These results are in accordance with our predictions, given the description of U.S. American culture as a distancing culture and of Peninsular Spanish as a rapprochement culture.

Responses to this first question of the questionnaire suggest that the majority of native speakers have a broad idea about what constitutes politeness in their culture in its folk sense and used notions such as rules of etiquette, protocol, courtesy, urbanity, and norms of social behavior to describe that. Hence, the results provide us with some insights into what constitutes a canonical or normative understanding of politeness by our two groups of informants. They also highlight two different understandings of first-order politeness. Within a cognitive linguistics framework, these may be represented as prototypically structured notions (Heider 1972), which only partially overlap. The American notion of first-order politeness has consideration at its core, with engagement with the interaction, manners, appropriateness, and, to a lesser degree, niceness, completing the content of this category. The Spanish notion of first-order politeness places appropriateness at the center with consideration, manners and, to a lesser degree, *confianza* and engagement with the interaction completing its content. The prototypical construal of notions of first-order politeness allows us to capture both quantitative and qualitative differences in the understanding of politeness by the two groups investigated. Moreover, features which are more central to the definition of politeness by each group may be expected to be more resilient (e.g., given up last when shifting to a nonnative context). This prediction was confirmed by our findings (see Section 5.6. below).

## **5.2. In general, do you think Spanish speakers are less or more polite than English speakers (when speaking their own languages)? Why?**

We are aware that politeness is not a quantifiable notion, and that cultures or languages may not be compared in terms of being more or less polite. Rather, we view differences in the use of politeness as motivated by different conversational styles and the contents of face in a particular culture. Nonetheless, comparisons between cultures in terms of

their ‘degree’ of politeness are pretty common among lay speakers. The purpose of this question was thus precisely to highlight any prejudices and stereotypes that informants might have about Spanish- and English-speaking cultures. Ultimately, our goal was to determine whether such preconceived ideas exist and, if so, whether they correlate with the different characterizations of these two cultures by researchers as rapprochement and distancing cultures, respectively. If that is the case, then pedagogical applications of our results could guide the design of materials to help counteract these prejudices and promote the pragmatic competence in Spanish/English language learners.

The answers of ENS, SNS and SNNS to this question are summarized in Table 2 and discussed immediately below.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Spanish- and English-speaking cultures in terms of their ‘degree’ of politeness

	<b>Spanish-speaking more polite</b>	<b>English-speaking more polite</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>ENS</b>	7.15%	14.3%	78.55%
<b>SNS</b>	0%	0%	100%
<b>SNNS</b>	38.2%	11.8%	50%

Americans made it clear in their answers to the first question (see Section 5.1 above) that politeness is a matter of adequacy and as such depends on the culture and the situation. Correspondingly, in answer to this question, 78.55% of ENS stated that one cannot claim that English/Spanish speakers are more or less polite than the other; it just depends on the situation and, ultimately, on the person. Only 7.15% of ENS thought that Spanish native speakers are more polite, considering that they are more aware of the other than U.S. Americans, who are more egocentric. On the other hand, twice that number (14.3%) believes that, in general, English native speakers are more polite. They explained this assessment by alluding to turn-taking — “English native speakers wait for the other to finish while the Spanish interrupt more” — and to having more ways of saying the same thing.

None of the SNS claimed that Spanish native speakers are more polite than English native speakers. The majority of the answers pointed towards a different conception of politeness and, consequently, a different way for expressing it in both languages. Most informants stated that “English native speakers tend to be more formal during speech,” and that “formality is maintained even after the ice has been broken.” In their opinion, “[Peninsular] Spanish speakers switch to a more informal interactive style faster, but this just indicates different conversational styles, not a lack/excess of politeness.” Other SNS explained that “[Peninsular] Spanish speakers express politeness by means of gestures and body language, which is probably a more subtle way of doing so.” They concluded that although those gestures might be less formal and, therefore, less evident or ritualized than the devices used by English speakers — less of what is commonly included under the umbrella of formal language and deference — they generate a polite effect as well.

With regard to SNNS, 38.2% of them considered Spanish native speakers to be more polite than English native speakers, whereas only 11.8% thought the opposite. Several informants believe that “politeness is often more necessary in Spanish

interaction,” whereas English native speakers are “more inclined to use slang” and to “use less appropriate words and mannerisms than Spanish speakers.” In fact, from a second-order politeness perspective, slang can be face-constituting if it is the appropriate behavior in a given situation. Therefore, this reflection is revealing of the first-order politeness understanding that we were able to tap into. Furthermore, informants said that “native speakers of Spanish use polite phrases more frequently than native speakers of English do.” Once again this idea points to a prescriptive — first-order — notion of politeness. In spite of positions for and against one option or the other, the majority of SNNS preferred not to take sides on this question. More concretely, 29.4% believe that “both languages are about the same” and that “it depends not on the language but on the speaker, because both English and Spanish have many ways of expressing politeness.” Similarly, 20.6% claimed that “there is no such thing as one language being more polite than the other,” and that “each language and culture has its own expectations, ways and circumstances for expressing politeness.” This more sophisticated understanding of politeness — closer to a second-order understanding of this notion — may be due to the fact that our informants were undergraduate language majors, or to the academic context of the research. It is possible that our results may have been different had we sampled a different population of respondents or in a different context.

Interestingly, having studied abroad and their level of proficiency seem to have impacted SNNS’s answers to this question. Most novice learners (71.4%) argued that Spanish and English are two different languages that cannot be compared in terms of being more or less polite, while intermediate learners were equally split between viewing Spanish as more polite (36.4%), and both languages as equally polite (36.4%). Finally, advanced learners in their majority (52%) considered Spanish to be more polite than English. This last result was repeatedly exemplified by pointing to the existence of Spanish honorifics (i.e., a T/V pronominal system) that English does not have. SNNS have had to be taught explicitly polite forms in Spanish, which they never had to be taught as native speakers of English. As such their metalinguistic awareness about Spanish is more acute compared to English. In order to determine whether the differences by level of proficiency were statistically significant or simply due to chance, a one-way ANOVA was run and the results were significant ( $F_{2, 39} = 3.242, p = .05$ ). SNNS who studied abroad answered that English speakers are more polite than Spanish speakers to a higher percentage compared with those who have not been abroad (16% versus 7.7%). Informants explained that while living in a Spanish-speaking country they came into contact with norms of behavior that were different from theirs and felt uncomfortable. In other words, they came into contact with a notion of first-order politeness different from theirs. It is likely that this difference has to do with highly valuing *confianza* versus independence. Notably, the evaluation of Spanish speakers as being less polite than English speakers is higher when informants studied abroad in Spain than in other Spanish speaking-countries. They asserted that “Spaniards are less formal with one another than English speakers are when speaking their own language.” Also, some SNNS mentioned having felt intimidated by Spaniards who tended to ask them personal questions, and not being used to “a different conversational etiquette which allows Spanish speakers to interrupt each other frequently.” For instance, some informants stated that “although Spanish has more linguistic forms for expressing politeness [alluding to the T/V system], these are rarely used,” and others claimed that “the norms of Spanish, including body language, are so different that Spaniards seem to

U.S. Americans to be less polite.” In other words, students living in a Spanish-culture judged SNS from Spain according to their own distancing cultural norms. Hence, they found Spaniards to be too abrupt, indiscreet and, ultimately, impolite, because they were unable to adjust to the foreign culture norms.

These kinds of judgments are what one might expect from speakers of a distancing culture when reflecting on a rapprochement culture. However, those informants who studied abroad in Costa Rica, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, Nicaragua or Ecuador answered that Spanish speakers are more polite than English speakers. Among the reasons given for this, some informants explained that Spanish speakers are kinder in interaction, but most referred to the T/V system as evidence that Spanish has a built-in factor of respect.<sup>9</sup> Spanish linguistically differentiates between addressing one’s peers, an elder, or a stranger. To achieve this, Spanish uses verbal agreement, which increases the metalinguistic awareness of speakers, unlike English where politeness does not depend on agreement. In conclusion, the divergent reasons given by SNNS to explain why Spanish speakers are more/less polite than English speakers seem to follow from their different experiences with Spanish. Their perceptions are influenced by their contact with professors and acquaintances who speak different Spanish varieties, and by their travels and stays abroad in different Spanish-speaking countries.

A noteworthy observation made by some nonnative informants is that their inability to bring things up smoothly in Spanish is responsible for their impression that Spanish speakers are more polite. It is likely that many L2 speakers have the same impression when speaking a foreign language. That is, this statement does not necessarily mean that Spanish speakers are more polite than English speakers. Rather, it is just being a native speaker that allows being more polite than a nonnative speaker. Participants explained that their less developed communicative competence forces them to produce messages that go straight to the point, because they do not manage very well the polite strategies (read: Conventions) that can help present a message in the most appropriate way, depending on the situation. This might generate problems in intercultural communication, including the perpetuation of stereotypes, speaker isolation or recipient affront.

All in all, the diverse answers to this question show that half of SNNS are aware of the different meanings and ways of being polite in Spanish and in English, and did not judge these differences to be negative or positive.

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<sup>9</sup> Peninsular Spanish makes use of the dyadic T/V system as well. However, different scholars have observed that since the 60’s Peninsular Spanish culture is simplifying the devices traditionally used to address someone during interaction, resulting in more flexibility in social relationships (Carrasco Santana 1999; Blas Arroyo 1994; Montoya Ramírez 2008; Hummel et al. 2010). There is a spread of an informal conversational style in Spanish interaction nowadays, where the use of *usted* is rare in situations where it was the norm some decades ago, and titles are generally avoided. In this sense, Piatti (2003: 355–368) observes that, although Spanish society has been characterized by a strongly stratified social system for centuries, more recently it has promoted an interactive style based on solidarity, not on social differentiation. This change need not translate into the progressive advance of a disrespectful treatment and a descent toward rudeness — as some purists might think — but may be related to a more generalized trend toward informalization, that is, a progressive preference for establishing supportive and close relationships instead of recognizing differences in social statuses, occurring across the board (Blas Arroyo 1994: 40). In other words, it may be the case that there is a change in progress in Spain from a preference for the avoidance of FTAs — represented by the use of *usted* — towards the current preference for the production of FEAs — represented by the use of *tú*. A diachronic study of Spanish politeness would be a better place to answer these questions.

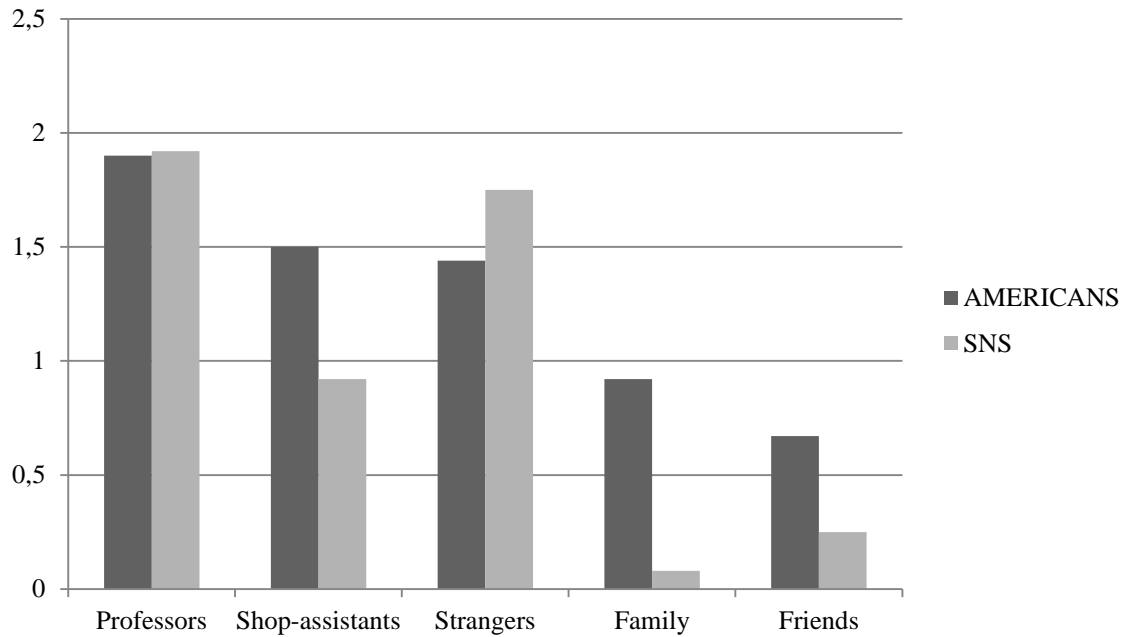
### **5.3. Who (family, friends, professors, a stranger, a shop-assistant) do you think it is important to be polite with? Why?**

The third question of the questionnaire asked about the need to use politeness with people with whom one maintains different types of relationship: With a family member, a friend, a professor, a stranger, and a shop assistant. The goal of this question was to analyze whether participants associate the need for politeness with the type of addressee they are conversing with, as well as to clarify whether formality and familiarity are ingredients of what informants understand by politeness. Informants were asked to rate the importance of using politeness with different types of addressees on a 3-point scale, where 0 was labeled as ‘not important,’ 1 was labeled as ‘important,’ and 2 was labeled as ‘very important.’ Answers to this question show that there is indeed an association between the importance informants attribute to the need for politeness and the relationship they maintain with the addressee.

Among the different relationships the questionnaire asked about, almost all Americans answered that it is very important to be polite with professors (mean 1.90,  $SD = .298$ ), quite important when interacting with shop-assistants (mean 1.50,  $SD = .542$ ) and with strangers (mean 1.44,  $SD = .574$ ), important with family members (mean .92,  $SD = .621$ ), and not so important with friends (mean .67,  $SD = .617$ ). The main reasons pointed out by Americans for using politeness are power, formality, consideration, making a good impression, distant relationships, and social rules. These reasons were already pointed out by them in response to question #1, which directly asked informants to describe what a polite speaker is like. Therefore, it seems safe to consider these as core ingredients of first-order politeness for native speakers of American English. Overall, the results to this question confirm that Americans generally understand politeness as formal speech, so its use is necessary when there is distance with the addressee and when there are differences in power. In this way, these results validate Brown and Levinson’s theory in relation to the priority of negative over positive politeness in situations of increased distance (D) and a high power differential (P) between interlocutors.

SNS were also asked to rate the importance of being polite with family, friends, professors, strangers and shop-assistants. The need for politeness emerged as particularly important for them when talking to professors (mean 1.92,  $SD = .289$ ) and strangers (mean 1.75,  $SD = .452$ ). Next, SNS found it important to be polite to shop-assistants (mean .92,  $SD = .289$ ). With all these three types of interlocutors, the importance of politeness is justified by the distant relationship between interlocutors. Therefore, when a close relationship exists with the addressee, as with friends and especially with family, SNS did not believe politeness is important (friends: Mean .25,  $SD = .452$ ; family: Mean .08,  $SD = .289$ ).

Relative divergences are found when comparing Americans’ and SNS’s answers, as the following diagram shows (cf. Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The importance of being polite with different types of interlocutors

First, although both Americans and SNS rated low the need for politeness with family and friends, SNS found it more important to be polite to friends than to family; the main reason given for this is that blood ties are impossible to dissolve, whereas friendship can be damaged if one does not nurture it. However, Americans found it more necessary to be polite to family members in order to meet cultural expectations that require treating family with respect, especially when they are older or not too close to the speaker. Thus, negative face/privacy seems to be an issue for Americans with family, but not for SNS. The reasons given by both Americans and SNS to affirm that politeness is not necessary with family and friends are closeness and informality. They explained that when one is close to the other person, when one is comfortable in the conversational setting, and when informality prevails, politeness is unnecessary. Informants often said that “your family and friends know you truly, so you do not need to make a good impression on them.” This kind of reasoning points to a strategic — or, utilitarian — perception of politeness. Informants also said that “being polite with family and friends would be so inappropriate as to seem strange, as if one had ulterior motives for this behavior.” This last assertion again indicates a rather utilitarian understanding of politeness confined to formal means, such as using *usted*, saying “please”, and so on. In sum, both Americans and SNS share the idea that politeness is only needed when there is no intimacy or *confianza*, because they link politeness to proper language and, hence, find it more appropriate to use in formal settings.

Another significant difference between the responses of Americans and SNS is that none of the latter rated being polite with shop-assistants as very important. SNS explained this outcome by saying it is part of their job to serve the client. Thus there is no reason for being overly polite. On the contrary, the main explanation given by Americans for the need to be very polite to shop-assistants is to acknowledge their service. In this sense, SNS’s answers to this question confirm Hickey’s (1991, 2005) observation about the different — “but not less polite” — use of politeness formulae

such as “please” and “thank you” by Spanish speakers from Spain. Spaniards tend to use these formulae “in their literal sense, that is, in asking or giving thanks for a personal favour, as distinct from a service that is part of one’s duty, such as a shop assistant’s duty to serve, and a customer’s duty to pay for an article purchased” (Hickey 1991: 4).

#### **5.4. When you try to be polite with the people above (question #3), what do you do?**

Informants were asked to describe the strategies they use in order to be polite when conversing with the different types of addressees listed in question #3. This question asked them to think about their behaviors and the linguistic and non-linguistic devices they normally use when they want to be polite or, at least, not impolite, even though they might have rated the need for politeness with some of those relationships as low. For example, if they rated the need for politeness with professors as high, their answers should show what they prototypically understand as politeness. This question should also help highlight qualitative differences between ways of being polite with different addressees, expanding understandings of politeness beyond formality and social manners.

##### *5.4.1. Family*

When Americans try to be polite with their family, they mainly choose *showing respect and consideration* (68% of the answers). A second group of answers (10.6%) has to do with *being patient* with family members. For example, informants explained that they avoid starting arguments, getting angry for no reason, and reacting negatively to what family say. Other informants mentioned demeanors linked to *expressing affection and engagement* (8.5%), like hugging, smiling, using terms of endearment (“mum”, “grandpa”, “Uncle John”), and doing something for them to show that one cares. A small group of answers (2.1%) were connected to the idea of *being obedient*, that is, “to do what they are asked to do,” and “to take advice.” Finally, individual replies highlighted concepts such as *maturity* (“behaving in a sensible manner,” “asking useful questions,” and “acting wise”), *honesty*, and *kindness*.

When SNS try to be polite to family members, they mainly get involved in their family’s issues (83.3%). Specifically, they alluded to helping with chores, looking for solutions to family members’ problems, asking about their day, and using some other maneuvers to show that they care. In addition, they mentioned the use of terms of endearment and other expressions of love. Other strategies consist of “making compliments” and “keeping a close physical distance when interacting.” Only 16.7% of SNS talked about the use of mitigation and indirectness when trying to be polite with family. They found the use of these devices especially necessary for strategic purposes, such as asking for permission to do something or asking for a favor, and to facilitate daily coexistence.

Overall, more than half of Americans thought about polite maneuvers to protect face, and most SNS thought of polite maneuvers to constitute and reinforce face. This suggests that Americans see family as a relationship where there are differences in D and P, due to age, experience, income, and so on. Hence, the need for negative



politeness is greater than the need for positive politeness. On the contrary, most SNS and a small group of Americans stated their preference for producing FEAs, even though the latter's answers to question #1 of the questionnaire were not connected to this type of politeness. This further indicates that Americans' prototypical notion of first-order politeness is synonymous with negative politeness and avoiding FTAs, not with positive politeness and producing FEAs — though their actual behavior may veer away from this prototype.

#### 5.4.2. Friends

When talking to friends, the majority of Americans (64.5%) gave answers linked to the *expression of affection and engagement* (positive politeness), such as hugging, making their friends feel close to them, using terms of endearment (“cupcake”, “muffin”, etc.), and making their friends happy. Nevertheless, 18.4% of them still considered *respect* as an indicator of politeness. They attend to the interlocutor's negative face by using manners, not imposing or demanding, apologizing when necessary, and letting their friends finish talking. Finally, 7.9% talked about the use of an informal conversational style that helps them *tighten the bonds of friendship*. For instance, they said that they kid around with each other, use sarcasm, interrupt each other for the effect of humor, and even insult each other jokingly, but take care not to actually hurt each other.

SNS pointed out that they do the same or very similar things when wishing to be polite with friends as with family, that is, offering help and advice, using kind language — “not formal but affectionate and thoughtful” — getting involved in their lives, showing interest, making positive comments about their jobs or appearance, and having physical contact when interacting.

It is interesting to note that, in both cultures, there is a predominance of positive over negative politeness with friends. Nonetheless, Americans rated lower the importance of using politeness with friends than with family. This suggests that Americans perceive of friendship as a lower D + P relationship than family relationships.

#### 5.4.3. Professors

Both Americans and SNS listed verbal and non-verbal devices that they use to be polite with professors, in order *to make a good impression, to be appreciative* of the professor's job, and above all, *to show respect*. For instance, as students, they “pay attention to what professors say,” “thank professors for their help,” “put a lot of effort into the class, because professors are also putting in a lot of effort,” “do not impose,” “ask useful and thoughtful questions,” and “make sure that professors have time for you before asking questions.” They are also “mindful of professors' higher status,” and they “do not say anything that would offend professors.” All in all, informants try to be polite by being deferential. Therefore, deference is the main ingredient of their definition of politeness with professors — situationally defined first-order politeness.

#### 5.4.4. *Strangers*

The results of the questionnaire show, once again, that informants associate politeness with distance and formality, since they not consider the use of politeness very important when interacting with people they maintain a close relationship with — such as friends and family — but they believe it is important to be polite with professors and strangers.

Americans are divided between establishing a connection with the stranger (48.9%) or respecting his/her privacy (51.1%). When opting for the first, they acknowledge the presence of the stranger by greeting and introducing themselves. They also “humor the stranger if s/he enjoys small talk,” “keep up the conversation,” and are “open to what the stranger is saying.” While interacting, they remain kind, smile, engage in eye contact, compliment, and are attentive and friendly. If, on the contrary, they choose to keep their distance from the stranger, they “let the stranger speak first,” “address only what the stranger has said,” and “do not ask anything non-superficial.” That is, they treat the stranger with respect and consideration: they are courteous, address the stranger using titles, speak calmly, use mitigation and indirectness, try not to offend and to be politically correct, use formal language, and do not use profanity or slang.

SNS try to be polite to strangers in the same way as to professors, foremost by using negative politeness: Keeping a distance, using good manners, formal language and politeness formulae. Nonetheless, some informants (10%) talked about being polite by being friendly to the stranger and acting with confidence.

In sum, the two cultures try to be polite to strangers by both protecting and constituting face, especially negative face.

#### 5.4.5. *Shop-assistants*

This type of relationship includes the three classic components that promote negative politeness: There is distance between the interlocutors, there is a difference in power — although it is not always clear in which direction — and a variable understanding of imposition — the client is asking for service. This last factor is variably understood by Americans and SNS, with the egalitarian ideology of the former — if not always their actual ethos in practice — being built into a convention of never taking the provision of service by a shop-assistant for granted. Owing to this last factor, Americans explained that they are polite with a shop-assistant by being grateful for the service that the shop-assistant is providing to them and by acknowledging their work. For this reason, they generally make use of negative politeness with shop assistants (77.6% of the answers). Informants explained that they do not demand things, but request them politely using mitigation, indirectness, a calm tone, titles, politeness formulae, and formal speech. Also, they do not demand too much time if the shop-assistant is busy. In addition, informants thank shop-assistants for their service, listen to their explanations, try not to lose their temper or seem irritated, do not complain too much, and stay positive. Nevertheless, to the extent that clients have the power in this kind of relationship, 22.4% of Americans showed a preference for recognizing shop-assistants’ service by using strategies more associated to positive politeness than to negative politeness. For instance, they prefer establishing contact with shop-assistants, instead of just being respectful and considerate. They also smile, make eye contact, greet, interact with shop-

assistants rather than just looking for information or help, ask how their day is going, exchange pleasantries, and are friendly and understanding.

When SNS were asked what they do to be polite to shop-assistants, they repeated almost the same answers as in the two previous sections (Section 5.4.3 and Section 5.4.4): 70% of SNS use formal and indirect language - conditionals, modal verbs, T/V system, and interrogatives -, manners and politeness formulae - “my pleasure”, “thank you”, “please”-, while 30% of SNS try to be polite by greeting shop-assistants appropriately and chit-chatting to break the ice. This last behavior is connected to the production of FEAs and is in line with Spaniards’ tendency towards familiarity or *confianza* noted earlier. Nevertheless, figures indicate a preference for showing respect and keeping a distance. Therefore, negative politeness is more important for both SNS and Americans when interacting with shop-assistants.

In conclusion, there are some points in common between the use of polite strategies by SNS and Americans with different recipients. When these two types of informants want to be polite to family, friends, professors, strangers, or shop-assistants, they primarily use resources associated with the expression of deference, engagement, and kindness. However, figures indicate that, in general, the answers of Americans highlighted behaviors associated with respect and consideration. In contrast, for SNS showing respect is less prevalent than showing affection. For instance, compared with Americans, the importance attributed by SNS to being affectionate as a way of being polite to family members and friends is much higher than the importance of being respectful. These results are in accordance with the characterization of U.S. American as a distancing culture — where the protection of face is paramount —, and the characterization of Peninsular Spanish as a rapprochement culture — where the constitution of face is more appreciated.

### ***5.5. When talking with an English-speaking friend in English, what do you think is important?***

The previous question asked informants to detail strategies and forms of conduct that they use when trying to be polite with different types of addressees. The current question inquires about some specific behaviors with a particular type of addressee: A friend. Surveys conducted among ENS and SNS only offered one chart for rating behaviors when talking with an English-speaking friend in English or a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish, respectively (i.e., ENS only answered the question reported in 5.5, and SNS only the question reported in 5.6 below). The questionnaire distributed among SNNS asked about the importance they attach to these behaviors when talking with an English-speaking friend in English *and* with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish (i.e., they responded to both questions reported in Section 5.5. and Section 5.6).

Contrary to the previous questions, which were open-ended, informants were now given a list of behaviors and asked to rank them accordingly. Informants were asked to rate the importance they attach to: A friend not meddling in their personal life, waiting until they have finished their turn to start talking, using mitigation and indirectness to make requests or to make a statement, making positive comments about them (their virtues, their belongings, their actions, etc.), and inviting them to make plans together (e.g., having coffee, shopping, going out, etc.). They rated the importance of

these behaviors on a 3-point scale, where 0 was labeled as ‘not important,’ 1 was labeled as ‘important,’ and 2 was labeled as ‘very important.’

Some of the behaviors in this question are more related to the avoidance and mitigation of FTAs (a friend who does not meddle in their personal life, a friend that waits until they have finished their turn to start talking, a friend that uses mitigation and indirectness to make requests or a statement), whereas others are more connected to the production of FEAs (a friend that makes positive comments about them, a friend that shows closeness or intimacy, and a friend that invites them to make plans together). We predicted that Americans would rate higher the importance of avoiding FTAs than producing FEAs, whereas the opposite would be true of SNS.

After analyzing the data from the entire group of Americans (ENS and SNNS), we found that the most appreciated behavior is waiting until the other speaker has finished his/her turn to start talking (mean 1.17,  $SD = .550$ ). Second, Americans rated as important that their friends show closeness, intimacy (mean 1.10,  $SD = .664$ ), and that they invite them to make plans together (mean 1.10,  $SD = .774$ ). Although the statistical analysis of mean responses indicated that the same average importance was given to these two behaviors, the standard deviation is greater for making plans together. Using mitigation and indirectness comes next in order of importance (mean .79,  $SD = .572$ ), followed by friends making positive comments about them (mean .67,  $SD = .648$ ) and, lastly, their friends not meddling in their personal life (mean .42,  $SD = .572$ ). All these results indicate that working both negative and positive face is important with friends, but the degree of agreement among Americans is higher when it comes to behaviors associated with negative face.

In conclusion, results indicate that for Americans, avoidance of face-threat is more important with friends than face-enhancing politeness, confirming, once again, the characterization of Anglo cultures as distancing ones — or, in Brown and Levinson’s terms, as prizing individuality above and beyond intimacy. The results of this part of the questionnaire are also in accordance with all previous answers given by Americans. They did not describe politeness as face-enhancing in question #1, and they did not consider it important to be polite with friends in question #3, because they had in mind a notion of politeness that is closer to negative politeness. However, when they were directly asked about the things that they do when trying to be polite with friends in question #4, they included a series of behaviors that are linked to the expression of affection and engagement — i.e., positive politeness. This suggests that, while it is not completely absent, positive politeness does not figure prominently in English folk definitions of first-order politeness, which justifies the predisposition toward negative politeness and the avoidance of imposition in several theories that have been criticized for an Anglo-bias (Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983).

### ***5.6. When talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish, what do you think is important?***

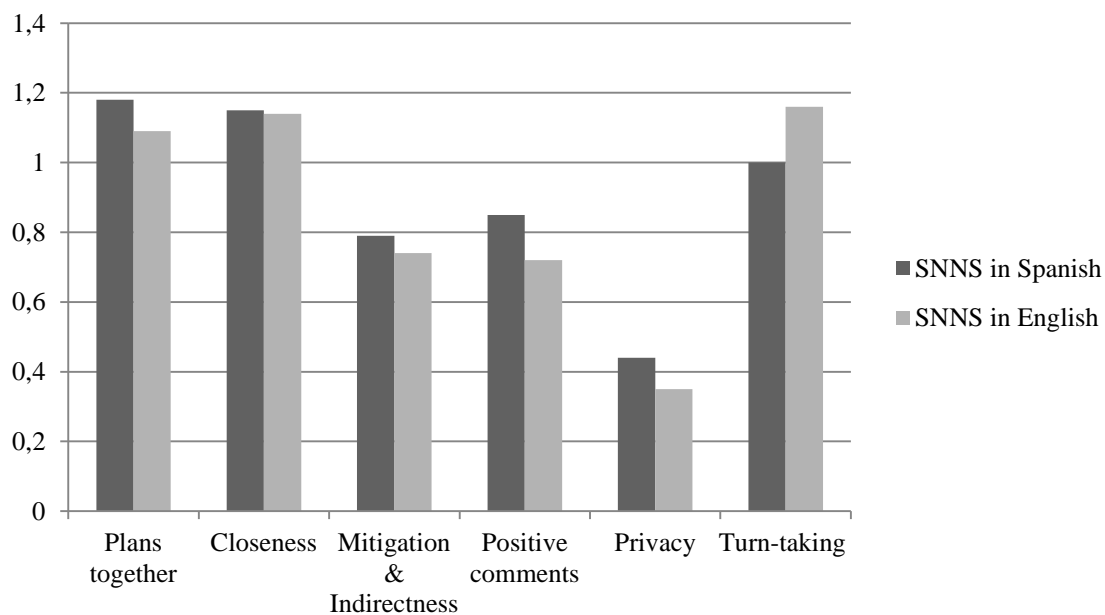
Only SNS and SNNS answered this question, which asked informants about the importance of the same behaviors as before but this time while talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish. The pertinent research question here is whether SNS rate higher the importance of producing FEAs than avoiding FTAs and, if so, whether SNNS transfer to Spanish their (native) Anglo preference for the avoidance of FTAs over the

production of FEAs or whether they are able to adapt their behavior depending on the culture of the addressee and the language that they are using.

### 5.6.1. Spanish nonnative speakers

The two most appreciated behaviors by SNNS when interacting in Spanish with Spanish-speaking friends are linked to the production of FEAs: That their friends invite them to make plans together (mean 1.18,  $SD = .756$ ) and that they show closeness and intimacy (mean 1.15,  $SD = .709$ ). These two behaviors are followed by the positive appreciation of friends who wait until they have finished talking to start their turns (mean 1.00,  $SD = .688$ ), friends who make positive comments about their friends (mean .85,  $SD = .756$ ), and the use of mitigation and indirectness (mean .79,  $SD = .695$ ). Lastly, as with the English version of this question, the least important behavior was that their friends not meddle in their personal life (mean .44,  $SD = .641$ ).

Figure 2 shows a comparison of the answers given by SNNS rating these behaviors when talking with an English-speaking friend in English, and with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish.



**Figure 2.** Summary of the importance attached by SNNS to various behaviors when talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish and with an English-speaking friend in English

All the actions related to the production of FEAs — making plans together, showing closeness, making positive comments — are rated higher when speaking in Spanish than in English; however, so is privacy/not meddling in their affairs. Using mitigation and indirectness is rated the same when speaking in Spanish as in English, but the difference in the standard deviation indicates less agreement about the importance of this action when speaking in Spanish. Finally, the last behavior relating to the avoidance

of FTAs concerns respecting turn-taking norms, for which they seem to have more tolerance when speaking in Spanish. This suggests that SNNS are aware of cultural differences and try, to some extent, to adjust their behavior towards the characteristics of a *rapprochement* culture.

Informants' level of Spanish proficiency interacts interestingly with turn-taking: Not being interrupted is more important to novice students (85.7%) than to intermediate (50%) and to advanced students (38.5%). This suggests that higher level speakers know more about the flexibility of the Spanish turn-taking system<sup>10</sup> and are better able to accommodate to it than beginners are.

Finally, it is reasonable to assume that participants who studied abroad would be more conscious of cultural differences. In order to determine if the differences in scores were statistically significant, independent samples T-tests were run. The T-tests resulted in significant differences for three of the behaviors: Privacy rights, turn-taking, and closeness. Students who studied abroad were more tolerant of a Spanish-speaking friend meddling in their personal life (68.4% versus 53.8%). They also answered more frequently that it is not important that their Spanish-speaking friends wait for them to be finished to start talking (42.1% versus 7.7%), while their percentage of answers claiming that it is very important that their Spanish-speaking friends show closeness and intimacy is greater compared with students who have not been abroad (42.1% versus 23%). All these answers show that the importance and higher appreciation for face-enhancing politeness increases with exposure to a Spanish-speaking culture. Regarding the teaching of im/politeness, a question for future research would be how to achieve this enhanced appreciation without necessarily staying abroad. Could classroom discourse also effectively familiarize students with face-enhancing politeness, and how?

### 5.6.2. *Spanish native speakers*

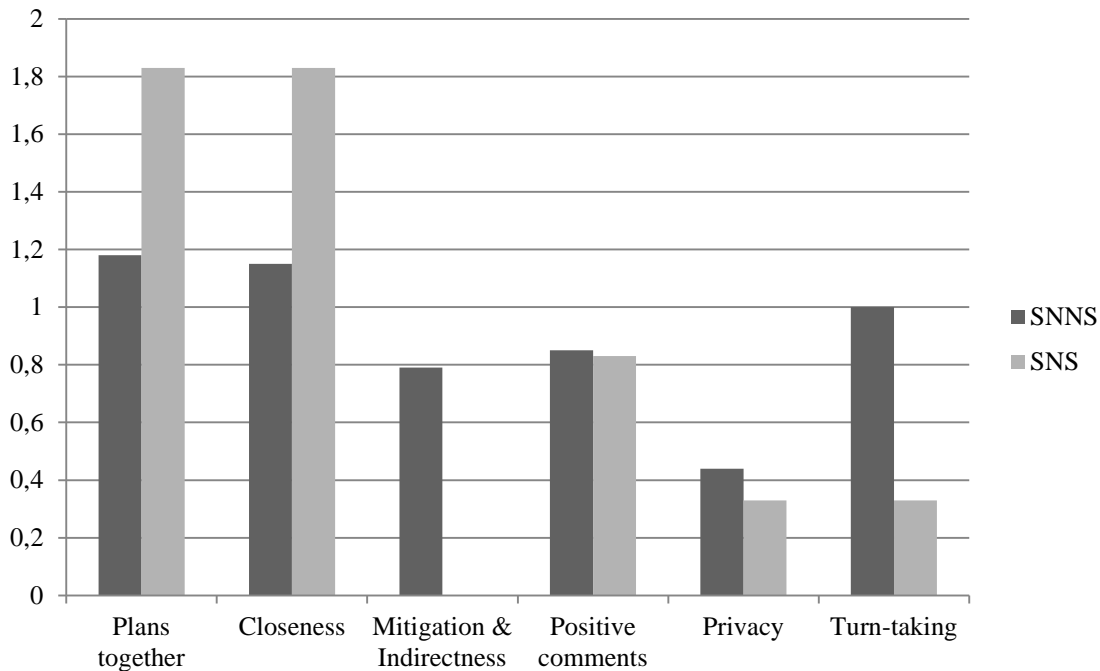
Our prediction was that SNS would rate higher the importance of behaviors connected to the production of FEAs than to the avoidance of FTAs. These expectations were confirmed. The behaviors most appreciated by SNS are all related to the production of FEAs. Especially important to SNS is that their friends show closeness, intimacy (mean 1.83, *SD* = .389), and invite them to make plans together (mean 1.83, *SD* = .389). This matches the description of Spanish face in the literature as involving a high degree of *confianza*. Second comes another behavior connected to the production of FEAs: That their friends make positive comments about them (mean .83, *SD* = .389). By far, the least important behaviors are all linked to the avoidance of FTAs: That their friends not meddle in their personal lives (mean .33, *SD* = .651), and respect turn-taking (mean .33, *SD* = .492). Interestingly, no SNS gave importance to using mitigation and indirectness.

These results are in accordance with the conclusions of Barros García (2011), who analyzed a corpus of Spanish informal conversations and concluded that the production of FEAs is more frequent than the avoidance of FTAs in informal conversations among acquaintances. Therefore, the two methodologies — self-reporting versus analysis of conversational data — produced the same results.

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<sup>10</sup> This flexibility has been discussed by Fant (1989), Briz (2005), and Bernal (2007), among others.

The comparison of the answers to this question by SNS and SNNS supports the idea that Spanish nonnative speakers still attach more importance to the avoidance of FTAs when speaking in Spanish than Spanish native speakers do, as shown in the next diagram (Figure 3). SNS rated much lower than SNNS did all behaviors related to the avoidance of FTAs.

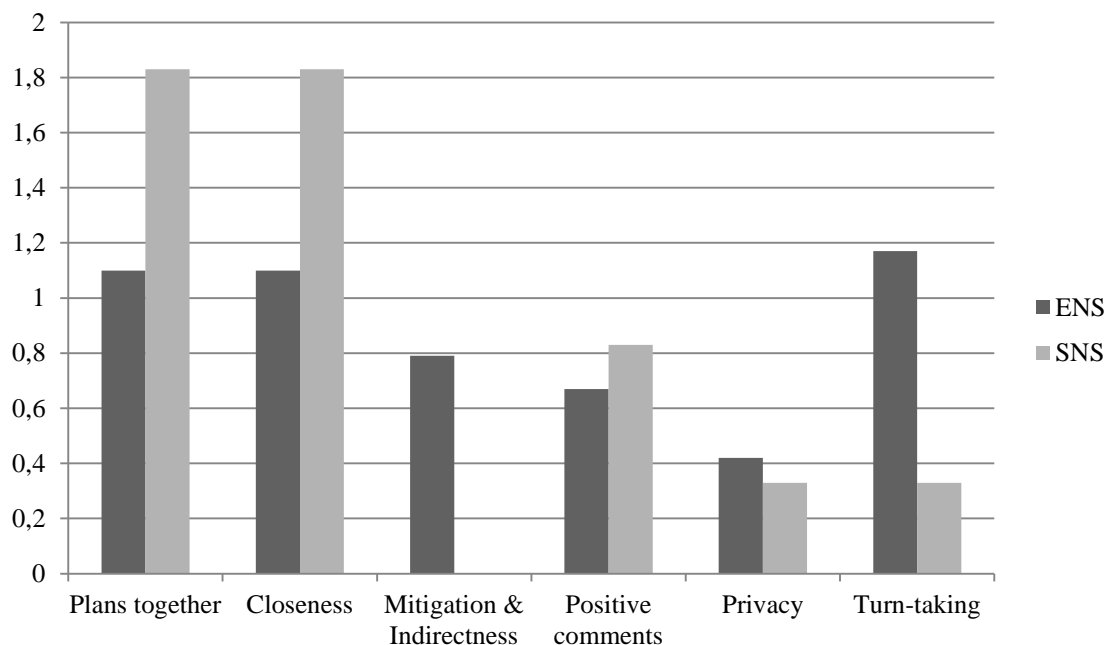


**Figure 3.** Summary of the importance attached by SNS and by SNNS to various behaviors when talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish

The results further showed that the more advanced learners were able to align themselves better with Spanish norms. Nevertheless, even they found some aspects of Spanish politeness — such as the lack of mitigation and indirectness or the turn-taking system — harder to adapt to, suggesting that certain aspects of native norms may be more difficult to abandon. This suggests that some aspects of the notion of first-order politeness are more central to its definition and therefore less easily foregone than others, providing support for the prototypical structure of first-order politeness notions proposed in Section 5.1 above.

Regarding the comparison of the answers to question #5 given by SNS and SNNS, the results confirmed our predictions again. The following diagram (Figure 4) supports the idea that Spanish face is not described as the desire not to be imposed upon, intruded, or otherwise put upon, as happens in English-speaking cultures — according to Brown and Levinson (1987) — but rather the need for positive self-affirmation and being treated with familiarity. For instance, 75% of SNS rated as not important that a friend not meddle in their personal life, which is 13.5% higher than the corresponding percentage of SNNS. And whereas the totality of SNS rated using mitigation and indirectness as not important, 63.5% of SNNS assessed it as important. Moreover, showing closeness and intimacy is considered very important by 83.4% of SNS but only by 26.9% of SNNS, while a friend making positive comments is rated as important by

83.4% of SNS and only 48% of ENS. Finally, 83.4% of SNS as opposed to only 34.6% of ENS assessed as very important that their friends propose to make plans together.



**Figure 4.** Summary of the importance attached by ENS and SNS to various behaviors when talking with a friend in one’s native language

Another striking difference that can be seen in this diagram is the percentage of Spanish and English native speakers who rated “a friend that waits for his/her turn to start talking” as not important — 66.7% of SNS versus 7.7% of ENS. Indeed, no SNS found this very important, while 25% of ENS did. This last divergence clearly indicates a difference between Spanish and English conversational styles. Whereas Spaniards participate in conversations whenever they find it appropriate, that is, not following a strict system of rules for turn-taking, English speakers tend to wait until their interlocutor has finished his/her turn in order to start speaking. For some English speakers, Spaniards interrupt frequently. For some Spaniards, these are not interruptions but *cooperative overlaps* (Tannen 1990, 1993, 1994), because they are not an attempt to steal the turn. Rather, they show interest and support.<sup>11</sup> Tannen defines these two conversational styles as *high consideration* and *high involvement* respectively. A high involvement conversational style gives priority to expressing enthusiastic support, even if it involves simultaneous speech, while a high consideration style is more concerned with being considerate of others. Thus, it is understandable that these differences could become a problem in intercultural communication between speakers with different

<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, not every overlap is cooperative. In order to determine whether one speaker is interrupting another, one must be familiar with the setting and the conversational style of the speakers. It is “a matter of interpretation regarding individuals’ rights and obligations” (Tannen 1990: 190). Other scholars also distinguish between interruptions and overlaps. For instance, Goldberg (1990: 890–893) talks about *power-oriented interruptions* and *rapport-oriented interruptions*. The first type is characterized as rude, impolite and inappropriate; the second as a sign of empathy and cooperation. “[R]apport interruptions often strive to bolster the interruptee’s positive face” (Goldberg 1990: 893).



conversational styles. Furthermore, it seems logical to claim that Peninsular Spanish has a high-involvement conversational style and American English a high-consideration conversational style, if we look at the results of the questionnaire. ENS consistently showed more appreciation for demeanors linked to consideration, whereas SNS showed more appreciation for demeanors linked to involvement (cf. Figure 4 above).

**5.7. *If you made any changes to your answers from question #5 to question #6, why do you think that is?***

This last question was only part of the questionnaire administered to Spanish nonnative speakers, since it is only they who answered both questions. The purpose of this question was to probe SNNS's reasons for appreciating different communicative behaviors when talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish versus when talking with an English-speaking friend in English, and the extent of their metalinguistic awareness about the conventions of each language.

In spite of the individual opinions given by the informants, some trends were found in the data. For instance, a good number of SNNS, especially beginners, indicated that they would not have made any changes because they do not have enough knowledge to answer this question. On the other hand, some Spanish learners explained that they rated the importance of some behaviors higher because they want to use their best speaking skills to make a good impression of themselves, as well as of their country, in the foreign language/culture. In addition, the results indicate that participants' lack of proficiency in Spanish makes them behave in a different way and appreciate different behaviors from their interlocutor. Therefore, their answers to this question are not always motivated by differences between English and Spanish but by their difficulties when speaking in the foreign language. Some of the answers that support this idea focus on turn-taking: "sometimes when I cannot think what to say in Spanish and they cut me off, I am grateful for it!" (Spanish beginner), "I changed my response about waiting for me to finish talking because in Spanish it is harder for me to complete thoughts so I would not mind someone jumping in" (advanced).

Besides, several informants acknowledged the differences in the way English and Spanish speakers do turn-taking. They believe that English-speaking cultures emphasize taking turns and allowing one another to complete a thought before speaking, while Spanish is more relaxed and does not demand such behavior. Other participants focused on the idea that mitigation and indirectness are more important in English than in Spanish. Nevertheless, some informants, such as a participant who studied abroad in Ecuador, stated the opposite idea. If one looks back to the information about politeness in different varieties of Spanish (see Section 2), one will understand the reasons for this answer. Ecuadorian Spanish is characterized by a more extensive use of polite strategies to avoid or mitigate face-threats compared with other Spanish varieties, such as Venezuelan, Argentinean or Peninsular Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer 2008).

With regard to changes in their answers about privacy/intimacy, some informants explained that they are more used to closeness and intimacy when interacting with Spanish native speakers than when interacting with English native speakers. And, finally, another frequent change is the importance attributed to their Spanish-speaking friends making positive comments. Informants explained that Spanish

native speakers are friendlier with each other, so positive comments are more frequent and necessary in interaction.

In sum, answers to this question should not be always taken at face-value but rather as justifications for SNNS's preferences as these were shaped by their different command of the language and different exposure to a range of Spanish varieties. In spite of this, it is worth noting that SNNS rated higher all communicative behaviors associated with FEAs. They also exhibited less agreement and lowered their ranking of two communicative behaviors associated with FTAs — mitigation and indirectness, and turn-taking — when asked to assess the importance of these behaviors while speaking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish and with an English-speaking friend in English. We propose that first-order notions of politeness may be prototypically structured, with those features about which there is most agreement (cf. Table 1 above) being more central to its definition and therefore less easily foregone than others. The fact that these prototypical features correlate precisely with the aspects that Americans find it most difficult to adapt to when speaking Spanish seems to support this point.

## 6. Conclusions

The questionnaire discussed in this article was designed to explore what native and nonnative users of Spanish consider as politeness, the strategies they use when trying to be polite, and the need for polite behavior in a given social situation. With this goal in mind, SNS from Spain, ENS from the United States, and SNNS from the United States were asked to answer questions about what politeness is; when it is used; what they do to be polite; when they think politeness is necessary and to what degree; what their strategies are when trying to be polite with different types of addressees; how they rate the importance of a list of communicative behaviors when talking with a friend in their native language; and how they rate those communicative behaviors when talking with a foreign friend in a foreign language.

Our results support the characterization of Peninsular Spanish as a rapprochement culture and of U.S. American as a distancing culture by previous researchers as accurate. For instance, the answers of ENS and SNNS to questions #1, #5 and #6 of the questionnaire support the relevance of negative face — non-imposition, non-intrusion, and privacy — for these speakers, and, consequently, the relevance that the avoidance and mitigation of FTAs has for Americans. These features were significantly downplayed in the answers given by SNS, who better appreciate the production of FEAs than the avoidance/mitigation of FTAs. SNNS notice the difference between Spanish-speaking and U.S. American cultures, and try, to the best of their abilities, to adjust their behavior to the expectations of the foreign culture.

However, both groups of informants — Americans and SNS — share a traditional view of politeness as deference, adherence to social norms and morality, which connects our results with politeness<sub>1</sub> or first-order politeness approaches. For this reason, informants, in their role as ordinary language users, believe that the use of politeness is more necessary when there is a distant and/or asymmetrical — power, age, etc. — relationship with the addressee. This last claim is based on participants' answers to question #3, where they rated the importance of being polite to family, friends, professors, strangers, and shop-assistants. Family and friends were consistently ranked lower than other types of addressees. A related difference was found here in that SNS

rated higher the need for politeness with friends, because blood ties with family members are more difficult to damage than friendships, while Americans rated higher the need for politeness with family, because this kind of relationship is ruled to a greater extent by social rules and conventions than friendships are.

The connection of politeness to deference is closer to the definition of negative politeness than to positive politeness. Negative politeness is more apparent in distant relationships and when there are differences in power among interlocutors, such as with professors, strangers, and shop-assistants. The list of polite strategies suggested by all informants supports this idea. Conversely, when they try to be polite with family and friends, their behaviors are more connected to positive politeness than to negative politeness. Thus, positive politeness is more frequent when interlocutors enjoy a close relationship, and when there are fewer differences between them, but not necessarily when the speaker has the power, not the addressee. Since informants do not associate positive politeness with the definition of politeness itself, they rated lower the importance of being polite with family and friends.

In question #2 informants were asked to evaluate Spanish and English native speakers as more/less polite. The answers of the SNNS group showed the clear influence of their own culture. Informants who studied abroad in Spain think that Spaniards are less polite than English speakers because they are more casual and look for closeness, which intimidates them. However, those informants who studied abroad in a Latin-American country see Spanish speakers as more polite, because of these countries' frequent use of formal language, indirectness and mitigation.

Lastly, the arguments used by some SNNS to explain any changes they would make from question #5 (talking with an English-speaking friend in English) to question #6 (talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish) indicate that their ratings are not always motivated by the observation of cultural differences but may also result from by their lack of proficiency in the foreign language and their personal experiences with a range of Spanish-speaking cultures.

Although metapragmatic data such as these obtained by means of a reflective questionnaire may not provide information about what speakers actually say in real life, they reveal what guides their expectations, perceptions and performance. Therefore, metapragmatic data are an important tool for achieving knowledge about politeness. They help gain useful access into first-order understandings of politeness and impoliteness. The study of folk beliefs, language attitudes and language awareness is, according to Jaworski et al. (2004: 3), vital for understanding how speech communities value and orient to language and communication. In this sense, the metapragmatic representations of politeness obtained from this research reveal some structured shared understandings of what politeness is usually like, how it works, what certain ways of speaking connote and imply, and what they ought to be like for native speakers of Spanish from Spain and for native speakers of English from the United States, and for nonnative speakers of Spanish from the United States. In conclusion, we agree with Schneider (2012: 1035) that metapragmatic insights such as these are needed, alongside real conversational data, to provide the foundations of a first-order theory of politeness.

Accepting that there are plenty of factors that could influence the outcome of this research, some basic statistical analyses were used, paying particular attention to the influence of variables like the level of proficiency of SNNS and their experience abroad. The combination of all the tests supports the conclusion that advanced learners and those who studied abroad in a Spanish-speaking country are more alert about cultural

differences and misjudged them as impolite to a lower extent as beginners and students who have no experience of living abroad.

In addition to researchers of intercultural communication and specialists in im/politeness, this research is of interest to specialists in second language acquisition. Since the role of politeness is essential for establishing how each culture conceives of communicative success and works out interpersonal relationships, Spanish learners should be aware of how politeness is used in the target language and which values are shared with their native languages or rejected. Teaching particular aspects of politeness (e.g., divergences in the turn-taking system) in the second language classroom should enable students to correctly interpret speakers' intentions in the foreign culture, to achieve their communicative goals, to constitute their and their addressees' face, and to strengthen their interpersonal relationships. In addition, it should help them avoid intercultural misunderstandings that can generate stereotypes, speaker isolation or recipient affront. More generally, it is expected that reflection on cultural differences could contribute "to fight[ing] against xenophobia, [which is] very frequently due to the ignorance of communicative norms variations and, more specifically, to the ignorance of politeness norms variations" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004: 52; our translation).

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**Appendix 1. Background Survey**

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION:**

- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Sex:           **Woman**           **Man**
  - Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
  - How long have you been living in the United States of America? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is/are your native language/s? \_\_\_\_\_
  - How long have you been learning Spanish? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Have you studied abroad (in a Spanish-speaking country)? \_\_\_\_\_
- If your answer was YES, where did you study abroad? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your Spanish level (ACTFL)?: **Novice**   **Intermediate**   **Advanced**
  - Are any of your family members from a Spanish-speaking country? \_\_\_\_\_
- If your answer was YES:  
 What country is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Did you grow up speaking Spanish? \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2. English Questionnaire**

1) How would you describe a polite speaker?

2) In general, do you think Spanish speakers are less or more polite than English speakers (when speaking their own languages)? Why?

3) Who do you think it is important to be polite with?

	<b>VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT IMPORTANT</b>	<b>WHY?</b>
Your family				
Your friends				
Your professors				
A stranger				
A shop-assistant				

4) When you try to be polite with the people above (question #3), what do you do?

Your family	
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Your friends	
Your professors	
A stranger	
A shop-assistant	

5) When talking with an English-speaking friend in English, what do you think is important? Mark the appropriate cell from the table.

	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
That he/she doesn't meddle in your personal life.			
That he/she wait until you finish your turn to start talking.			
That he/she uses mitigation and indirectness. For example: <i>Could you close the door, please?</i> versus <i>Close the door.</i>			
That he/she shows you closeness, intimacy.			
That he/she makes positive comments about you (your virtues, your belongings, your actions, etc.). For example: <i>You are very smart, I love your bag, You did a great job,</i> etc.			
That he/she invites you to make plans together, such as having a coffee, shopping, going out, etc.			

6) When talking with a Spanish-speaking friend in Spanish, what do you think is important? Mark the appropriate cell from the table.

	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT
That he/she doesn't meddle in your personal life.			
That he/she wait until you finish your turn to start talking.			
That he/she uses mitigation and indirectness. For example: <i>¿Podrías cerrar la puerta, por favor?</i> versus <i>Cierra la puerta.</i>			
That he/she shows you closeness, intimacy.			
That he/she makes positive comments about you (your virtues, your belongings, your actions, etc.). For example: <i>¡Qué listo/a eres!, Me encanta tu bolso, ¡Buen trabajo!,</i> etc.			
That he/she invites you to make plans together, such as having a coffee, shopping, going out, etc.			

7) If you made any changes to your answers from question #5 to question #6, why do you think that is?

