Sociopragmatic Variation: Dispreferred Responses among Mexicans and Dominicans

The goal of the study of sociopragmatic variation is to compare/identify the interactional patterns of given social groups in specific sociocultural contexts. The literature in cross-cultural and sociopragmatic variation in Spanish is limited to the differences in realization patterns of requests between Spaniards and Ecuadorians, and Uruguayans and Spaniards; mitigation between Chileans and Spaniards, and refusals and reprimanding between Venezuelans and Peruvians (cf. Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005). Using conversation-analytic tools (Lerner, 2004; Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1995), this study examines one type of dispreferred responses, refusals, and analyzes sociopragmatic variation between two sociocultural contexts: Mexico and the Dominican Republic (DR) when refusing an interlocutor of equal status, but with different degrees of distance (+D, -D). Sample: 36 male university students: Mexicans (N = 18) and Dominicans (N = 18), and data were collected in each country by means of unscripted role plays. Each participant interacted with a native speaker of Mexican or Dominican Spanish (a college student) in three refusals to requests, invitations, and suggestions. Data were analyzed across the interaction using Scollon & Scollon’s (2001) framework of face: involvement and independence. The 108 interactions were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (t-tests) statistics. Results: Although situational variation was the norm between both groups, the following sociocultural realization patterns were noted: Mexicans used a significantly higher number of refusal strategies across the interaction than Dominicans, whose strategies were employed in fewer and shorter turns. The Mexicans showed a stronger preference for indirectness when refusing a friend or a classmate, whereas the preferred response among Dominicans was a direct, unmitigated refusal. In response to an insistence, Mexicans were more elaborate, vague, more deferential, and refused profusely using indirect refusals such as reasons, mitigated refusals, alternatives, and indefinite replies. Dominicans, on the other hand, were firm, direct, and clear in refusal responses. Differences were also noted in the use of informal address forms with a person of equal status: Mexicans used the ‘tú’ form in all situations, whereas Dominicans preferred two address forms, the ‘tú’ (you-INFORMAL) and ‘usted’ (you-FORMAL) to address a +D classmate. Overall, while both aspects of face, involvement and independence, are present in the speech act behavior of Mexicans and Dominicans, the data showed that Mexicans showed an orientation toward independence (i.e., deference or negative politeness), whereas Dominicans showed an inclination toward involvement (i.e., solidarity or positive politeness). The results are discussed in light of previous studies that compared Venezuelan and Peruvian Spanish (García, 1999, 2004). This study makes a contribution to the limited field of sociopragmatic variation in two varieties of Spanish that have not been examined in previous literature.

References