Impoliteness Strategies and Social Characteristics.

An Analysis of Films in Peninsular Spanish and American English Speakers at Work

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Abstract

This paper aims to offer a brief revision of some of the best-known contributions to the field study of impoliteness. On the one hand, a taxonomy of impoliteness strategies is presented, based on my own model of social characteristics. On the other hand, as an example of the application of this model, dialogues in six films —three of them filmed in peninsular Spanish and the rest in American English— are analysed, in search of the use of such impoliteness strategies. The results will show that different cultural conceptions of these two groups reflect upon the use of impoliteness strategies.

Keywords: impoliteness strategies; social characteristics; cultural differences

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Linguistic impoliteness is not an independent element in discourse, but it depends on the context that surrounds it, on the nature of the relationship that the participants establish and also, on the type of activity they are carrying out. Thus, discourse analysis research should always keep in mind these three elements when analysing impoliteness. Since this paper proposes a classification of impoliteness strategies, it seems appropriate to me to highlight previous contributions that could be taken as landmarks in this field of study. Leech (1983), one of the founding fathers of politeness and impoliteness theories, stated that there are several types of speech acts that interlocutors can perform. His typology included: actions that support politeness, actions that are almost indifferent towards politeness, actions in conflict with politeness and actions addressed to break the relationship between participants. In the two last categories, although not specifically mentioned, Leech was defining impoliteness as those actions contrary to politeness or, in other words, those actions that may conflict with what is considered polite. According to Leech, there are some speech acts that are inherently polite, as for example thanking somebody, and other speech acts that are inherently impolite, for instance, giving orders. As we will argue here, this is not always true, because, for example, we can be thankful to somebody so ironically, that it can be considered impolite.

Therefore, unlike Leech, and following Fraser and Nolan (1981), we must consider context as a key to interpret a speech act as polite or impolite. According to these authors, there are not inherently polite or impolite speech acts, but it is the context of a specific situation what categorises a sentence. In their words, “[...] no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. [...] it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are

uttered that determine the judgement of politeness” (Fraser & Nolan, 1981, p. 96). Nowadays, as Culpeper claims, “one cannot find any mainstream politeness theorist explicitly arguing that either politeness or impoliteness is wholly inherent in linguistic expressions” (Culpeper, 2010, p. 3234). Schifffrin (1991) also indicates that language always depends on the characteristics of the context, and therefore, it must be taken into account in any analysis of the discourse. The context can include cultural values such as power, identity, etc., and, for Culpeper (2010), as for Kaul de Marlangeon (2017), impoliteness occurs when there is a difference of power between the interlocutors. Bousfield (2008) also indicates the importance of conversational analysis or the study of linguistic strategies that speakers can apply during a conversation, abiding or infringing sociocultural norms, which govern the discourse of a particular culture; for example, turn-taking rules, interruption in conversation, etc. Thus, the manipulation and use of these rules can result in polite or impolite linguistic forms. Also, Kaul de Marlangeon (2017) emphasises the importance of the relationship established among context, cultural traits, and negative emotions, which can lead to impoliteness. Likewise, Wilutzky (2015) highlights the significance of emotions in the process of perception of impoliteness, and also the emotional relationship among participants and the social constructs about emotions that cultural groups build are crucial (Fuentes Rodriguez, 2012; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2017; Kienpointer, 2008). As Bravo (2005) argues, the ideal would be to establish a connection between phrases and social reality, cultural, demographic and social factors, to interpret the meaning of discourse. However, my stance towards the possibility of formulating a theory about politeness/impoliteness that adapts to all contexts is quite pessimistic, similarly to Bousfield (2006), Bravo (2005), or Janney and Arndt (1993), given the magnitude of cases that can concur during interaction. In other words, we should abandon the idea of building a universal theory about impoliteness and adopt a discursive or postmodern approach (Bousfield, 2010; Culpeper, 2010; Locher, 2006; Mills, 2003),

considering context as a crucial criterion. We could at least rely on what Locher and Watts (2005) call *a cognitive frame*, through which people make judgements about situations they have not experienced before.

In addition to context, the type of activity that interlocutors perform is another key element that determines politeness. Levinson (1979) contributed to defining activity type as:

[...] a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview [...] a task in a workshop [...] and so on (Levinson, 1979, p. 368).

The kind of relationship that can take place during such situations and the type of actions that can be carried out will be restricted by a series of written and non-written sociocultural norms. Any transgression of these norms can be interpreted by the hearer as impoliteness. In particular, this paper examines types of activity that can be found in labour contexts, both in Spain and in the United States, which are represented in films. In labour contexts, there may be different delicate situations in which impoliteness can occur easily. We are referring, for example, to communications of dismissal, important meetings, situations of abuse of power, tensions between colleagues aspiring to be promoted, job interviews to get a job, etc. —as in the example proposed by Levinson (1979). In these contexts, awareness of the values, ideas, rituals and rules that a culture has with respect to what is regarded impolite in certain circumstances, must be an aspect to bear in mind. This type of knowledge of social conventions, of what is appropriate or not in certain contexts, is what Bravo (1999) called cultural premises, and without them, it would be impossible to interpret the context and detect (im)politeness. As can be seen, also the notion of speech community, a term coined by the ethnography of speaking (Gumperz, 2001; Hymes, 1972) can be glimpsed here. These

authors talk about the knowledge shared by a group of speakers, in terms of social, discursive and conversational conventions, etc., and which is necessary for the interpretation of messages. The problem of identifying these norms, called by Bravo *socio-cultural premises* (Bravo, 2010), is that, as Hall pointed out (1959), they often remain hidden even for participants of a culture, needless to say, for other visitors. For this reason, it is necessary to list and identify as many of these premises as possible, to raise awareness among users of a particular language —especially non-native speakers of that language— so that they can improve their socio-cultural communication skills. An additional problem is that, as it has also been shown (Correa et al., 2002; Triandis et al., 1988), even in the same culture, cultural values that in principle are opposite, for instance, cultural traits of individualism and collectivism, can coexist in the same group, albeit in different contexts. That is also one of the reasons why im/politeness must be always studied at a specific local level, irrespective of the expected cultural values of a group (Sifianou & Garcés-Conejos, 2018).

In particular, this paper tries to illustrate the differences found in two cultural groups as different as the United States and Spain. For example, in a country such as the United States, regarded by many scholars (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010) as an example of individualist culture, private life is considered to be within limits that must not be invaded by co-workers. People may consider impolite to ask questions about one's personal life, religious beliefs, etc. unless there is a close relationship or the context permits such questions. On the contrary, in a culture like the Spanish one, whose members tend to exhibit tribal values (Leaptrott, 1996), which include a combination of individualism and collectivism, the line between the private and the public is not so insurmountable and the boundaries of privacy are not as ferrous. In this cultural group, this type of question among co-workers may not be regarded as offensive, although it will always depend on the situation and context. To conclude, as we will illustrate

in this study, cultural values reflect upon discourse, and therefore, they also influence on the interpretation of impoliteness.

Alternatives to Brown and Levinson's Model of Strategies

Since the model presented in this paper is inspired by the one proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]), we should include a review of some of the most prominent alternative proposals that have been developed since then.

First, Lachenicht (1980) developed what he reckoned an extension of the model proposed by Brown and Levinson and which included four superstrategies of *aggravating language*:

- (1) Indirect aggravating language, covering ambiguous insults, insinuations, and irony;
- (2) Direct aggravating language, such as impositions and any linguistic expression threatening the public image;
- (3) Positive aggravating language, which indicates that the listener does not have the speaker's approval, "... [he or she] is not esteemed, does not belong and will not receive cooperation" (Lachenicht, 1980, p. 619); and
- (4) Negative aggravating language, which indicates that the listener receives an imposition from the speaker, in order "... to interfere with his freedom of action and to attack his social position and the basis of his social action" (Lachenicht, 1980, p. 619).

Lachenicht is a reference point for impoliteness studies, although he has also received strong criticism, concerning the examples he created *ad hoc* to illustrate his classification.

Another author to be highlighted here is Culpeper (1996), who considers his model of impoliteness strategies, not as an extension of Brown and Levinson's (1987 [1978]) theory, but as a parallel and opposed model, in the sense that rather than presenting strategies aimed

at the maintenance of the public image, his strategies describe the types of attacks that the image can receive. Thus, after a brief presentation of impoliteness strategies in his paper *Towards an anatomy of impoliteness* (Culpeper, 1996), Culpeper together with Bousfield and Wichmann (2003) offered a more descriptive classification:

- (1) Bald on record impoliteness, when there is a clear intention to attack the listener's public image;
- (2) Positive impoliteness, or the use of strategies that damage the listener's positive public image, as for instance, ignoring or excluding, making uncomfortable silences and jokes, etc.;
- (3) Negative impoliteness, or the use of strategies aimed to damage the listener's negative public image, as, for instance, ridiculing, threatening, reminding a debt, etc.;
- (4) Sarcasm or mock politeness, or the use of complementary and flattering strategies that are obviously false; and
- (5) Withhold impoliteness, or not using politeness when it should be used.

Later, Culpeper (2005) makes some changes to his classification, excluding, for example, incidental impoliteness, or the one which is not intentional, as well as mock politeness, and he adds the use of sarcasm, as covert impoliteness. Then, Culpeper (2010) revises his model of impoliteness, excluding intention as a condition for impoliteness as he accepts that "... people took offence and described the behaviour as impolite or rude despite knowing that the producer had not acted intentionally. Hence, in the definition given in this paper, impoliteness does not have intentionality as a necessary condition" (p. 3233).

Culpeper et al (2003) also claim that impoliteness may not simply appear when one or more of these strategies are used. On the contrary, politeness depends entirely on the context. In this sense, similarly to Bousfield (2006) or Mills (2005), Culpeper (1996) does not consider impoliteness as simply the opposite of politeness. In fact, they could be regarded as

two phenomena that complement each other, since impoliteness cannot be understood without politeness.

Some criticism that may be made to Culpeper's (1996) model is his imprecision when it comes to listing the specific strategies that every superstrategy can include. Culpeper does not offer a thorough list with explanatory examples, but he only lists a few actions, closing the lists with etcetera. As Bousfield (2008) argues, the imprecision of the model can be taken as a weakness, since it leaves him exposed to criticism.

Likewise, Bousfield's (2010) approach to impoliteness and rudeness is also a milestone in the field, as he presented a detailed classification with twelve possible scenarios in which impoliteness can occur. As he points out, impoliteness will depend on the various contexts and variables that can influence the outcome. Besides, he leaves his classification open to future research, as I have done in this paper too.

Finally, equally worthy of mention is Kaul de Marlangeon (2008, 2010, 2017), who proposed a model that is complementary to Brown and Levinson's. The author, following Fraser and Nolan (1981) and Lavandera (1988) presents politeness and impoliteness as two ends of a continuum in which there are strategies that can be used for mitigating acts that threaten the public image—in the case of politeness—or acts that emphasize a threat—in the case of impoliteness. Thus, impoliteness may occur unintentionally, as in a gaffe or blunder, or in the most intentional form, such as when it is used to undermine or offend the listener. In addition to providing a definition of impoliteness and a list of cases in which this can occur, Kaul de Marlangeon (2008, 2017) presented a classification of types of impoliteness in Spanish, depending on the degree of intentionality and on the threat to the image that they convey. Thus, we find the following classification:

- (1) Formally impolite speech acts driven by a polite purpose
- (2) Involuntary impolite speech acts, such as:

- Blunder or gaffe
 - Unintentional lack of politeness
- (3) Self-impoliteness
 - (4) Formally polite acts driven by a rude purpose
 - (5) Deliberate lack of politeness
 - (6) Overwhelming silence
 - (7) Attacking impoliteness

Kaul de Marlangeon is a reference in studies of impoliteness in Spanish, and therefore, she is included in numerous studies and publications about this field (Alba Juez, 2008; Bernal, 2010; Hernández Flores, 2013).

Impoliteness Strategies and Social Characteristics of Individuals

In a previous study (Pacheco, 2013), I presented a classification of four *social characteristics* that everybody has in society. This taxonomy included the public image of singularity and three types of public rights. It was based mainly on Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2003) and Bravo's (1999, 2002) contributions to the field. Therefore, before explaining what these terms describe, we will recall the valuable contribution of these authors.

On the one hand, Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2003) distinguishes between *face* and *sociality rights*. She takes the first concept from Goffman (1967), and it refers to everybody's need to be valued and appreciated by others, so it is what Brown and Levinson called positive public image. The second concept relates to Brown and Levinson's idea of negative public image, as it defines everyone's need to keep intact their social and personal rights, including also the sense of social justice and the right of association. On the other hand, my concepts are also inspired by Bravo's (1999, 2002) notions of autonomy, affiliation, and role.

According to her, the concepts of positive and negative face described by Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) cannot be applied in a cross-cultural way, as every culture has a

particular notion of what public image is and how people wish to be considered and seen from inside and outside the rest of society.

The classification I propose herein includes, on the one hand, the *public image of singularity* or someone's desire to be valued for his or her virtues and positive aptitudes and to be seen as someone able to do things properly. On the other hand, we can find three types of public rights: first, we can talk about the *public right of equality* or someone's desire to be treated fairly in relation to the rest of society, that is to say, the desire to be considered a peer by the rest of the group and have the same rights as the rest. Secondly, the *public right of affiliation* refers to an individual's need to feel part of society and a member of a group. In other words, it is the desire not to be a social outcast, but a recognized and valued member. Finally, the *public right of independence* relates to one's need to preserve our physical and emotional territory free from attacks or threats.

Thus, impoliteness can be defined as actions or phrases which attack or go against an individual's public image of singularity or public rights. As we mentioned before, the listener will reckon an expression as polite or impolite depending on the context, which can include factors such as the relationship between speakers, their cultural and social values and norms, etc. Therefore, from my point of view, impoliteness can arise in either of these situations:

- (1) The speaker utters, either intentionally or not, an expression that threatens or attacks the public image or social rights of another person, or
- (2) The hearer perceives that his or her public image or social rights have been threatened or attacked, whether or not the speaker did it intentionally.

The speaker may make use of impoliteness strategies if he or she wants to attack or threaten the addressee, and these attacks or threats can be carried out either directly or indirectly, regardless of the speaker's intention. In Figure 1, we can see the types of impoliteness

strategies that speakers can use in discourse. As can be observed, this classification is based on the above-mentioned taxonomy of social characteristics of individuals.

This classification of impoliteness strategies could be further developed as follows:

(1) Group 1. Impoliteness strategies that attack the public image of singularity, that is to say, the positive image of being a valid person that every individual seeks to present to others.

(1.1) Impoliteness strategies that attack the public image of singularity directly:

(1.1.1) Insulting somebody. The speaker refers to the other in a negative manner.

(1.1.2) Mocking somebody. The speaker ridicules the other's aptitudes, actions or ideas.

(1.1.3) Stating somebody's negative aspect. The speaker focuses on somebody's defects, not his/her virtues.

(1.1.4) Self-impoliteness. The speaker does not recognise his/her virtues and aptitudes. On the contrary, he/she has a negative view of oneself.

(1.1.5) Stating that somebody has made a mistake. The speaker does not appreciate the other's ability to do things properly and brings to light his/her mistakes.

(1.1.6) Blaming somebody. The speaker establishes a relationship between a negative situation and somebody's deeds or ideas.

(1.2) Impoliteness strategies that attack the public image of singularity indirectly:

(1.2.1) Ignoring somebody. The speaker does not recognise somebody's importance, speech, or presence.

(1.2.2) Not taking into account somebody's opinion. Somebody's opinion is not appreciated but ignored.

(1.2.3) Questioning somebody's abilities or speech. The speaker suggests that the other is not a valid person or that his/her speech is untrue.

(1.2.4) Insinuating that somebody has made a mistake.

(1.2.e) Insinuating somebody's negative aspects.

(2) Group 2. Impoliteness strategies that attack the public right of equality or the desire to be considered the same as the rest of individuals in the group.

(2.1) Strategies that damage the public right of equality directly:

(2.1.1) Despising someone. The speaker considers the other person less than what he/she deserves as a member of the group.

(2.1.2) Disregarding someone. The speaker disdains the values or the discourse of the other.

(2.1.3) Highlighting differences in status, position, condition, etc.

(2.1.4) Abusing differences in status, condition, etc. The speaker treats the addressee unfairly.

(2.1.5) Telling someone that he or she is in debt. By doing so, the speaker places the hearer in a lower position in terms of reciprocity, that is to say, they are not at the same level.

(2.1.6) Using obscene and rude language. The issuer does not respect the social rule of using polite language towards others.

(2.2) Strategies that damage the public right of equality indirectly:

(2.2.1) Not showing empathy or understanding. The speaker does not identify with the addressee neither emotionally nor mentally, and he or she does not consider the other as a peer.

(2.2.2) Exaggerating one's capabilities. This way, the speaker is stating that he or she is above the addressee in terms of skills or abilities and that they are not at the same level.

(2.2.3) Not abiding by rules and general obligations. By doing this, the speaker is not respecting equality, as rules are supposed to be obeyed by everybody.

(2.2.4) Insinuating that someone is in debt. The speaker suggests that the addressee is below him/her in terms of reciprocity.

(2.2.5) Not using politeness when it should be used. The speaker does not abide by the rules of politeness as he/she should.

(2.2.6) Using mock politeness. The speaker does not abide by the general rules of politeness as he or she should, and besides, he/she pretends that he/she is doing so.

(3) Group 3. Strategies of impoliteness that attack the public right of affiliation or the desire of the individual to form part of the social group he/she is in:

(3.1) Strategies of impoliteness attacking the public right of affiliation directly:

(3.1.1) Ridiculing someone in front of others. The speaker wants to cause the addressee to feel ashamed.

(3.1.2) Breaking the relationship with someone. The speaker breaks the bonds of affiliation with the addressee.

(3.1.3) Denying the possibility of a future relationship. The issuer rejects the possibility that there can be any future relationship, communication, or cooperation with the addressee.

(3.2) Strategies of impoliteness attacking the public right of affiliation indirectly:

(3.2.1) Using inappropriate group markers. By doing so, the speaker implies that the other individual is not in the same group.

(3.2.2) Seeking conflict with difficult topics. The speaker aims to argue with the other so that they break their relationship.

(3.2.3) Seeking areas of disagreement. The speaker seeks points of disagreement with the listener.

(3.2.4) Excluding from an activity. The speaker implies that he or she does not want the other person to be within the group.

(3.2.5) Using a dark language. In that way, the speaker makes the addressee feel excluded from the group because he or she does not understand the conversation.

(4) Group 4. Strategies of impoliteness attacking the public right of independence or the desire of individuals not to feel invaded by anyone and to have one's territory respected:

(4.1) Strategies of impoliteness attacking the public right of independence directly:

(4.1.1) Threatening. The speaker remarks that he or she intends to go beyond the limits of the addressee's territory.

(4.1.2) Invading somebody else's physical or emotional space. The receiver feels that his/her territory has been invaded.

(4.1.3) Abruptly interrupting someone's speech. The speaker does not respect the other's turn of speech.

(4.1.4) Boasting about doing something that harms someone else. The speaker confesses that his/her actions harm some aspect within someone else's scope and territory.

(4.1.5) Ordering someone to do something immediately.

(4.2) Strategies of impoliteness attacking the public right of independence indirectly:

(4.2.1) Not using a deferential language when it would be necessary (dual system *tú/usted* in Spanish, modal verbs in English, etc.). The speaker trespasses the other's territory, as the required distance is not shown.

(4.2.2) Insinuating that the other's territory could be trespassed.

As we mentioned above, this classification is not closed, as other strategies could be added, with the purpose of undermining, attacking, or offending someone's public image or public rights. Moreover, we must take into account the possibility that one single expression can

represent more than one strategy, and therefore, that it could damage more than one public right and/or the public image of singularity.

Methodology and Corpus

As many other authors have done before (Almeida Monteiro et al., 2008; Culpeper, 1998; Kaul de Marlangeon & Alba Juez, 2012), the researcher here has used the dialogues in films to extract a corpus for the analysis. Culpeper (2005) stresses the importance of fictional dialogues and the study of impoliteness. According to the author, since impoliteness is a type of aggression, the audience enjoys this kind of violence, because they are in a position of comfort, feeling safe from any damage or attack. Also, as McCarthy and Carter (1994) claim, fictional dialogues such as the ones in theatre plays or films, constitute an excellent corpus, since the audience considers them as natural dialogues. Also, Kaul de Marlangeon (1995) argues that a text of fiction can transmit serious speech acts. Besides, as Dynel (2015) affirms in her research using dialogues from *House*, the television series, film discourse is more accessible than natural corpora, and it is commonly accepted as valid research data because it does not differ in structure from natural language. Other authors to be mentioned for using film dialogues are Liverani, (2005) who studied various pragmalinguistic aspects, among them politeness and the influence of cultural values in the film *Los lunes al sol* (2002); Monjour (2006), who analysed the use of insults and taboo words as impoliteness strategies in the film *El Barrio* (1998), and Pinto (2010), who analysed the translation from Spanish into English of those two films, taking into account the importance of cultural values. As can be seen, there is a current of linguists nowadays that maintain that film dialogues cannot be seen as artificial (Dynel, 2015; Jucker & Locher, 2017; McIntyre, 2012), but as a source of data valid for research.

The six films used for analysis in my study were *Crimen Ferpecto* (2004) [the misspelling is intentional], *Mataharis* (2007) and *El Método* (2005) in Spanish, and *The Devil*

Wears Prada (2006), *Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps* (2010) and *Working Girl* (1988) in English. All the films take place in a context of labour relations and they depict tensions, disputes, and problems among colleagues.

We followed a deductive coding method for extracting data from the films, using the classification of impoliteness strategies presented above. Thus, the first phase of the study consisted of viewing the films and identifying impoliteness strategies, bearing in mind the above-mentioned list. We noted down the sentences in a table, together with the strategy they were related to. We viewed the films in their original versions with subtitles so that we were able to read the selected utterances and dialogues and contrast them with what we listened to. Additionally, we could find the electronic transcripts of the films, though in some cases, just some extracts. That also enabled us to check once more our records. At the same time, when relevant, we included nonverbal communication, like gestures and other proxemic elements that were relevant for the interpretation of the dialogue.

Then, we counted the impoliteness expressions we had found and registered the figures in a table, noting down again the type of strategy they represented. Finally, a new table recorded the times that each strategy had appeared in each cultural group. For example, the characters in the Spanish films used strategies from the classification in 260 occasions, and fifty-six of those attacks were aimed at the public right of affiliation. However, in the American films, only twenty-six out of 320 strategies were attacks aimed at that public right.

Finally, we obtained the percentages for each strategy and groups of strategies. For the aforementioned examples, in the group of Spanish films 21.54% of the strategies attacked the public right of affiliation, whereas in the American films, only 8.12% of the strategies attacked this public right. We can observe all the percentages in Table 1.

Analysis of Data

From the very first moment, we can clearly see the differences between the two groups of films, in the use of impoliteness strategies. These differences are in accordance with the stance that we have defended throughout this paper, i.e., the fact that cultural values, as part of the cultural background of speakers, influence the choices that they make when it comes to the use of impoliteness strategies. The figures in Table 1 show the percentages found in each group of films, showing the attacks that the public image of singularity and the three public rights received.

What follows now is a brief selection of all the strategies found in the analysis. Given the limitation on the length of this paper, we will only comment on some examples that best illustrate the differences found in the two groups of films, and we will relate them to the different cultural values of each group.

The first finding that draws our attention is the difference in the percentages of strategies that attack the right of affiliation. In the group of Spanish films, this figure (21.54%) nearly triples the percentage collected in the group of American films (8.12%). The main reason that would explain this fact is the tribal nature of the Spanish cultural group — situated halfway in the continuum individualism/collectivism. As Leaptrott (1996) indicates, in tribal cultures, relationships of friendship established among individuals in small or medium-sized groups are of great importance. Besides, the right of affiliation refers to somebody's need to be recognised and accepted by the group to which one belongs. Therefore, in a tribal cultural group such as the Spanish one, a statement that implies or insinuates that the individual is not accepted or that he or she can be expelled from the group, would be considered an attack. The strategy mostly used in this group was strategy 3.1.3 *Denying the possibility of a future relationship*. It implies breaking off relations, and it also emphasizes that the relationship has no possibilities of being restored in the future. The following expression is an example of this strategy: (The translations offered are mine).

ENRIQUE: “*Que no me metas en tu saco, que yo no soy un sindicalista*”. (*El Método*)

[“Don’t lump us together, I’m not a trade unionist”.]

One of the candidates says this to another candidate in the meeting, to distance himself from the other’s opinion, but at the same time he is suggesting that he would be a better employee, because he never seeks conflict with the employers.

Another strategy widely used in the Spanish group was *3.1.1 Ridiculing someone in front of others*. The speaker wants to cause the other to feel ashamed. Using this strategy with peers at work has the same purpose as the previous strategy, i.e., to encourage the group not to accept someone. We can find an example of this strategy in the following statement:

ANA: “*Yo también he hecho un cursillo de primeros auxilios y no voy por ahí de doctora*”. (*El Método*)

[“I have also taken a first aid training course and I don’t pretend to be a doctor.”]

One of the participants in the meeting is boasting about his skills, but another participant suggests that he is exaggerating and makes this comment in front of the others, to ridicule him.

Another strategy that was frequently used in the Spanish group, but not in the American one, was strategy *3.2.3 Seeking areas of disagreement*. The speaker seeks points of disagreement with the listener. With this strategy, the speaker threatens to break the relationship with the listener. This can lead to conflict and confrontation and consequently endanger the relationship. It is, therefore, a strategy that attacks the public right of affiliation.

ENRIQUE: “*¡Qué bueno!*”

JULIO: “*¿Bueno? ¿Por qué?*” (*El Método*)

[“Good idea!”]

[“Good idea, why?”]

With that response, the speaker expresses his disagreement, and he also urges the other candidate to explain why he considers that idea a good one.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in the percentages of strategies that damage the public image of singularity. In the Spanish films, this figure was 35% of the total while the percentage used in the American group was higher, 43.75%. This data may be inversely related to the previous one, as the public image of singularity refers to the desire to be viewed as a unique, valid, and capable individual. The public image of singularity is very important for the two groups analysed in this paper. However, as we have seen, relationships within the group are also very important for the Spanish tribal cultural group, whereas that is not the case for the American cultural group. It could be said that in the American group, the individual receives much importance, whereas the Spanish cultural group highly values individuality, but relationships with the group are also of great importance.

One of the strategies used in both groups, by the same percentage, is strategy *1.1.5 Stating that somebody has made a mistake*. By means of this strategy, the speaker does not recognise the other's ability to do things properly and brings to light his/her mistakes. The public image of singularity refers to the desire to be considered as an individual who can do things correctly. Therefore, when someone indicates that another worker has made a mistake, he or she is accusing the listener of not being able to do things properly.

MIRANDA: "*The last two you sent me were completely inadequate.*" (*The Devil Wears Prada*)

Miranda, the boss, tells the worker that the last candidates that applied for the post, and that the worker finally selected, were not suitable, and she eventually had to fire them.

INSTRUCTOR: "*Te has equivocado en todo.*" (*Crimen Ferpecto*)

["You are completely wrong."]

During a course about sales strategies, the instructor tells the worker that in the simulation to assist a potential buyer, the worker has made many mistakes, from the beginning to the end. Thus, he suggests that the employee is not a good shop-assistant.

Another strategy worthy of mention is *1.2.1 Ignoring somebody*. *The speaker does not recognise somebody's importance, speech, or presence*. This strategy attacks the listener's public image of singularity since he or she is not valued nor taken into account. The following statement is an example of this strategy:

MIRANDA: "Who's that?" (*The Devil Wears Prada*)

Miranda asks Emily who Andrea is, pretending that Andrea is not there, but in fact, she is in front of them.

We also found strategy *1.2.3 Questioning somebody's abilities or speech*. *The speaker suggests that the other is not a valid person or that his/her speech is untrue*. With this strategy, the speaker is also suggesting that someone may not be able to perform a task and, therefore, he or she attacks the other's public image of singularity.

INSTRUCTOR: "Lo saben hasta los niños." (*Crímen Ferpecto*)

["Even children know that."]

The instructor in the sales strategies course says that to one of the attendants. With this statement, he accuses the employee of not being able to perform his task properly and, at the same time, he implies that the worker should know the basic rules that everyone knows.

MIRANDA: "Thank God somebody came to work today." (*The Devil Wears Prada*)

Miranda makes this comment to all the workers, who have already shown her their work, and which she has disliked. Then, someone shows her something she likes, and she takes the opportunity to criticise the staff's work.

Finally, let us analyse strategies in the films that attack the public right of independence. As can be observed in the table, the percentage is somewhat higher in the

group of American films —with 20% of the total— than in the group of Spanish films —which is 15.77%. This difference would be linked to the greater importance of the individual's independence granted by the American cultural group (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010). In contrast, in the Spanish tribal cultural group, this independence can be partly invaded by the group the person belongs to. The most remarkable finding is the use of strategy 4.1.3 *Interrupting abruptly someone's speech. The speaker does not respect the other's turn of speech*. This strategy was mainly used in the American films with expressions such as the following:

ANDREA: "*But, ...*"

MIRANDA: "*That's all.*" (*The Devil Wears Prada*)

Andrea is explaining something, but Miranda interrupts her and does not let her finish.

KATHERINE: "*This is just a misunderstanding and I... you cannot...*"

TRASK: "*I can and I will.*" (*Working Girl*)

The speaker is trying to explain what has happened in a previous scene, but the listener interrupts the conversation and terminates it abruptly.

These are clear attacks on the freedom to express one's opinion, one of the most valued cultural traits in an individualist group as the American one (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Chi Square Test on the Results Obtained in the Analysis

To find out if the differences between the two groups of data were statistically significant, i.e., if the differences between the two cultural groups were important, we applied this mathematical formula. The first step taken was to create the contingency table that we have named Table 2. This table showed the number of strategies observed in the variables of the analysis. The variables were, on the one hand, cultural groups, with two modalities: Spanish and American, and on the other hand, impoliteness strategies associated with the four

social characteristics of individuals, with four modalities: strategies that attack the public image of singularity, strategies attacking the public right of equality, the ones attacking the public right of affiliation and the ones that attack the public right of independence.

The central figures in the table refer to the number of strategies found in the analysis. As we can see, we have to add all the frequencies —number of observations— obtained by rows and columns, and then we get the last row and column, called *Total*, representing the number of frequencies obtained by each modality. Finally, the figure in the bottom right corner, which in this case is 580, and which can be named *Grand total*, corresponds to the sum of all the frequencies observed. *Total* and *grand total* figures are only used for mathematical purposes.

Then, we defined a null hypothesis, hereinafter H_0 , and an alternative hypothesis, H_1 . These hypotheses relate to the existence or not of an association between different variables, which in our case are, on the one hand, the values of a cultural group and on the other hand, impoliteness strategies associated with social characteristics. Thus, the null hypothesis would be as follows:

H_0 : There are no significant differences between the frequencies obtained in the group of Spanish films and those obtained in the group of American films, with regard to the use of strategies of impoliteness that attack the four social characteristics.

Then, the alternative hypothesis would read:

H_1 : There are significant differences between the frequencies obtained in the group of Spanish films and those obtained in the group of American films, in terms of the use of strategies of impoliteness that attack the four social characteristics.

Then, the chi-square formula $\chi^2 = \sum (O - E)^2 / E$ was applied to the data in the contingency table. When applying the formula with a 0.01 degree of statistical significance, that corresponds to 11.34 following Pearson's table (Velez et al., 2004), the result was 22.44.

This means that our first null hypothesis must be rejected with a confidence level of 99%, and that we must accept the alternative hypothesis, as the result is higher than the figure given in Pearson's table. Thus, we must accept the alternative hypothesis that holds that there are differences in the data obtained in the two groups. In other words, the findings from the analysis show that, the differences observed in our analysis are statistically significant.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, context (Bousfield, 2010; Culpeper, 2010; Locher, 2006; Mills, 2003; Schiffrin, 1991) and particularly cultural values (Bravo, 1999, 2005; Fuentes Rodriguez, 2012; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2017; Kienpointner, 2008; Wilutzky, 2015), influence the choices that speakers make when it comes to being impolite. In other words, the cultural context configures the linguistic repertoire that speakers use, unconsciously or not, in interaction with peers.

Due to cultural differences that the two groups of study possess, we have been able to identify some differences concerning the choices that people make when using impoliteness strategies. On the one hand, in the group of American films, we found that the most frequently used group of strategies was the one aimed at the public image of singularity (43.75%), followed by attacks to the public right of equality (28.12%) and finally, the public right of independence (20%). On the other hand, in the Spanish corpus, the attacks were mostly aimed at the public image of singularity (35%), followed by attacks against the right of equality (27.7%) and then we found those strategies attacking the right of affiliation (21.54%). In other words, one of the major findings was that in the Spanish group, the public right of affiliation was attacked by 21.54%, whereas in the American group, speakers barely attacked this right (8.12%). On the contrary, American speakers showed a stronger preference than the Spanish group for attacks aimed at the public right of independence (20%).

We have been able to establish a relationship between these differences and the cultural values of each group. Thus, in the American group, with individualist cultural traits (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010), we found that people highly valued freedom and independence from the group and also the freedom to express opinions. They also felt the need not to be invaded by others regarding one's work and personal life, and workers were urged to take responsibility for their actions. In the group of Spanish films, there was greater concern for collectivist/tribal values (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010; Leaptrott, 1996). We refer to values such as, for example, the importance of friendship, and also relationships within small groups, as those formed at work. Also, people highly valued loyalty and mutual support within the group. As in the American films, attacks that referred to a worker's ability and skills were also of great concern, and this is due to the importance of the public image of singularity for both groups.

To conclude, the model of strategies of impoliteness and social characteristics that has been applied in this paper should be used in subsequent studies to further corroborate its validity or, if necessary, to extend or even to alter it. That said, we must always keep in mind that the results obtained in any study are applicable to the context discussed in that analysis (Bousfield, 2010; Sifianou & Garcés-Conejos, 2018), and therefore, we must be cautious and not take them as axioms.

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Figure 1: *Classification of linguistic impoliteness strategies*

Table 1

Percentages of groups of strategies used in the Spanish films and in the American ones

	Attacks to the public image of singularity	Attacks to the public right of equality	Attacks to the public right of affiliation	Attacks to the public right of independence
Spanish films	35%	27.7%	21.54%	15.77%
American films	43.75%	28.12%	8.12%	20%

Table 2

Contingency table of the data obtained in the analysis of films

	Spain	U.S.A.	Total
Singularity	91	140	231
Equality	72	90	162
Affiliation	56	26	82
Independence	41	64	105
Total	260	320	580