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Book review

Aspects of Spanish Pragmatics Book, D. Dumitrescu (Ed.), Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York (2011). xii, 254 pp., Price: \$80.95 (cloth), ISBN: 978-1-4331-0443-5

Domnita Dumitrescu (henceforth D.), a Professor of Spanish at California State University, Los Angeles, *Miembro correspondiente* ('Corresponding Member') of the *Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española* ('North American Academy of the Spanish Language'), and Chair of the Commission on Sociolinguistic Study of Spanish in the US, has written numerous scholarly books and essays on various aspects of Hispanic linguistics, Spanish pragmatics, and contrastive linguistics (Spanish and Romanian). A partial listing of D.'s scholarship on Spanish pragmatics appears in the final bibliography of this book (pp. 241–243).

In her prefatory statement (pp. ix–xii), D. offers various definitions of the broad field of study labeled 'pragmatics'. To this end, she provides several including one by Mey (1993:42), which she describes as 'the most memorable definition' (p. ix), namely, '*pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language uses as these are determined by the context of society*' (italics in original, FN). Moreover, D. cites Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2005:2; see p. x), who state that:

Present-day pragmatics is an interdisciplinary endeavor, at the intersection of different fields, including, among others, linguistics, discourse analysis, philosophy, sociology, (cultural/linguistic) anthropology, and cognitive and cross cultural psychology. As such, there cannot be one all-embracing pragmatics theory with a unified methodology since a number of diverse theories have developed out of different research interests and programs.

D. then embraces the Anglo-American School of Pragmatics with its focus on speech acts, conversation, and politeness – all of which appear in this volume.

The present book consists of two sections. The first part ('On politeness and face management', pp. 1–137) has five chapters, and it addresses politeness in Spanish-speaking communities with attention to their cross-cultural and cross-linguistic meaning. Her theoretical foundation for politeness derives from Brown and Levinson (1987) and French linguist Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007) as well as the work of the members of EDICE (*Estudios del Discurso de la Cortesía en Español*, 'Studies about the Discourse of Courtesy in Spanish, 2011). The second part ('Discourse functions and strategies', pp. 139–236) also has five chapters, and it is a bit more eclectic in that it addresses such diverse but quite interesting topics as echo questions, conversational repairs, evidentiality, mitigation, contrastive emphasis, topicality, and discourse salience.

D. points out that the chapters in this volume are based on previously published research written in Spanish (pp. xi–xii). The essays in the present volume, however, represent completely revised and updated adaptations of articles, which are substantively different from their original versions. Moreover, D. has translated the original Spanish essays into English. In the following discussion of each chapter, there will be a parenthetical reference to the original work in Spanish.

The first chapter ('Polite speech acts across cultures: an overview', pp. 1–30; cf. Dumitrescu, 2006b) of Part One presents an overview of politeness in speech. In particular, D. comments on four types of pragmatic speech acts: (1) thanking, (2) apologizing, (3) complimenting, and (4) wishing. Prior to her cross-cultural discussion of these pragmatic speech acts, she establishes her theoretical parameters (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1955; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007). Politeness theory, of course, involves the crucial notion of 'face', i.e., the effort on the part of the participants in a conversational interaction to preserve territory (negative face) and to retain self-esteem (positive face). Both, in turn, correspond to negative and positive politeness (p. 2). Thus, in spoken communication, politeness may preserve or threaten the addressee's face. Politeness seeks to mitigate 'Face Threatening Acts'. As D. points out, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997) modified this original view of 'Face Threatening Act' by adding the corresponding 'Face Enhancing Act', subsequently renamed 'Face Flattering Act' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004, 2005; pp. 2–3). Since then, Kerbrat-Orecchioni's approach to politeness has been widely employed by other linguists. The author (p. 4) further cites Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997:15) who states that '[p]olite communication consists above all of putting forward other people's interests before one's own'.

Furthermore, Haverkate's (1994) groundbreaking work in Spanish pragmatics has also enhanced Brown and Levinson's (1987) notions on positive and negative politeness. Moreover, he has examined these same aspects from an intercultural perspective by distinguishing positive and negative politeness societies (Haverkate, 2004), and he categorizes Spanish culture as one where positive politeness is central (p. 4).

In this initial chapter, D. takes an intercultural perspective (Spanish, French, Romanian, English) in terms of four types of pragmatic acts (thanking, apologizing, complimenting, wishing). She then proceeds to provide a critical analytical perspective on each one of these interlocutor-centered speech acts from an intercultural point of view. Within Kerbrat-Orecchioni's system (1997), all four constitute 'Face Flattering Acts', when they constitute ritual exchanges (p. 5).

The value of this chapter lays in its explicit cross-cultural comparison of four polite speech acts with a nuanced and subtle interpretation of each one of them in these four languages (Spanish, French, Romanian, English). D. concludes that pragmatic variation exists in all four languages. This fact has led to a new sub-discipline labeled 'interlanguage pragmatics' (p. 25). Moreover, intra-linguistic pragmatic variation occurs with speakers who share a common language but not a common culture, e.g., varieties of Spanish worldwide. This is an area that requires further research (Márquez Reiter and Placencia, 2005:212; p. 26). Ultimately, D. argues that the four languages represent a pragmatic continuum with English and French at one end as distancing languages and Spanish and Romanian at the other end as languages of closeness and solidarity (p. 27).

The following chapter ('Gratitude exchange: L1 vs. L2', pp. 31–54; cf. Dumitrescu, 2006a) raises the general questions of what is appropriate to say to whom and in what circumstances. This is, of course, the essence of pragmatic competence (p. 31). Moreover, these subtle pragmatic rules and regulations change from culture to culture, which makes the teaching of such nuanced formulae challenging.

D. analyzes the speech act of gratitude, or the act of expressing appreciation, or giving thanks *a posteriori* for various reasons (favor, service, invitation, gift, well wishes, compliment, etc., p. 32). Gratitude is a dyadic asymmetric speech act. It represents an interpersonal discourse act between a beneficiary and a benefactor and an object of gratitude. Response formulae to appreciation are tripartite: (1) denial of its existence so as to minimize the object of gratitude; (2) recognition of the object of gratitude with an indication that it was for pleasure; and (3) return of thanks or a compliment to the person benefitted to indicate that the gratitude should be shared, or that its merits are less significant (p. 33).

The author's empirical study on gratitude speech acts involves a combination of a modified questionnaire (Appendix 1, pp. 49–52) based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986), role-play (Appendix 2, pp. 52–53), personal observation, and selections from dramatic literature (p. 35). The questionnaire in Appendix 1 was administered to 120 students enrolled in intermediate to advanced Spanish courses. The participants included 20 non-native speakers, 65 bilingual Chicanos, and 35 native speakers from various Spanish-speaking countries (p. 35). Her results provide functional and structural analyses of the linguistic formulae for general Spanish compared to the verbal strategies employed by Spanish learners in Los Angeles, California (native speakers of English and heritage speakers of Spanish, p. 49). The second questionnaire (pp. 52–53) derives from Ragone's (1998) doctoral dissertation. D. used the second questionnaire with 25 graduate students (15 women, 10 men) who were native speakers of Mexican or Argentine Spanish (pp. 35–36). Her results indicate that there is pragmatolinguistic and sociopragmatic failure in the two groups (Anglophones, heritage speakers of Spanish) caused by the transference of English pragmatic rules to Spanish, and the communication of insecurity by heritage speakers of the language less well controlled, namely, Spanish (p. 49).

Chapter 3 ('Ritual politeness: the speech act of wishing', pp. 55–74; cf. Dumitrescu, 2004) is an empirical analysis of the speech act of wishing someone well, which are inherently polite speech acts. As such, wishes are Face Flattering Acts intended to augment the speaker's image and to evince solidarity among people who share a similar cultural system.

The database for this study derives from a questionnaire (Appendix, pp. 70–72) administered to 66 participants (25 males, 41 females) ages 18–72 from various Spanish-speaking countries, and 10 born in the US who currently reside in Los Angeles, California.

A classification of wishes includes the following: (1) situational wishes, employed in opening speech sequences with fixed linguistic formulae in public celebrations with appropriate verbal behavior expected (p. 58); and (2) interactional wishes, which are used in farewells, and whose function is to end a conversation (p. 61). In overall terms, D. concludes from her research that wishes reflect the '... system of ethical values embedded in the wishing formulas embodied in the tradition of each community' (p. 69).

The fourth chapter ('Blackboard politeness', pp. 75–108; cf. Dumitrescu, 2008b) addresses contemporary 'netiquette' (= 'net' + 'etiquette'), i.e., politeness in computer-mediated communication. Some research already exists on chat rooms (Noblia, 2001) and email (Laborda-Gil, 2003; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2007). This form of verbal interaction may be synchronous in the case of online chat rooms, or asynchronous in the instance of email. Furthermore, this form of communication has developed its own supranational norms of politeness.

D.'s empirical study is based on an online quarter-long Spanish course (Business Spanish) that she taught at California State University. It had 21 students with 20 Hispanics and one African-American native of Jamaica. In the case of the heritage bilinguals, Spanish was the first language, or one of two languages spoken at home.

The author examined 637 unedited email messages including comments made on the discussion board and from her students during the ten-week class. The purpose of this study was to determine the linguistic strategies employed by students to protect their self-image and occasionally that of their interlocutor. D.'s theoretical assumptions include De-Matteis's (2004) study on the nature of email communication. To be sure, electronic communication has features that are distinct from other more formal forms of written communication, e.g., speed, orality of form, and a disregard for

conventional orthography and grammar. D.'s study revealed two basic categories: (1) 'monologic interventions that do not require nor receive a response' (p. 80), and (2) 'dialogic interventions that do require or receive a response' (p. 80). The first category includes monologic intervention from professor to student, student to professor, and student to student. The second category involves similar dialogic interventions.

Results of the study of this relatively new form of communication show that students vacillate between conventional rules and the non-traditional rules of grammar and orthography. Moreover, a lack of face-to-face interaction permits shy students to 'speak' more freely. Likewise, students may ignore questions. Such silence would, of course, be more difficult in an in-class course. Finally, students employed politeness strategies intended to enhance the self-image of their peers via compliments, congratulations, and well wishes (p. 106).

The last chapter of the first section of this book ('Face-work in sociolinguistics interviews', pp. 109–137; cf. Dumitrescu, 2009) contains an introductory section in which D. traces studies the increase on studies of verbal politeness in Spanish to Haverkate's (1994) groundbreaking work on the topic. More recently, of course, the 'Hispanic School' of pragmatics, which revolves around EDICE (= *Estudios del Discurso de la Cortesía en Español*, 'Studies about the Discourse of Courtesy in Spanish', 2011) headed by Diana Bravo (University of Stockholm), and the research group Val.Es.Co. (*Valencia Español Coloquial*, 'Valencia Colloquial Spanish', 2011) headed by Antonio Briz Gómez (University of Valencia) have added significantly to our knowledge of pragmatic research in Spanish. Both groups have engaged in joint academic ventures to organize symposia and to publish important research in Spanish pragmatics. Thus, this chapter fits into the theoretical framework of the 'Hispanic School', i.e., the interaction of speaker and interlocutor in courteous behavior depends upon the achievement of balance of the social image of both for mutual benefit (pp. 109–110).

The data for this study derive from a three-volume collection of sociolinguistic interviews by Reyes Benítez (2001) conducted with Caribbean youth from San Juan, Puerto Rico, Havana, Cuba, and Santo Domingo, The Dominican Republic. D. notes that the Caribbean corpus is important for several reasons. First, few studies on adolescent politeness exist. Second, not many address ritual courtesy. Finally, little research on politeness exists for Caribbean communities since most of the extant publications deal with Mexico, the Southern Cone, and Andean countries (p. 110). The specific domains addressed in this chapter include: (1) face-flattering politeness activities; and (2) mitigating politeness activities.

The author concludes this chapter by noting the special situation of a sociolinguistic interview. In these interviews, face-flattering acts and reinforced affiliation links are numerous between speaker and interlocutor, which is atypical of interview situations (pp. 110, 132). D. hypothesizes that the age of the interviewees may be a factor in the results. In addition, she attributes this aspect of her findings to a tendency on the part of Caribbean Spanish speakers to manifest positive politeness (pp. 133–134).

The first chapter ('The discourse functions of interrogative: allo-repetitions', pp. 141–158; cf. Dumitrescu, 2008a) of Part Two ('Discourse functions and strategies'), and the sixth in this collection considers the pragmatic function of repetitions in dyadic speech. D. cites Haverkate (1994:212) who had noted that lexical repetition in Spanish is so common that one could label it a sort of 'echo-tongue'. For Haverkate (1994:112), such reiteration serves the function of positive politeness when it signifies agreement, thereby enhancing the interlocutor's egocentric face (p. 142). Nevertheless, Haverkate (1994:213–214) suggests that this type of replication might express impoliteness because such repetition may indicate ridicule or sarcasm depending upon the context. In this study, D. focuses on the organization and purpose of interrogative allo-questions, or echo questions including politeness and impoliteness.

The database for this study derives from two corpora of Mexican Spanish collected by Lope Blanch (1981, 1995) as well as the corpora of Hernández Cabrera et al. (1998) for the main cities of the Hispanic world, Briz (1998) for Valencia, and Camacho-Adarve (2003) for Almería (p. 143).

In this study, the author considers structural features of allo-questions in Spanish as well as their cognitive, conversational, interactional functions, and the politeness strategies employed (p. 143). D.'s study confirms Bernal's (2005) findings on repetition. On the one hand, allo-repetitions may integrate into the interlocutor's discourse the other party's words as a type of affiliative function. On the other hand, it may be disaffiliative because it forces the other person to correct him/herself. In this sense, it may initiate illocutionary acts of rebuke, irritation, and protest (p. 157).

The seventh chapter ('More on mitigation in oral transactions', pp. 159–177; cf. Dumitrescu, 2010) discusses the notion of attenuation, or mitigation in speech acts. In citing Caffi's (1999) study on mitigation, D. notes that there is general consensus on attenuation in speech acts, i.e., it is a multi-faceted linguistic function that operates at multiple linguistic levels. Caffi argues that it serves two needs: (1) instrumental (interactional efficiency, p. 160); and (2) relational needs (identity construction and management of emotional distance, p. 160). In this study, D. presents the mitigating strategies for the deontic modality (impositive or direct speech acts, p. 161), and the epistemic modality (assertive or constative speech acts, p. 161).

In this essay, D. utilizes the Madrid corpus (Esgueva and Cantarero, 1981) for her database on mitigation, which involves interviews. Because of their complexity, speech acts of mitigation operate at multiple levels. Mitigators may be internal (morphological, syntactic, lexical means) or external (*if*-clauses, adversative constructions, pre-sequences, grounders). They may be illocution free or illocution bound depending upon the context (Caffi, 1999).

In this chapter, D. examines three types of speech acts. The first is the impositive one with three formats: (1) the use of the mitigator *un poco* ('a little'); (2) interrogative sentences, namely, indirect requests; and (3) the conditional of politeness (p. 162). Of interest is the fact there were no instances of the expression *por favor* ('please') or its variants. The second type of speech act is the assertive one, which employs the expression *un poco* ('a little') frequently. Because of the nature of the

speech act situation in the database (interviewer–interviewee), assertive speech acts are quite frequent (p. 165). The third type is dialogic mitigation in which D. found three types: (1) disagreement of opinion; (2) polite mitigation between by interviewer or interviewee to save the other's face; and (3) topic negotiation during the interviews (p. 171).

Chapter 8 ('Discourse functions of *sí*', pp. 179–197; cf. Dumitrescu, 2007) addresses the high frequency Spanish word *sí* ('yes'), which has not received a great deal of attention by linguists. In order to study the uses and functions of *sí*, D. utilized the Mexican section (14 recordings of educated speakers, 7 men ages 18–81 and 7 women ages 25–80 with discourse from participants and interviewers) of the electronic *Macrocorpus de la norma lingüística culta del mundo hispano* (Hernández Cabrera et al., 1998) and *Lope Blanch's* (1995) corpus of Mexican Spanish (pp. 180–181).

The examples of Spanish *sí* from the two corpora have the following distribution and functions. The first are autonomous tokens: (1) prosentential adverbs; (2) sentential adjacent, i.e., separated by a comma; and (3) metadiscursive pragmatic markers. The second are non-autonomous, i.e., they form part of a verb phrase and may be elided or explicit (p. 181). D. concludes that Mexican Spanish data confirm the observations made about the use of *sí* in peninsular Spanish (p. 197).

In the penultimate chapter ('Clitic doubling and *personal a*', pp. 199–219; cf. Dumitrescu, 1998), D. examines the use or non-use of the personal *a* and its correlation to the lexical direct object and its position in a sentence as well as the well attested phenomenon of clitic doubling (pp. 199–200) in two dialects of Spanish (Buenos Aires, Madrid). She points out that her study seeks to explain the pragmatic and discursive parameters that separate the Spanish dialects of Madrid and Buenos Aires with respect to inanimate lexical direct objects. In particular her research indicates that '... a Buenos Aires speaker tends to mark these inanimate direct objects with *a*, to duplicate them, or do both at the same time, apparently with greater ease and frequency than a speaker of Madrid Spanish' (p. 200).

The author used a questionnaire (Appendix, pp. 213–218) to carry out this research project, which was distributed to 8 people in Buenos Aires (6 women, 2 men ages 29–56) and 8 people in Madrid (4 men and 4 women ages 28 to 56). D. concludes that '... there is a gradual functional extension of the uses of the preposition *a* carrying Scenic Prominence [the foregrounding of the object to give it prominence, p. 210] in the Spanish of Buenos Aires, in the same situations in which the Spanish of Madrid resorts, typically, to clitic doubling to mark the same function' (p. 212).

The final chapter of section two, and the last one of this book ('From evidentiality to epistemicity: Latin-American *dizque*', pp. 221–236; cf. Dumitrescu, in press) considers the use of the Spanish expression *dizque* (an amalgamation of *se dice que* ('one says that')) as a linguistic form that allows the speaker to encode the source of information, or evidentiality (p. 221). The expression serves four functions: (1) introduction of reported speech (pp. 225–226); (2) rumor or hearsay (pp. 226–227); (3) surprise or disbelief (pp. 227–229); and (4) disagreement and contradiction (pp. 229–234). The author's data based derives from the *Real Academia Española* ('Royal Spanish Academy', 2008) data base known as C[orpus de] R[eferencia del] E[spanol] A[ctual] (p. 225).

This collection of significantly revised and updated articles represents a unified source of important innovative essays on various aspects of pragmatics. Many of them derive from pre-existing databases of authentic speech from various parts of the Spanish-speaking world, while some are based on D.'s own data. All ten essays demonstrate D.'s careful scholarship, astute, nuanced observations about various aspects of politeness (thanking, apologizing, complimenting, wishing, and so forth). Furthermore, the author's discussion of the emerging and very important field of interlanguage pragmatics merits praise because this is an ignored area in theory and practice. It should be further noted that D. has a complete command of the extant research, which is evident in her discussion of the theoretical foundations of her research. Because she uses excellent databases as well as her own empirical research, her claims and hypotheses about the various aspects of pragmatics are credible. Finally, D. investigates areas of pragmatics that have received either very little previous attention.

A useful bibliography (pp. 237–254) provides evidence of D.'s comprehensive knowledge of the burgeoning literature in Spanish pragmatics.

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