POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN THE GREETINGS OF SPANISH LEARNERS IN VIRTUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS[1]

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ABSTRACT. The present study reveals how 34 Spanish learners from two different cultures and first-language backgrounds follow politeness norms related to greetings in the context of a collaborative cross cultural online learning (CCOL) classroom project. Using *WhatsApp,* students are instructed to upload a 1-minute introduction video about themselves. Then, after watching their peers' videos, students are asked to greet and welcome international members to their teams. Data from students' initial greetings identify a significant difference in terms of number of greetings and the type of semantic formulas used. Results support previous research in identifying a sense of cordiality and warmth within Indian society toward guests that gets replicated in the second language context. Indian Greensboro, North Carolinastudents tend toward involvement, whereas the American Students tend to orient towards independence in the involvement/independence dichotomy (Félix-Brasdéfer 2006). Understanding how these politeness norms transfer would be an essential tool in facilitating intercultural exchanges and collaborations as students meet the social, global, and cultural demands of the 21st century.

Keywords. politeness strategies; greetings; online learning; Spanish learners.

RESUMEN. Este estudio revela cómo 34 estudiantes de español de dos bagajes culturales y lingüísticos diferentes siguen patrones de cortesía relativos a los saludos en el contexto de un proyecto de aprendizaje colaborativo intercultural en línea (CCOL). Usando la plataforma *WhatsApp,* se pide al estudiantado que comparta una presentación autobiográfica en vídeo de 1-minuto de duración. Una vez que visualizan los vídeos de sus pares, se le pide al estudiantado que saluden y les den la bienvenida a los miembros de sus equipos. Los datos obtenidos a partir de los saludos iniciales por parte del estudiantado indican una diferencia significativa en cuanto al número de saludos y al tipo de fórmulas semánticas empleadas. Los resultados corroboran los de estudios anteriores en cuanto a que identifican un sentido de cordialidad y calidez dentro de la sociedad de la India que permea el contexto del uso interactivo de una segunda lengua. El estudiantado de la India tiende a involucrarse, mientras que el estudiantado de EEUU tiende a ser más independiente en la dicotomía de la implicación/independencia (Félix-Brasdéfer 2006). Entender cómo se transfieren estas normas de cortesía podría ser una herramienta esencial para facilitar intercambios interculturales y colaborativos de cara a las exigencias sociales, globales y culturales del estudiantado del siglo XXI.

Palabras clave. estrategias de cortesía; saludos; aprendizaje virtual; aprendices de español.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of virtual modes of communication and collaboration, educators have seen an expansion in the use of computer-mediated language education. To facilitate Spanish learners' access to authentic modes of communication with native speakers and/or native language users of the target language, technology developers and second language (SL) instructors have developed and introduced different types of online activities in the language classroom. These activities range from the synchronous, real-time modality to the asynchronous, time-delayed modality, and from students completing pair work to collaborative projects, where three or more students are asked to be part of a team. One of the aspects of these widespread computer-mediated modes of communication that has not been widely explored is how learners introduce themselves to both their instructors and their peers in virtual learning environments. Greetings are key elements for successful interactions with members of the classroom community - to establish solidarity and trust and also with members of the community at large, as they function "as a door to the target culture" (Kakiuchi 2005: 63). Learning how to greet appropriately is not only a crucial component of SL communicative development and pragmatic competence but also a critical strategy in our globalized, multicultural world. It has become imperative that language instructors promote and facilitate ample opportunities for intercultural communication among second language learners who speak different languages and come from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

This study focuses on the types of politeness strategies utilized when Spanish learners employ greetings in two different settings, the United States and India, in virtual collaborations. Are these purely linguistic greetings? Are these affected by politeness norms, cultural backgrounds, level of familiarity, relationship, etc. with their interlocutors?

2. Theoretical background: Previous research on greetings

2.1. Interlanguage pragmatics: Performing greetings as speech acts

Pragmatic competence is the ability to convey and interpret meaning adequately in a given social context. To achieve this ability, learners need knowledge of pragma-linguistics and of socio-pragmatics, that is, the sociocultural rules surrounding language (Shively 2021). Particularly, pragmatic competence involves speech acts and politeness strategies, but also different interactional resources such as the ability to comprehend implied meaning. It also involves knowledge (competence) of register and style, and aspects related to humor, such as sarcasm or irony.

The literature has documented the difficulties that Spanish learners have when confronted with specific communicative situations in the target language (Bardovi-Harlig 2001). Learners are known to transfer inappropriately pragma-linguistic (linguistic forms) and socio-pragmatic (sociocultural and contextual conventions) rules of their native language (L1) into the target production, which leads to misunderstandings and communicative breakdowns or pragmatic inappropriateness.

Among many directions in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) research, such as politeness strategies, discourse markers, conversational implicatures, or turn taking, the bulk of the scholarship on cross linguistic studies has been devoted to the production of speech acts by SL learners of different languages (Taguchi 2017). Developing competence in performing speech acts is of key importance in relation to successful communication (Cohen 1996). It becomes especially important in the case of performing the speech act of greeting considering its significant social function in speech communities.

Since learning how to greet appropriately is not only a crucial component of SL communicative development and pragmatic competence, but also a critical strategy in our globalized, multicultural world, we thought it was important to conduct research on greetings among SL learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Recent research on the appropriate use of SL pragmatic production of speech acts (Alcón-Soler & Martínez-Flor 2008; Culpeper, Mackey, & Taguchi 2018; Taguchi 2019; Shleykina 2019) has helped to pave the way towards understanding how SL learners employ these speech acts, and whether they use them successfully in adequate contexts. The cultural context and the linguistic context may convey very different messages. A study by Zieliński (2018) explains how the same meaning cannot be conveyed when comparing Polish and English. This same issue has been explored in other languages (Pinto 2008; Shleykina 2019). Thus, for example, the verb "to greet" can be conjugated and used as a greeting in various languages, for example in Polish (Zieliński 2018). So "I greet you" is a polite and efficient greeting. While the verb exists in English, it is not common to use it in actual greetings. In Spanish there is a similar verb, "saludar," which also means to greet, but it is also uncommon to use it in actual greetings. Despite these cultural differences when using greetings, particularly among non-native speakers and SL learners of English, there is still a research gap when it comes to production of greetings in Spanish by SL learners, which is what this study is trying to fill.

2.2. Greetings and politeness

Greetings have been studied from different perspectives, i.e. the ethological (Simpson, Gangestad & Biek 1993, inter alia), ethnographic (Duranti 1997b), and speech act theories. For the current study, we focus on greetings within speech act theory. The speech act theory views greetings as ritualized speech utterances which lack propositional content and denotational meaning (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Their main function is social: to establish and reestablish relations and to acknowledge differences in social status (Goffman 1971).

At the early stages of speech act research, greetings underwent several classifications. Austin (1962) regarded greetings as "behavities." Searle (1969) and subsequently Searle & Vanderveken (1985) considered greetings as "expressive" speech acts. Expressives "show the emotional state or attitude of the speaker but say nothing about the world." (Michno 2017:2). Searle (1969) further explained in his classification that greetings only satisfy two felicity conditions (of his four): the preparatory condition, and the essential condition, the former related to speaker and hearer having just been come into contact or been introduced, and the latter that the greeting is a "courteous recognition of the hearer" (Searle 1969: 67; Searle & Vanderveken 1985: 216). For Goffman (1971), greetings indicate accessibility between interlocutors. In Spanish, one may acknowledge the other person's presence in several ways, or degrees of politeness. A simple "hola" ("hello") in Spanish, may be accompanied by a "¿cómo estás?"("how are you?") which may or may not be referring to the other person's health. Initially that might have been the case, but in English "how are you?" is not intended to trigger a response regarding your health or overall well-being, but rather enhances a simple "hello" to a more polite category. In some Spanish cultures, "hola, ¿cómo estás?" can be interpreted as a polite greeting without expecting an explanation about your health or your mood. Depending on the culture, an explanation may be needed or expected. It is thus culturally, and regionally dependent and SL learners of Spanish may need to be cautioned about possible interpretations of greetings, thus appealing to their sociocultural competence.

In this regard, although many greetings are relatively straightforward and formulaic (Baratta 2009), they can involve extensive forms and additional contextual features emerging in context

and during interaction (Baratta 2009; Duranti 1997). Because of this added level of complexity, the speech act of greeting might present difficulties for SL learners (Waring 2012).

Studies exploring the interlanguage pragmatic aspect of greetings are scarce up to date. Few studies analyze the production of English greetings by SL learners, and the research exploring the production of Spanish greetings by SL learners is even smaller, particularly around virtual interactions in educational environments (Koike & Félix-Brasdéfer 2021).

From Austin's (1962) first approach at classifying greetings, to Duranti's (1997) detailed criteria for identifying greetings across languages, there is great variation among the classification of greetings depending on factors, like language, culture, region, level of politeness, among others. Some communities do not even have expressions to greet, so common among other communities. Duranti (1997: 67) argues that, when studying greetings, it is not possible to "concentrate only on lexical items and phrases exclusively reserved for greetings" as many languages may not have such lexical counterparts. He suggests six recurring features that may identify greetings in a speech community:

1. near-boundary occurrence
2. establishment of a shared perceptual field
3. adjacency pair format
4. relative predictability of form and content
5. implicit establishment of a spatio-temporal unit of interaction
6. identification of the interlocutor as a distinct being worth recognizing

(íbidem, p. 67)

As mentioned above, greetings have traditionally been considered expressive speech acts (Haverkate 1994). Expressive speech acts are meant to convey how speakers feel (Ferrer & Sánchez Lanz 2002) and this may cause a change in the world or in the interlocutor. Greetings are further classified as bidirectional and part of an adjacency pair. Adjacency pairs "consist of sequences which properly have the following features: (1) two utterance length, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance." (Schegloff 1973: 74).

2.3. Greetings in Spanish

Research addressing Spanish greetings is not as extensive as in other languages. As mentioned above, greetings are speech acts that can vary significantly from culture to culture.

One study that compares the source of cross-cultural variation associated with greetings and farewells in Spanish in contrast with American English is Pinto's (2008). In his study, Pinto found that passing greetings in both languages align with their cultural values, habits, and strategies, thus English speakers use greetings and farewells in line with negative politeness to prevent speakers from imposing on hearers, while speakers in Spanish, use passing greetings and farewells in line with strategies of positive politeness, thus establishing solidarity and directness (Pinto 2008: 371).

Bou-Franch (2011) investigated greetings and leave takings in 240 short email conversations in Peninsular Spanish. Results showed that opening and closing interactions were subject both to technological restrictions and, most importantly, to social and interactional constraints. The main takeaway of the study was that participants exhibited a style within the social norms of interacting with acquaintances than those circumscribed to the world of business transactions alone.

Cantamutto (2019) studied the use of greetings in text messages (SMS) by Spanish speakers in Bahia Blanca, Argentina. She analyzed a corpus of 6700 SMS. Her investigation showed that

participants in the study prefer vocative forms (e.g., Maria, Juan, Pedro) instead of greetings when opening conversations.

Michno (2017) analyzes the perceptions of bilingual Mexican-American residents of Texas regarding greeting and leave-taking usage in informal settings with three social groups. He analyzed levels of appropriateness in the use of greetings and leave-takings in social contexts. Results from his study identified a significant difference in the use of polite greetings – or meeting the socially expected level of "correctness" among native-Spanish speakers versus non-Spanish speakers. When comparing the use of polite speech acts among family members and folks outside the family, Michno's study not only supported previous findings with Mexican American families, but also indicated that bonds of solidarity extend to other Spanish-speaking members of their communities.

Few studies have explored the production of greetings by SL learners of Spanish, specifically around digital interactions in educational environments. This is particularly relevant in our emerging educational settings, that is, the teaching modalities that have become at the forefront – due to the pandemic. In this context, students have been forced to envision greeting and welcoming peers in computer-mediated educational spaces like never before. Even though the following studies do not specifically address the use of greetings, however, they all provide relevant insights into how students interact within digital educational settings.

For example, Pérez Sabater (2015) studied language variation among postgraduate students in *WhatsApp* text interactions. In their interactions students were urged to use language creatively, so that they could contribute to their field of study, language in digital communications. The goal of the study was to determine whether the language used in those *WhatsApp* text interactions was a new variety or not. Results showed that age was a crucial factor when utilizing non-standard language, and the crucial role played by digital communication in how language (written and spoken) is used today (Baron 2013).@

In her (2017) study about the use of expressive speech acts in educational e-chats, Maíz Arévalo found that students choose performing declarative acts but prefer not to express their emotions, and they did nor favor the use of Spanish or English while doing so, which revealed that their L1 did not seem to influence the kind of speech act performed.

Cantamutto & Vela Delfa (2019a) examined the use of emoji in *WhatsApp* interactions and found that emoji were utilized by users due to the variety they offer as well as the dynamic possibilities with such a large repertoire of icons. They did not find significant differences in the use of emoji by gender regarding Spanish of Bahia Blanca, Argentina. They did find that the types of emoji more widely used were the ones that transmitted positive emotions. The use of emoji favors linguistic economy and linguistic expressivity. They found ten emoji that are largely used, and they correspond to the ones that favor clarity and lack of ambiguity. Cantamutto & Vela Delfa (2019b) further explored the interpretation and diversity of emoji in *WhatsApp* text interactions. Their results indicated that the most frequently used emoji are the monosemantic ones, which express positive evaluative content, whereas the most under-utilized ones were the polysemantic ones, although the context usually helped disambiguate their meaning.

2.3.1. Classification of greetings in Spanish

We used a classification based on the revised formula for determining the weight of a face-threatening act, that is, a greeting that violates a variable of power or social distance. This formula was originally proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), who characterized greetings as face saving acts (since they demonstrate positive politeness, phatic communication and establish relationships

in a non-threatening environment). Qian (1996), Feller (2015) and Shleykina (2016: 63) revised the formula to make it open-ended, as it was determined that other factors, like, time of day, communicative intention, number of interlocutors and so on, may interfere. Thus, Shleykina (2016) proposed an in-depth classification of English greetings for her research based on time indicator, contextual factors, and lexico-semantic content. Her classification of greetings uses semantic formulas (SFs) that include the constituents of English greetings: greetings proper, address terms, and elements of phatic communication (Bonsignori et al. 2011; Greere 2005; Sacks 1975) and renders itself general enough to be applicable to other languages, like Spanish. These SFs have been employed as the basis of the classification of Spanish greetings in a manner that is exemplified below:

(1) Greetings proper. This category was further divided into time-free/ time-bound and formal/ informal variants. For example, "Hola" ("Hello"), "Saludos" ("Greetings") or "Bienvenidos" ("Welcome") are time-free, neutral, greeting proper; "Buenos días" ("Good morning") is a time-bound, formal greeting proper.

(2) Address terms. This category was further divided into personal names and summons (e-personal names, for example @Kate).

(3) Phatic questions. "¿Cómo estás?" or "¿Qué tal estás?" ("How are you?").

(4) Response to phatic questions. "Muy bien" or "Muy feliz" ("I am fine").

(5) Phatic phrases. "Mucho gusto" or "Encantado/a de saludarte" ("Nice to meet you").

(6) Situational greetings. This category includes contextualized or individualized phrases that serve as a greeting in specific circumstances of the constructed dialogue. For example, in reference to an introductory video: "Me gustó tu vídeo" or "Gracias por compartir tu vídeo" ("I liked your video" or"Thanks for sharing your video").

(7) Welcome situational greetings. This category includes contextualized phrases that serve as a greeting, particularly inviting and welcoming, in specific circumstances. For example, in reference to collaborating on the same project: "Me hace ilusión trabajar contigo este semestre" or "Estoy emocionado/a de aprender juntos" ("I am looking forward to working with you this semester/I am excited to learn together").

(8) Paralinguistic features. This category includes extra exclamation marks, icons, symbols, emoji, gifs, etc. to aid the conversation. For example, 😊, ^_^ , hola!!!!!!!!, among others.

In the context of the present study, the classification of greetings centers around their use by SL learners in virtual educational environments, and how these are employed in conjunction with paralinguistic features, such as emoticons or emoji.

2.4. Greetings and use of emoji and emoticons

Some of the following studies address greetings specifically (i.e., Sampietro 2019), and other studies (i.e., Lupyan & Dale 2016; Li & Yang 2018; etc.) address the use of emoji and emoticons in digital interactions, which are both investigated in this study.

Emoji or emoticons come to fulfill a need for suprasegmental features and non-verbal strategies for complete, successful communication in virtual settings, which are typically based on written texts (Taguchi 2017). Results from studies like Lupyan & Dale (2016) even suggest that, in recent years, emoji are being used instead of written slang to serve a similar communicative function. Li & Yang's (2018) study extracted 46 types of emoji from a corpus of 34,047 words and classified the emoji into seven functions. Results revealed how extensively emoji are used in digital communication, how positive emoji were more frequently employed than negative emoji, and how the purpose of utilizing positive emoji was to promote collaboration in a relaxed environment.

Sampietro (2019) investigated the use of emoji to open or close *WhatsApp* conversations. She found that openings using emoji contribute to establishing contact between participants and to set a positive goal. They "introduce a socially-oriented exchange" (Sampietro 2019: 117).

Pérez Sabater (2019) studied language variation in adult *WhatsApp* text interactions, focusing on gender differences in the use of emoticons. The results of her study revealed that gender plays a key role in determining how emoticons are used for relational purposes within adult digital conversations. In Pérez Sabater's (2019) study women used emoticons for the purpose of underlining adherence to a particular group rather than strictly conveying declarative meaning.

Martín Gascueña (2016) analyzes non-linguistic elements as semantic anchors in speech acts. The use of emoticons serves various purposes as they can replace lexical units, but they can also indicate intention and emotion of the enunciator. Thus, Martín Gascueña found that they can be utilized to indicate (im)politeness within interlocutors.

Beißwenger & Pappert (2019) investigated the use of emoji based on data from a learning environment in which students were asked to provide peer feedback on other students' work. They showed that there was evidence that the students use emoji as devices for performing redressive action (softening potential face-threatening acts or boosting acts to reinforce the other´s face when verbal face-threats in the same posts were performed without emoji (p. 250). Their analyses of emoji provided evidence of the use of emoji in e-learning environments being utilized at various levels of the organization of the discourse to fulfill different actions. Their results served as a starting point for the development of a pragmatic approach for the analysis of emoji in computer-mediated interactions.

These are the research questions addressed by the current investigation:
- Are semantic formulas in greetings produced by US learners of Spanish different from or similar to those produced by Indian learners of Spanish in terms of their number?
- Are semantic formulas in greetings produced by US learners of Spanish different from or similar to those produced by Indian learners of Spanish in terms of their type?
- Are there any differences regarding the students' gender?
- Are there any differences regarding the students' cultural background with regards to the use of greetings and emoticons/emoji?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 34 college students of Spanish as a SL from two different institutions – 9 of them were students from Ohio University (OU), a public university in the Midwest, USA and 25 students from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), a public university in India – interacting among themselves. Their age range was between 18 and 23. Participants self-reported their gender. The OU students were 6 female and 3 male; and the JNU students, 14 male and 11 female. All the students were registered in either an advanced conversation and composition course or an introduction to Spanish linguistics course. They were at an "intermediate high" level of proficiency in the target language, following ACTFL guidelines. The US students were native English speakers, while the Indian students spoke Hindi and/or a variety of south Asian and south-east Asian languages (Rajasthani, Malayalam and Korean). All the students were involved in a collaborative cross cultural online learning (CCOL) project about Spanish pronunciation.

3.2. Project instructions

Students were randomly assigned to teams of six or seven students. They were to work on a CCOL project. The purpose of the project was to choose between two well-known literary passages (one was from Miguel de Cervantes and the other one from Gabriel García Márquez) and work on the pronunciation of difficult words, connected speech, rhythm, fluidity, etc. Team members were asked to contribute tips from the lessons and lectures they had previously attended and provide feedback. Before the start of the virtual collaboration, and the aim of the current study, students were asked to record a one-to-two-minute video introduction of themselves - mentioning their names, the place where they grew up, their major of studies, and their hobbies. Then they were asked to upload their video to the *WhatsApp* group we had created for each team to share information and materials for carrying out their project. After watching their peers' videos, they were asked to greet and welcome their team members. The greetings that were part of the *WhatsApp* interactions are the essence of the data that we analyzed. All the greetings were identified, coded, and interpreted. The amount and type of greetings utilized in these interactions were computed. The results were subsequently submitted to statistical analyses.

3.3. Data coding

To code our data, we followed the classification of greetings described in section 2.3.1. and considered the following types of greetings:

a) greetings proper: "Hola;" "Saludos" o "Bienvenido/as;"
b) terms of address: personal names, and summons (e-personal names)
c) phatic questions: "¿Cómo estás?" o "¿Qué tal?"
d) response to phatic questions: "Muy bien" o "Muy feliz"
e) phatic phrases such as "Encantado de saludarte" o "Mucho gusto"
f) situational greetings: "Me gustó tu vídeo" o "Gracias por compartir tu vídeo"
g) welcome situational greetings: "Me hace ilusión trabajar contigo este semestre"
h) paralinguistic features - extra exclamation marks, icons, symbols or emoji and emoticons.

As mentioned in the previous section, the *WhatsApp* initial interactions were analyzed, and all the greetings extracted. Those greetings were subsequently identified, counted, and coded based on the above classification.

4. Results

Each type of greeting was initially coded based on the classification described in section 3.3. Once coded, the greetings were counted and assigned to the corresponding student group that had employed them, that is, JNU (Indian students) vs OU (US students). These analyses yielded the following results:

Table 1. Classes of type of greetings

	JNU (N=25)	OU (N=9)	Totals
Greetings proper	59	17	76
Terms of address	64	28	92
Phatic questions	8	2	10
Phatic phrases	49	13	62
Response to phatic questions	8	3	11
Situational greetings	25	17	42
Welcome situational greetings	29	5	34
Paralinguistic features	36	11	47

Figure 1. Total number of greetings per group
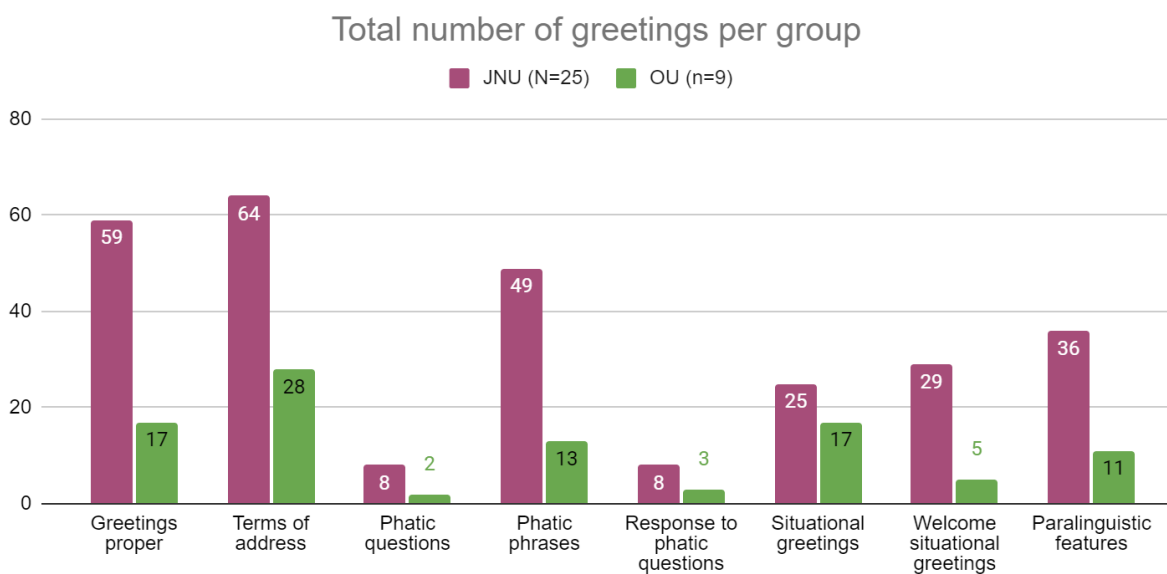
As figure 1 shows, overall, Indian students (purple) and US students (green) used greetings differently. and they also varied not only in terms of how personally they addressed their peers, but alsoin terms of how they made them feel welcome. The total number of greetings by type were submitted to Chi-square tests that yielded statistically significant results in two areas, the use of

"terms of address" and the use of" welcome situational greetings." Figures 2 and 3 show the results of the Chi-square tests.

To reduce Type I error (possibility of obtaining statistical significance due to the large number of comparisons) given the multiple comparisons, Bonferroni adjustments were made.

Figure 2. Chi-square results for Terms of Address.

Crosstab

Count

		TermaddrRecoded (to Used of Not Used/Yes or No)		Total
		Yes	No	
LOCATION	JNU	23	2	25
	OU	5	4	9
Total		28	6	34

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.048ª	1	**.014**		
Continuity Correctionᵇ	3.800	1	.051		
Likelihood Ratio	5.384	1	.020		
Fisher's Exact Test				.031	.031
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.870	1	.015		
N of Valid Cases	34				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.59.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.422	.014
	Cramer's V	**.422**	.014
N of Valid Cases		34	

In order to determine the level of significance a series of Chi-square tests were performed, and the p-values were calculated. The two tests that came back significant were:

(a) Terms of address (p = 0.14) and (Figure 2)
(b) Welcome situational greetings (p = 0.10) (Figure 3)

This means that Indian students differed significantly from US students in two aspects from the study, terms of address, and welcome situational greetings. Figure 2 shows that the total number of students from each background, Indian vs US, were submitted to Chi-Square Tests. The result of p=0.14 indicates that the result is statistically significant.

Figure 3. Chi-square results for Welcome situational greetings

Crosstab

Count

		WelcsitugreRecoded (to Used of Not Used/Yes or No)		
		Yes	No	Total
LOCATION	JNU	20	5	25
	OU	3	6	9
Total		23	11	34

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.585ᵃ	1	**.010**		
Continuity Correctionᵇ	4.625	1	.032		
Likelihood Ratio	6.329	1	.012		
Fisher's Exact Test				.033	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.391	1	.011		
N of Valid Cases	34				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.91.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

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Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	**.440**	.010
	Cramer's V	.440	.010
N of Valid Cases		34	

Figure 3 shows the results obtained for welcome situational greetings. In order to determine its level of significance a Chi-square test was performed, and the resulting value of p=010 indicates that Indian students differed significantly from US students with regard to use of welcome situational greetings. Figure 3 shows that the total number of students from each background, Indian vs US, were submitted to Chi-Square Tests. The result of p=0.10 indicates that the result is statistically significant.

Indian students used more personable greetings and summons and produced significantly more welcoming, and caring greetings to their international peers to their teams than US students.

If we look at the number of paralinguistic features employed, we compared male learners to female learners. The female learners used significantly more (76% total) paralinguistic features than their male counterparts. For example, female learners used more flower or heart emoji. The p value is p = 0.17. In terms of the type of feature, female learners used more features that conveyed affection(for example hearts, smiley faces) or less formality whereas the males were keener on conveying complicity or humor (for example, an emoji conveying strength or laughing/winking emoji) (75% total).

Figure 4. Proportion of paralinguistic features divided by gender of participant
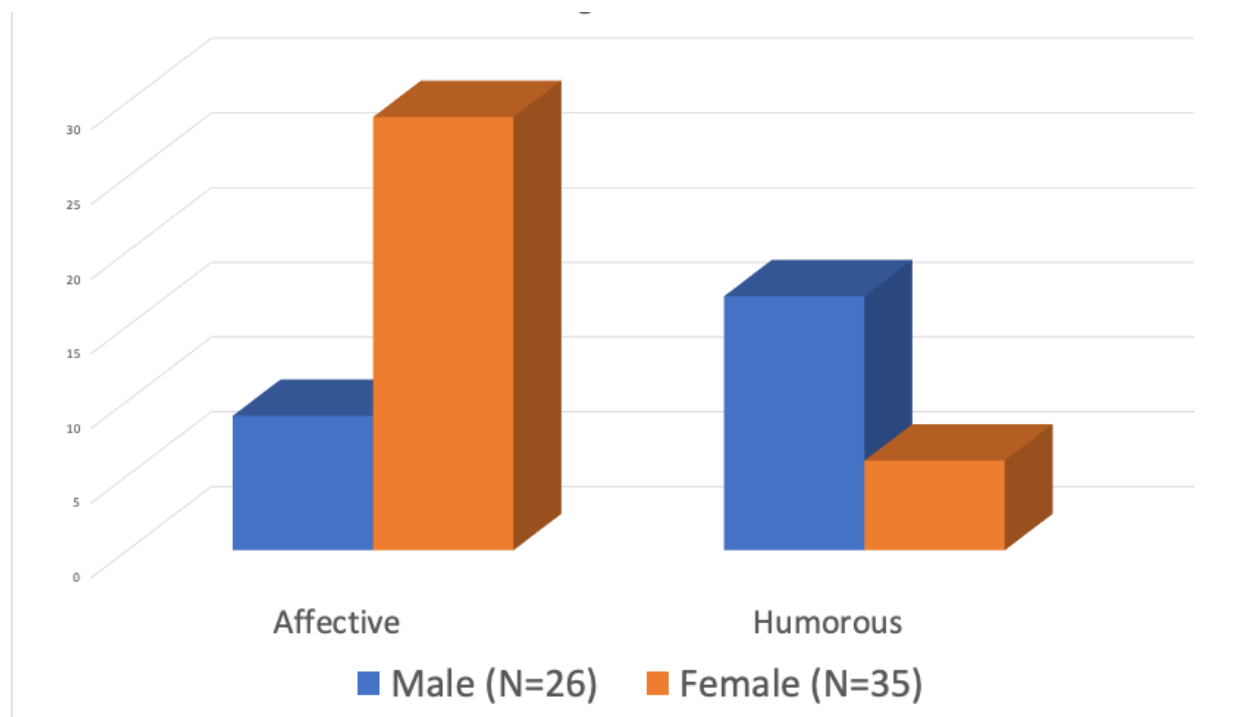
5. Discussion, conclusions, limitations, and future research

The aim of this study was to focus on the types of politeness strategies utilized by Spanish learners in two different settings, the United States, and India, in virtual collaborations. The investigation sought to explore whether greetings employed by SL Learners are purely linguistic greetings or whether they are affected by politeness norms, cultural backgrounds, or level of familiarity, relationship with their interlocutors. The four research questions that guided the current investigation were:

- Are semantic formulas in greetings produced by US learners of Spanish different from or similar to those produced by Indian learners of Spanish in terms of their number?
- Are semantic formulas in greetings produced by US learners of Spanish different from or similar to those produced by Indian learners of Spanish in terms of their type?
- Are there any differences regarding the students' gender?
- Are there any differences regarding the students' culture?

The two groups of SL learners used a comparable number of semantic formulas in their greetings, and these seem to be similar in type. No significant differences were observed in terms of gender. Nevertheless, there were significant differences in the use of terms of address so students from India made their greetings more personable than students from the US who chose to address the group. For example, a student from India would personalize their greeting by using an e-summons, (@Laurie), while a student from the US would rather address the entire team and opt for an e-summons of the type, (@todx, @all). An incidental finding from this study was that US students attempted to indicate gender inclusivity by using greeting terms of address that

encompassed feminine and masculine in Spanish. The Spanish plural is generally marked by the masculine form "-os" in many word endings. The US students, however, utilized "-xs" or "-es" to purposefully specify lack of gender and show an inclusive gender-neutral term. These forms were not employed by the Indian students. It was outside of the scope of this study to ask Indian students why they used certain forms and not others. Our hypothesis is that those forms may have not reached a common usage status at their university.

Another major finding of the study with respect to types of greetings was that students from India used significantly more welcome situational greetings than students from the US, and those turned out to be more empathetic in nature than plain, neutral formulas. For example, students from India would choose inviting expressions, such as: "Me hace ilusión trabajar contigo este semestre" [I look forward to working with you this semester] versus a less committed expression, such as a generic apology of the type: "Perdón por no haber saludado antes" [My apologies for not having said hello to you before].

The study also looked at paralinguistic features used by the two groups of students in their initial *WhatsApp* interactions. Students mostly used exclamation marks and emoji. While the use of exclamation marks was sporadic and insignificant, the use of emoticons was overtly and consistently used. We found that students used two types of emoticons. One type was affective emoticons, such as, smiley faces, hearts, faces in love, hugs, stars, flowers, etc. The other type was humorous or ironic emoticons, such as, laughing faces, smirks, smiley faces with a halo, faces indicating boredom or tiredness, lying faces (with an extra-long nose), etc. Our findings show that, irrespective of group, female students preferred the use of affective emoticons significantly more than male students, who opted for the use of humorous/ironic emoticons in their interactions.

Like all research, ours has a few limitations, the main ones being the small sample size of participants (N = 34) and the fact that only quantitative findings were reported. But we hope to analyze the qualitative data that we have so that we can shed some more light on these findings. Because of these limitations, we strongly recommend that future research be conducted with a mixed-methods approach which would help to account for the individual variability and complexity of pragmatic development that characterizes the use of semantic formulas in greetings.

The findings of this study provide data relevant for program planning decisions so that not just teachers but also program coordinators give more importance to interlanguage pragmatic competence as a strategy for preparing students to navigate our increasingly globalized world.

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