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**The pragmatics of communicative competence.
The case of interactions between university professors and
students.**

Volume I

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Analysis of the American emigrants

PRESENTATION OF SELF

STRATEGIES	SUBSTRATEGIES	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Avoiding assertiveness	A.1. Subjectivity	A.1.1. Parenthetical verb/clause (<i>from what I understand</i>)
	A.2. Non-factual	A.2.1. Modal verb/adverb (<i>may/maybe</i>)
	A.3. Down-toner	A.3.1. Adjectival/adverbial hedge (<i>sort of, like</i>)
B. Explaining and justifying	B.1. Explanation	B.1.1. <i>I (don't) mean</i>
	B.2. Justification	B.2.1. Discourse connective (<i>because</i>)
C. Displaying a positive self	C.1. Avoidance of negative impressions.	C.1.1. Verbal substitute (<i>not sure, rather not</i>)
		C.1.2. Complement modifier (<i>really, quite</i>)
D. Emphasizing modesty	C.2. Emphasis on positive aspects.	C.2.1. Verb of internal state in 1st person singular (<i>I'm really enthusiastic ...</i>)
	D.1. Minimization of self.	
E. Showing attitudes and feelings	D.2. Dispraise of self	
		E.0.1. Verb of likes and internal state in 1st person singular (<i>I love that picture</i>)
		E.0.2. Colloquial expressions (<i>damn; oh boy</i>)

6.2.2. Social Distance

In the analysis of this interactional requirement we must take into account the following premises:

- (i) The use of the standard register in interactions supposes in itself the upkeep of a certain degree of social distance. All the interactions analyzed develop in that register.
- (ii) The kind of interaction being studied is built upon the basis of the existence of a relatively high degree of social distance between the professor and the student.

With the two premises mentioned above one can understand that there is no need for the participants to direct their efforts towards maintaining or increasing the degree of social distance because this is already high at the beginning of the encounter. All the expressions that appear in our data are intended to reduce the social distance existing between the participants. The basic task to achieve this goal consists of going beyond the institutional role of the participants, appealing to their common experience as human beings and equal members of a social group. It is within this general frame that we must understand strategies such as (i) the introduction of affairs not directly related to the specific goal of the interaction but rather to the personal experience of one of the participants, (ii) the presence of features of informal registers such as colloquialisms and humour, (iii) the expression of positive feelings towards the

addressee, and (iv) the establishment of common experience.

A. Appealing to the individual

Under this heading we can include, in the first place, all those sections in which one of the participants introduces a topic which is not directly related to the goal of the conversation, but rather to personal matters such as family, personal tastes or past activities of the addressee. The essential element is that the contribution is not seen as 'interested' in achieving one specific goal. One could say that there is the implied meaning of 'I care about you not only in your institutional role but also as a person'.

(12)

- P That's right. Yeah. I remember that now.
S2 | It was something
fairly serious.
P Mhm. - Yeah, but I don't know (.....) What >
S | (.....)
> P did you name your baby?
S2 Andrew Robert. (1485-1490)

(12) belongs to the last stages of a conversation among two Students and the Professor, in which they have been discussing about a course project.

Addressing the other participants by their first names can be understood as conveying the same meaning as the group of expressions mentioned above, that is to say, the speaker is momentarily appealing to the individual (not the institutional) qualities of the person addressed. It is important to notice that the data do not contradict Ervin-Tripp's American rules of address in using first name (Ervin-Tripp 1972), and therefore we could say that the introduction of first name does not imply any special effort to reduce the social distance since these are the unmarked forms of address. However, the fact that in the expressions selected first name address can co-occur with \emptyset address without altering the communicative function of the utterance proves that it is an option that the speaker has made for a certain purpose.

(13)

P Hi Jane!

S How are you doing? Can I make an appointment to see you?
(2994-2995)

S in (13) is a married graduate student and P is her academic adviser. The use of first name as a sign of reduced social distance is confirmed later on in the conversation by the presence of other signs of reduced social distance like the introduction of personal topics (e.g. P's jury duty), use of colloquial language (e.g. "poop" –children's way of referring to defecations– for information about the student's *curriculum vitae*), bald-on-record face-threatening expressions (Brown and

Levinson 1978) (e.g. the Student saying that she would never take one of P's courses because she "would never live it down").

B. Breaking formality

One way of breaking the formality of the encounter is the introduction of humour and explicit (bald-on-record) face-threatening expressions in the conversation. The basis for most of the humorous expressions in our data must be found in the deliberate breaking of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle. The Maxim of Quality is perhaps the one that is broken more often

(14)

- P Hello!
S When will you not be busy with someone?
P Uh in nineteen ninety-four.
S [laughter](1158-1161)

In (14) we can see, in the first place, the Student addressing the Professor with a negative question which suggests something similar to a complaint for the Professor always being busy. To this question the Professor answers by breaking the Maxim of Quality.

The second strategy intended to break the formality of the speech event and, thereby, reducing the social distance between the participants consists of introducing expressions not

belonging to the expected register or even the same language, in some cases breaking the Principle of Politeness as well².

(15)

- S Have you not written my letter?
P No, + + + + I don't have any other any of the poop^{*}.
S I gave you the whole poop on Friday. (3047-3050)

(* poop = children's word for defecations; here it refers to the student's CV as well as to the information about the kind of fellowship the student is applying for)

(16)

- P For your thesis. Ok?
S Ok. Good. Yes.
P Sin más que decir - se fue la señorita. [laughter]
S Cómo que no hay más que decir! [laughter]
P [laughter]
S Good days these days.
P Good days?
S Yeah
P Oh you're enjoying the news, I guess. (3619-3627)

The success of this strategy can be appreciated in (15) and (16), since in both examples the addressee acknowledges the effort of the speaker to reduce social distance by using the same strategy

2 In a thorough study on the functions of code-switching in the verbal interactions which take place in foreign language classroom, Nussbaum (1990: 210) defines this specific strategy as indicating "una voluntad de renegociación del parámetros de la situación". This is what Gumperz (1982, 1990) defines as *contextualization cues* and Goffman (1981) as *footing*.

in his/her response. The presence of some kind of explicit acceptance (verbal: using the same expression or the same language; non-verbal: the presence of laughter) proves the cooperative nature of face-to-face communication: the participant who has begun reducing social distance needs an acknowledgment of the addressee accepting the new distance in order to continue in the same ironic key.

C. Sympathizing

I include as part of this strategy all those responses through which the speaker expresses positive impressions destined to make the addressee happier in a general sense. Most of the expressions selected are uttered by the Professor, and to a certain extent this is a predictable feature if we bear in mind that they involve an evaluation of the topic discussed, and the student is not in the possession of the intellectual or institutional authority necessary to allow him/her to do that. It is possible to distinguish two groups of expressions. A first group consists of those segments through which the speaker shows his/her positive feelings towards the matter discussed, the addressee or the interaction itself. This is the case of (17) where the Professor expresses his positive feelings (and those of the other professors) towards the fact that the students in the encounter are presenting a paper at a anthropology conference

in Mexico.

(17)

- P** Good. - Ok. Well, if you would uh - fill that in as soon as possible.
- S** I will.
- P** And - great we're all happy that you're going. (6125-6148)

The expressions in the second group are all intended to show the speaker's good disposition towards fulfilling the addressee's wishes. An example of this strategy can be seen in the use of the adverb *sure* as answer to a request. However, there are even clearer cases, like (18), where the Professor has deemed it necessary to make explicit his good disposition to lend one of his books to the Student by means of the expression "I'll be happy to" (as opposed to other more neutral expressions like "you may borrow it", "I will lend it to you", etc.).

(18)

- P** Orlove, Benjamin Orlove - deals specifically with - with that subject You can look that one up, and see what you can find in it. - If you can't find it in the library, come and tell me, and I'll be happy to (. . . .) Ok?
- S** Ok.
- S** Thanks. (2983-2988)

D. Denying social distance

Another way of reducing social distance is to say or imply that there is agreement, common experience or some shared familiarity with the idea being talked about. The importance of this function can be seen in the fact that even in cases where a disagreement is necessary, this is prefaced by a word indicating agreement, in this way what comes next is not seen as a direct opposition. A possible inference of the expressions in this subsection could be paraphrased with the following words: 'I'm not socially distant from you because I am familiar with and understand and accept as normal your feelings, ideas, problems, etc.'. This is another of the maxims Leech (1983: 138) mentions as part of his Politeness Principle:

- i) Mitigate disagreement between *self* and *other*
- ii) Maximize agreement between *self* and *other*

Some of the actual realizations of this strategy are often limited to one-word turns which show the speaker's agreement (e.g. *right; yeah; sure*). In some other cases the speaker adds a comment to give further support to the contribution of the previous speaker.

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(19)

S **! (L) don't (h) know (h) why. ? just I just got rid of all of that = .**

P **Yeah ^ yeah, sometimes happens. ^ - (ic) usually >**

S **| mhm**

> P **happens once, then you never get rid of anything after that. (1805-1808)**

The speaker can also anticipate what the other speaker is about to say.

(20)

S **I had one paper, but I've been looking for it and I can't find it.**

P **| you (h) can't (h) find (h) it. What (h) was (h) it? (1655-7)**

Extracts (19) and (20) are from the same encounter. They show the Professor working on the solidarity factor or reduction of social distance. The strategies in both cases are essentially the same: showing understanding by suggesting that this is an experience that the addressee of the message has already gone through. The Student in (19) is trying to excuse the fact that she threw away all the material given and elaborated during a course which she had taken some time ago, and she does it by suggesting that it was an irrational decision and that this is not the way she behaves regularly. We can see how in one of these uncomfortable moments the Professor goes to her assistance by saying that she is not the only one who does this sort of thing. In (20) the Professor anticipates the face-damaging expression for

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the Student (i.e. having lost a paper), implying, again, that he is familiar with this type of situation and, consequently, that he does not consider it a face-damaging circumstance for the Student.

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SOCIAL DISTANCE

STRATEGIES	SUBSTRATEGIES	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Appealing to the individual	A.1. Personal matters	A.1.1. Interrogative sentence <i>(what did you name your baby?)</i>
	A.2. First name	A.2.1. Vocative <i>(hi, Jane)</i>
B. Breaking formality	B.1. Deliberate breaking of the Cooperative Principle	
	B.2. Different register	B.2.1. Colloquial language <i>(poop)</i>
		B.2.2. Foreign language
C. Sympathizing	C.1. Positive reaction	
	C.2. Fulfillment of the addressee's wishes	
D. Denying social distance	D.1. Agreement	D.1.1. One-word turns <i>(right, yeah, sure)</i>
		D.1.2. Anticipating turns

6.2.3. Power

The power relationship present in this type of interactions is justified by the fact that it is part of a social situation in which one of the participants (the Professor) is assigned the role of gatekeeper. That is to say, he has been given by the institution almost total freedom of action to organize and direct the other participants (the Students) and, ultimately, evaluate their capacity to occupy a professional (and social) position.

From the data it is clear that the Professor is the one who organizes and directs the activity (the course) because he is the participant that states the requirements and gives permission for certain actions.

As was said in section 5.4.4., the clear Power relationship between the participants is the reason why it becomes really difficult to distinguish between segments which have been triggered exclusively by the presence of Power and segments which are motivated by the presence of Imposition. The usual case is that both interactional requirements appear together, that is to say, there is Imposition as far as there is Power. If the latter were not present the same act would not be an 'imposing' one. However, it is interesting to consider Imposition apart from Power not only to account for certain moves in contexts where the interaction takes place among equals but also to account for all those efforts of the 'powerful' participant to

diminish the impositive meaning of an action. In this way the 'interactional requirement' of Power can be restricted to explaining those cases in which there is an explicit acknowledgement of the difference in Power among the participants (e.g. asking/giving permission, requesting, suggesting/giving orders, stating obligations, etc.)

When confronting this interactional requirement, the 'powerless' speaker usually acknowledges the authority of the addressee by seeking his/her advice or permission. The 'powerful' participant, on the other hand, assumes his/her authority by means of directive speech acts.

A. Acknowledging authority

Requests for permission are very common actions in the Student's discourse. The uttering of requests as well as demands for direction are in themselves an acknowledgement of the power of the Professor, and, therefore, they are necessary not only to obtain information but also to clarify the roles of the participants in the encounter. Requests can be phrased in a more or less imposing way by means of certain non-imposing hedges that can accompany them, and which will be described in the section on Imposition. However, the interest in this section falls upon the act of request itself, to point out its significance as an implicit acknowledgement of the superior power of one of

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the participants. The type of request acknowledging power is the one that would be generally absent in speech among equals. The presence of the modal verb *can* is quite characteristic of this type of requests (e.g. *can I just write it out?*; *could I do that*; *can I make an appointment to see you?*)

(21)

- S No, I guess some of that - I mean is that many of those charity balls don't benefit those
- P No =
- S = the the people who need the money.
- P Yeah, yeah
- S But the - the uh illusion is there
- P Mhm
- P Yeah How interesting. - Mm
- S Well, anyway Can we talk about this this >
- P (...)
- > S problem of different selective pressures? (5439-5449)

In (21) we can see an extreme case of acknowledgement of authority, in which the student requests permission to switch the topic of the conversation.

The Student, assuming his/her role of 'powerless' participant, must be careful to constantly seek the Professor's advice and permission. The Professor, on the other hand, in his/her role of 'powerful expert' is allowed to make the most direct suggestions. We can mention here all those questions through which the Student seeks advice or permission. Questions seeking advice can appeal to the Professor's opinion

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by means of the question *do you think?* (e.g. *are they gonna let him do that? you think?*). It is also possible to find questions containing the modal *should* (e.g. *should I mm concentrate on Perú or*).

(22)

- P it may go back, as I say, I have this run from about nineteen sixty six one to the end of the near to to the end of the
- S | *Do you think that's a good time period to be looking at?*
- P Yeah. There may be, and and the library has the ones before that
- S Which?
- P So, you can look in there too. It'd be a good source
- S *Ok. What do you think? Starting in the sixties is a good time to start? Or it doesn't matter?* (2286-2294)

In (22) we see the Student trying to decide on the period on which to carry out her research. Interestingly enough, she asks the same question twice (because she thinks her question was not answered the first time) and in both cases the expression "do you think" is included.

B. Assuming authority

Requesting consent or advice supposes that there is someone to give it. Here it is possible for the speaker to diminish the impression of Power in the action (see the section on Imposition) or simply accept it.

A very characteristic interactive task of the Professor is to let the Student know (or just remind him/her) about academic requirements. Both the Professor and the Student make explicit in their utterances that they are dealing with a special kind of rules or obligations which sometimes have been fixed by a another authority or just form part of the regular academic life. The use of modal verbs such as **have to**, **must** and **need** or synonymous verbs like **be necessary** or **be supposed to** seems to be a preferred solution. Another possibility is the use of the passive voice, alluding to a higher impersonal authority. Finally, and although it is not so common as the two previous structures, it is also possible to find the future tense with a meaning of obligation (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 214).

(23)

- S So, I wanted to get straight an make sure I have this right.
 Where ~~am~~ I supposed to pick up the exam a week from
 Monday?
P Ok. A week from Monday you'll pick it up upstairs.
 (3255-3257)

The Student in (23) is a graduate student who must take a required comprehensive examination to finish her M.A. in anthropology. She wants to find out the place where the examination will be in order for her to pick it up.

Imperatives (e.g. **make sure you have 2 copy**) and the construction **want/would like you to** (e.g. **that's what I want you to do**) including verbs expressing volition like **want**, **would like**,

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are the most explicit examples of the linguistic display of power in the act of giving directions.

(24)

- (S) and in a paper like this, one thing you could say is that Joss recognizes five styles, A B C D - E - F - and and don't try to replicate Joss, you know. You can't discuss each of those five styles. (120-123)**

In (24) we can see the Professor in one of his typical tasks during office hours: giving advice/directions. In this case he is suggesting how to approach a topic for a paper.

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POWER

STRATEGIES	SUBSTRATEGIES	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Acknowledging the authority	A.1. Request for permission	A.1.1 Questions with modal verb <i>can/could</i>
	A.2. Request for direction	A.2.1. Questions about opinion (e.g. <i>do you think</i>) A.2.2. Questions with modal verb <i>should</i>
B. Assuming the authority	B.1. Requirements: obligations	B.1.1. Modal verbs (obligation) B.1.2. Passive voice B.1.3. Future tense
	B.2. Imperatives	B.2.1. Imperative mood

6.2.4. Imposition

As has been pointed out above, the 'interactional requirement' labelled here as Imposition will help to describe all those efforts by the participants to reduce the impositive connotations of the utterance. The expressions presented in this section include signals that show clearly that the speaker is aware of the danger of being extra-demanding with the addressee. These signals, therefore, are all aimed at reducing the degree of imposition that the act itself involves, or, if it is the case that this reduction is not possible, repair it by showing gratefulness or acknowledging the addressee's negative face, i.e. his/her "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson 1978: 66).

One could very well argue that the degree to which a participant can impose his/her wishes on the other(s) depends very much on the power and social distance relationship and, therefore, it is not necessary to study this variable separately. The point of view adopted here, however, follows Brown and Levinson (1978: 85-88) in considering this 'requirement' as independent, since it is possible to find a range of possible verbal options only by varying the Imposition parameter while maintaining the other two stable (see section 5.4.5). This 'interactional requirement' also helps us to account for the fact that on more than one occasion it is the powerful participant who works on diminishing the impositive force of his utterance.

A difference with the Power 'requirement' is that whereas the segments studied under it are all aimed at making clear who is the powerful participant and who is the powerless one, the segments included under Imposition have in common the fact that they all are intended to deny difference in power. In some way we could say that, whereas Imposition clues are desirable to a certain extent in order to maintain the social structure, Power clues are not desirable because they represent arbitrariness and hierarchy.

The strategies used to confront this 'interactional requirement' involve different ways of mitigating the impression of imposition in directives and requests. The presence of Imposition can also be appreciated in utterances in which the speaker explicitly acknowledges the addressee's negative face.

A Mitigating imposition in directions

It has often been said that the best pedagogue is not the one who tells what the world is like but the one who helps to discover it. The task of helping the Student to decide on a course of action is perhaps one of the most typical in the type of speech event studied. It is, therefore, justified that we begin the analysis of the Imposition requirement with those instances in which the Professor must impose a certain course of action on the student.

The first conclusion one reaches after a review of the expressions included in this subsection is that, at least from a formal point of view, we cannot speak of 'imposing' but 'suggesting' a course of action. Indeed, the speech act of suggestion is in itself the most direct way to reduce the imposition of a command. Thus, beside the typical standard ways of suggesting such as *if you could...* and *what about...* we find other expressions like *you might wanna go...* and *I think you wanna...*

The presence of the past/conditional forms of modal verbs indicating obligation (*can/could, may/might*) is perhaps one of the most recurring characteristics in the suggestions that appear in the data. Another relevant feature is the presence of parenthetical verbs involving the speaker like *it seems to me, I think*, and the modal *I would*, which are intended to convey the idea that the speech act is not an imposition but simply a sharing of one's ideas. Both types of expressions have also been included as part of the interactional factor Presentation of Self. The reason for this is that the degree to which a speaker imposes his/her wishes directly affects his/her face.

Finally, it is worth remarking the appearance of the verb *want to (wanna)* conjugated in the second person (e.g. *you wanna make sure you pitch it at what they're interested in*). A possible explanation for this expression is that it contributes to reinforcing the idea that, ultimately, it is not the Professor that

decides to take a certain course of action but the Student. By means of the second person followed by a volitional verb the speaker hands over to the addressee the responsibility for the option to be taken.

(25)

P In fact, I would - I don't know whether that's ever been looked at, but it seems to me that that would be more of a psychosomatic quality. And that would be one >

S | mhm

> P area which you would look. And then you could look at then you actually do a statistical test. (4806-4811)

(26)

S Ok. So, probably for this class then, just do a basic review of the (... ..)

P If I think you wanna outline the problem.

S I may end up outlining the problem. (2070-2073)

Samples (25) and (26) show the way in which the Professor directs the Student to undertake a specific course of action. The segments "I would" and "I think" correspond to the first strategy of 'sharing one's ideas'. The modal "could" in (25) presents the direction given as one of several possibilities to be taken up by the addressee. The expression "you wanna" in (26) passes the responsibility for the decision to undertake the action to the addressee.

Continuing with the idea of avoiding the danger of making the addressee feel that he/she is being imposed, there is an alternative interactive strategy to that of suggestion instead of command. The speaker may also resort to the possibility of not constraining the addressee to one specific way of reacting by giving him/her more than one option. Apart from the choice of modal verbs like **can** and **may** instead of **must**, **have to**, **ought to**, **skould**, the most frequent kind of expression used in order to accomplish this intention is a clausal coordination by means of the conjunction **or** with an inclusive meaning, i.e. allowing the realization of a combination of the alternatives.

(27)

(P) I mean, you could use the s even the same thing you've written, and then just you add a couple of sections or something.

S Mhm (1742-1744)

We see in (27) how in his aim not to constraint the freedom of the Student the Professor includes in the second part of the clausal coordination an indefinite pronoun which leaves open the alternative to adding a couple of sections.

It is interesting to point out that this is a specially relevant feature of many yes-no questions. This is so because this type of question points at a 'preferred' answer depending on the negative or affirmative orientation of the question. The speaker in his/her effort to be non-imposing can, therefore, mention

both possibilities, indicating that he/she is ready to accept any of them. In this way the addressee is not 'forced' to answer in one specific way.

(28)

S So, anyway. I've been really hard to come over here. Too hard pressed to get time.

P So, you're all clear now? Or not? (2794-2796)

In (28) the Student must fulfill part of his credit requirements through an independent study with the Professor. She had been putting off the preparation of this study because of personal circumstances.

B. Mitigating imposition in requests

The second type of speech act with the highest impositive connotation, and thus more susceptible of being 'softened' with non-imposing hedges, is the request. English as well as other languages has some linguistic means to make requests more or less direct depending on the degree of imposition the request puts upon the addressee. One possibility is to preface the request with a verb conjugated in the past and reflecting the speaker's mental state (e.g. *I was thinking, I was wondering*) or intentions (e.g. *I wanted to know, I was trying to remember*).

(29)

- S1 So, uh *I don't know* I was thinking I wanted to go through -
uh - through your materials, but =
- [S2 comes into the office without asking permission]
- S2 = Sorry. I did leave you something.
- S1 Do you think
- P [to S2] You seem to have a predilection to do that. (. . .)
hat, gloves, papers
- S1 I was wondering if *there's any chance* that I can get in to go
through that after hours. Like on a weekend. Is there
- P Sure. I can give you a key. (2172-2180)

The action of request in (29) is realized in two steps because of the interruption by Student S2 who had forgotten something in the Professor's office. Student S1 wishes to work with some of the material the Professor has in his office. Because of her academic schedule she needs to work there outside the regular hours. Therefore she needs a key to the office. The indirectness of the request can be appreciated, in the first place, by looking at the systematicity in the use of parenthetical verbs (e.g. "I was thinking"; "I was wondering"). Secondly, in both steps the parenthetical verbs are reinforced with other softening expressions (in italics; e.g. "I don't know"; "if there's any chance"). Finally, the Student succeeds in making the Professor not only give his consent to work in his office but also suggest the best solution (i.e. to give the Student a key to the office) without the Student having mentioned it.

A second possibility to introduce indirection is the insertion of downtoners like *kind of*, *sort of*, *rather*, *a little*, *just*, *basically*, etc., which question the appropriateness of the expression used or scale downwards its meaning (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 597-598). This is the case of (30), in which the Student visits the Professor to obtain an explanation for his low grade in a paper.

(30)

- P I didn't realize you were just waiting for me out there. -
What can I do for you?
S Uhm I wanted - a little bit more - to know basically where
I went wrong on uh - this paper.
P Mhm. (66-70)

C. Acknowledging the addressee's negative face

One last strategy adopted to cope with the Imposition 'requirement' includes all those utterances in which the speaker makes explicit *a priori* or *a posteriori* the fact that he/she is aware of the possible imposition exerted on the addressee, depriving him/her of his/her freedom of action. Perhaps the clearest examples are those through which (i) the speaker thanks the Professor for having attended him/her; (ii) the speaker solicits permission (e.g. *do you have a minute?*; *do you mind if I tape-record?*); and (iii) the speaker apologizes for depriving the addressee of his/her right to carry on with the activity he/she has chosen (e.g. *sorry to uh take up your time*

but uh; excuse me for interrupting). The speaker also has the option of explicitly clarifying his/her non-imposing intentions, as in (31), where the Professor insists explicitly on his wish not to sound imposing:

(31)

**(P) Let me suggest some things, and see how they sound. -
And and it's and and I don't wanna talk you into
something that you - you don't want to do. - But I also
wanna salvage [laughter] if (h) we (h) can =**

S = ^yeah ^ =

**P = your programme. So, so, I don't (^want you to ^) feel
like I I'm really trying to pressure you too much .**

(1584-1590)

IMPOSITION

STRATEGIES	SUBSTRATEGIES	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Mitigating imposition in directions	A.1. Possibility vs. obligation	A.1.1. Past of modal verbs <i>can</i> and <i>may</i>
	A.2. Sharing of ideas	A.2.1. Parenthetical verb (<i>I think, I would</i>)
	A.3. Transferring responsibility to addressee	A.3.1. Verb <i>want to</i> in 2nd person singular
	A.4. Options	A.4.1. Clausal coordinator <i>or</i>
B. Mitigating imposition in requests	B.1. Indirection	B.1.1. Verbs of mental state in the past tense (<i>I was thinking</i>)
	B.2. Downtoner	B.2.1. Noun and verb modifiers (<i>kind of, just</i>)
C. Acknowledging the addressee's negative face	C.1. Thanking	C.1.1. <i>thank you</i>
	C.2. Request for permission	C.2.1. Interrogative sentence
	C.3. Apology	C.3.1. <i>sorry...</i> ; <i>excuse me...</i>
	C.4. Clarifying potential arbitrariness	

6.3. Discourse competence

6.3.1. Topic

The fact that topics are introduced, maintained and shifted in the course of a conversation is in itself a sufficient reason to dedicate a section to study the kind of devices that speakers use to perform such actions. Although sequential contiguity is sometimes enough to make the addressee construct some coherence between different utterances, we will concentrate here on the specific linguistic devices that allow the speaker to manage different topics in a conversation. We will, first, deal with the devices used to shift from one topic to another. A second aspect of interest will be the means to introduce or re-introduce a topic and to organize it.

A. Signalling topic coherence

In order to progress in the development of different topics in the course of a speech event, the speaker may opt between trying to link the new topic (or aspect of it) with the old one or establishing a clear boundary between the two topics. The items that are normally used in the first case are *and* and *yeah*.

(32)

P Peruvian Times is a very good source of the sort, because they translated the laws into English.

S Mm.

P And often published them in the Peruvian Times. And you'll see in there as you look in the Peruvian Times, and also they would translate like the mining code into English, and then they sold it.

S Really?

P To people who needed to know and so.

S Yeah. Because I, maybe that's what I need to do. Because I don't know anything about this company

P Because that's probably in the mining code. That's probably where you'd find out. It's in the mining code

S In the mining code.

P I don't know. Yeah. See, like haciendas were supposed to provide schools and other services to their dependent population. (2234-2250)

Extract (32) is useful to exemplify the multifunctionality of **and**, as a marker of logical connection (Information Management requirement; in italics) and as marker of topic coherence (Topic requirement; in bold characters). In the former function "and" coordinates two predicates of "they" separated by a turn: "they translated the laws into English" and "they often published them in Spanish". As a signal of topic coherence it serves the Professor to shift from the topic of the Peruvian Times to the Student's task as topic (i.e. "and you'll see...") to go back later on to the previous topic (i.e. "and also they would..."). The particle "yeah" allows the Student to shift the topic again to herself while maintaining the impression of coherence with the previous one.

Another group of markers connected with the function of progressing in the development of a topic are those expressions which announce the speaker's insistence on the same topic although with possible modifications or expansions. The examples that appear in the corpus are: I mean, that is to say, in other words.

(33)

(P) Another another way people have done the honours programme - uh - is to take a paper they wrote for another class - and just expand it.

[a series of turns dealing with a paper the student wrote some time ago]

S And uh ^ what did it focus on? ^ - I think it it was mostly focused on on Latin America. Since that was what he >

P | Mhm

> S pulled most of his material for the class out of.

P | Sure Mhm

|]

P Mhm. - I mean, that that is a - a strategy and one that might be a little more workable (Lan: - creating a whole new research project in this short time.

(1649-1679)

The expression "I mean" in (33) allows the Professor to go back to the general topic of the different strategies people adopt to do the honours programme. This topic was interrupted with a series of exchanges on a specific paper the Student had written for a course.

Finally, there is a third group of items which differs from the other two in that, instead of pointing at the connection between the old and the new topic, they try to establish a clear

separation between one and the other. One prosodic feature that characterizes them is that they are usually pronounced as a separate tone group, with falling intonation and with a slight pause immediately following them. An analysis of the data has produced the following list: well, but, so, ok, anyway, now, so that, let's see, and combinations of them like but anyway, anyway ok, so anyway.

(34)

(P) That's one of the greatest fallacies in data collection that exists.

S yeah (.....)

P And and so, - you think (.....) it's not just setting step out but actually, you know, collecting the data, interviewing people. - And uh so, anyway. It will depend on what we decide. What you all decide to do and what the strategy will be to do it. (2866-2872)

In (34) we have an example in which the speaker seems to hesitate between linking one topic to the previous one or establishing a clear separation. This can be seen in the uttering of *so* and *so anyway* immediately after *and*.

B. Unfolding topic

Apart from the markers signalling topic digression or topic continuity there are other markers related with topic which are aimed at *indicating* a new topic and *introducing* it. The difference

between *indicating* and *introducing* a new topic is that with the former the addressor only calls the attention of the addressee but does not tell him/her about the object of the attention.

Expressions like *I need to ask you something* or *the other thing is, let me suggest some things*, have the function of indicating the start of a new topic. One of the best examples to appreciate the function of these expressions is (35), in which the speaker, after closing the previous topic (i.e. examination norms) with an "ok", indicates the opening of a new one (i.e. a potential topic in the examination) by means of the expression "the other thing".

(35)

S Tuesday morning I'm supposed to leave it? (.....)

P Yeah. I'll
tell you on the exam. I'll just write it out

S |Ok.

S Ok. The other thing, remember in my committee meeting?
And Tony brought up the thing about the Tas Tansig
article? (3267-3272)

Pseudo-cleft sentences (e.g. *what you really might wanna do is, one thing you could say is*) are among the most frequent expressions used by the speakers in order to introduce a topic. The relevance of this type of structure as a topic-indicating device is that their function is precisely that of topicalizing certain information³.

³ See section 6.3.3. on Information Management.

The topic can also be introduced by means of metacommunicative comments like *let me tell you of just a logistic problem or speaking of readability and stuff*, all of them containing verbs referring to the actual activity of communicating verbally (e.g. *tell, speak*). The difference between this type of metacommunicative comments and the previous one is that they include some specific information about the topic in question (e.g. *logistic problem, readability*).

Extract 35 involves the three steps which seem to be necessary in order to shift the topic: closing the present topic ("ok"), expressing the wish to open a new one ("the other thing") and introducing it ("remember in my committee meeting"). Of course, the speakers do not always follow the three steps, and very often the introduction of the new topic is a clear enough cue to signal the shift. This would be a similar case to that of 'implicit exchanges' like the following, where the rejection of the invitation is understood without being actually uttered:

- A Would you like to go to the movies?
 (B No.
 A Why?)
B I've got a lot of work.

The introductory strategy used in (35) consists of referring the addressee to some previous event or knowledge with which both participants are familiar. The act of referring to some familiar knowledge may be done in an explicit way as in the example above: "remember in my committee meeting?". Other

examples are: I was talking to you about my paper; I told you I'm going to do this on a I've got a typewriter. It is also possible to introduce the topic in an implicit way by mentioning the subject preceded by a definite determiner indicating that it is given information⁴.

(36)

- S1 Ok. So, we'll get that back to you.
P I'll have to call Bill.
S2 Oh, who's this person in Berkeley about the hotel?
P Oh, Stefano Varese. (390-393)

In (36) neither "this person in Berkeley" nor "the hotel" had been mentioned before in the conversation. However, they are presented as given information because they are a topic which had been discussed in previous encounters.

There are also a series of devices used when the speaker is interested in reintroducing a previous topic. These expressions have been sometimes classified as repair moves because repetition is seen as a conversational transgression of the Cooperative Principle. All of them are aimed at making clear that the speaker is aware of the repetition. As M. Mizzau (1984:114) says,

⁴ Brown and Yule (1983:169-179) provide a clear review of the different devices available in English to present information as given or new.

(...) this form of disclaiming corresponds to a general principle underlying a lot of interactive behaviour, which is: it is sufficient to demonstrate that you know the rule in order to legitimize its transgression.

The expressions found in the data are metacommunicative comments like again, like I say, as I say.

(37)

S When do you, when, what time period should I start looking into?

P [And the library has the Peruvian Times

S Yeah. Ok.

P It goes back, I just have a segment from like, what, nineteen sixty nineteen sixty-one through nineteen seventy, or something like that.

[29 turns later]

S Alright. Well, maybe I can get in here this weekend and get through that.

P Yeah.

S Because

P It may go back, as I say, I have this run from about nineteen sixty sixty one to the end of the, near to the end of the

S [Do you think that's a good time period to be looking at? (2221-2289)

In (37) the Professor acknowledges his insistence on a previous topic (the time period covered by the issues of the Peruvian Times he has in his office) after a long deviation from that topic.

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TOPIC

STRATEGIES	SUBSTRATEGIES	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Signalling topic coherence	A.1. Topic continuation	A.1.1. <i>and, yeah</i>
	A.2. Topic modification/expansion	A.2.1. <i>I mean, that is to say, in other words</i>
	A.3. Topic boundary	A.3.1. <i>well, but, so, ok, anyway, now</i>
B. Unfolding topic	B.1. Topic indication	B.1.1. Metacommunicative comment (<i>I need to ask you something</i>)
	B.2. Topic introduction	B.2.1. Pseudo-cleft sentence
		B.2.2. Metacommunicative comment (<i>speaking of...; let me tell you ...</i>)
		B.2.3. Past tense/definite article (<i>who's <i>in</i> person in Berkeley</i>)
	B.3. Topic reintroduction	B.3.1. Metacommunicative comments (<i>like I say</i>)

6.3.2. Turn Taking

The development of the activity of turn taking is essential for the process of transfer of information. The cooperative nature of a conversation implies that each participant makes his/her contributions according to the response/reaction of the other co-participants. It is because of this that it is important to study the mechanisms that make it possible for the process of taking turns to be organized. There are three types of task in which a speaker can become involved in connection with this 'interactional requirement': (i) supplying feedback; (ii) demanding feedback; (iii) giving-keeping the floor.

A. Supplying feedback

One important aspect of turn taking is the distribution of the different backchannel signals indicating to the addressee how he/she is to proceed with the construction of the text. We can distinguish four groups of backchannel signals according to the meaning they express: *continuers, agreement, acceptance/understanding, reaction.*

The group of continuers includes those vocalisations whose function is basically that of refusing the turn to speak: *uhm, mm, hm, uhu.* The reasons for this action can be found in one of

the following facts:

(i) The speaker realizes that there is more information to come in order to obtain a complete message and, therefore, decides not to use his/her turn.

(ii) The speaker has nothing to contribute to the conversation.

The difference between *continuers* and the rest of backchannel signals is that they do not express any specific meaning apart from signalling attention and refusal to take the floor.

(38)

(S) After that, you know, I described that. And then afterwards, I wrote the, I could see a value of this being used in the United States with the Indochinese refugees.

P Mhm

S | And the uh Laotians, for instance, most of them coming over illiterate in their own language.

P Mhm

S It's a switch from ten years ago, when we got the educated. Now we're getting the uneducated uh =

P = Do you work with them in Jacksonville?

S I worked with them a lot in Kansas.

P In Kansas. Ok. - Mhm.

S And the problem is when they come over here there's no way for them other than verbally to communicate.

P Mhm. - Mhm. (675-690)

We can see in (38) how the Professor adopts a very receptive attitude in front of the Student's message by means of exclusively supplying *continuers* which indicate to the Student that she can go on with her message. Finally the Professor shows

interest in the Student's message by uttering a question ("do you work with them in Jacksonville?"), and the Student interprets this as a sign of willingness to contribute to her message. In the next turn taken by the Professor he simply shows understanding but the Student nevertheless is hesitant to continue because she thinks that the Professor may have something else to say. This is the reason for the short pause preceding "mhra", through which the Professor communicates that he has nothing else to say.

A second group of backchannel signals are those which show agreement or sharing of knowledge with the current speaker. The most common one is the affirmative particle *yeah* (or the negative particle *no* when the previous expression is a negative one), but the data show that there are other ways of conveying the same meaning: *right, sure, exactly, of course, aha, absolutely, that's right*) and more explicit tokens like *I know, that's what I was thinking, that's true and I agree with you.*

(39)

- (P) So, I think we we're gonna give you an incomplete in this, and have you finish it after the term is over.
- S That's what I was thinking also. If I could uhm just finish it during summer A, then, something like that.
- P That would, I I would have no problem with that - you would have to check with the registrar on - what that means in terms of your graduation. Obviously you - you would graduate.
- S |*yeah of course* (1774-1782)

Extract (39) contains examples of the two groups of backchannel signals. In the first instance the Student agrees to the Professor's suggestion to finish the honours programme after her graduation. A few lines below she agrees to the Professor's expectation that she would be able to graduate even if she had not finished her honours programme.

Finally, as was pointed out in section 6.2.2, on Social Distance, agreement or sharing of knowledge can also be expressed by anticipating part of the current speaker's turn.

(40)

- S** So, I wanted to get straight uh make sure I have this right.
Where I am supposed to pick up the exam a week from
Monday?
- P** Ok. A week from Monday you'll pick it up upstairs. Yeah
- S** |Upstairs. Yeah.
(3255-3258)

Sample (40) is interesting because it contains an agreeing turn by the Student, which consists of an anticipation of information ("upstairs"), and because of its simultaneity with the previous turn it is not enough of a signal to make the Professor interrupt his turn. This is why there is a simultaneous reciprocal exchange of agreement tokens ("yeah") immediately after the word "upstairs".

The third group of tokens involves all those items expressing reception and acceptance of the new information supplied. The expressions that seem to accomplish this function

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in our data are *oh*, *alright*, *i see*, *i understand* that and repetitions of all or part of the previous speaker's turn.

(41)

(P) *Ok. Well, there's a big article on susto that you have to read.*

S *Which one is it?*

P *[Old old article by John Gillins'*

S *John Gilliac. Yeah. (4714-4718)*

In (41), although the Student first confirms the reception of new knowledge ("John Gillins"), the immediate addition of the token "yeah" suggests that she was already familiar with the author. We have, therefore, a piece of information which is treated as new at an initial stage and immediately after it is confirmed as known information.

Apart from acknowledging the reception of new information with rather neutral tokens such as those mentioned above, the speaker may communicate his/her subjective reaction to the information. One of the most common tokens is the particle *oh*, which indicates surprize and unexpectedness. Other ways of conveying the same meaning are: *ah*, *hu*, *hm*, *mhm'* (falling-rising intonation), *really?*, *oh yeah?*, *i didn't know that*, and question tags both with and without inversion of auxiliary (*she is?*, *are you?*). Other perhaps more informal (and also more exaggerated) ways of showing surprize are *oh my god*, *oh gosh*, *oh man*, *oh jeez*, with positive or negative connotations depending on the context. Finally, it is also possible for the

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speaker to convey his/her positive reaction towards the information received (oh that's great, how interesting, that's funny, yeah it sounds good, good).

(42)

- (S) They both see themselves as surprisus
P | Mhm
P Mhm' - And the others feel the need to be the recipient of the charity ball [laughter] it (h) k.nd (b) of (h) works >
S | right
> P (h) together [laughter]
S No I guess some of that - irony is that many of those chr. y balls don't benefit those
P No. =
S = the the people who need the money
P Yeah. Yeah.
S But the - the uh illusion is there
P | Mhm
P Yeah. How interesting - Hm.
S Well, anyway Can we talk about this this >
P | ()
S 'problem of different selective pressures' (5432-5449)

Extract (42) is intended as a final example of the variety of backchannel tokens available to the speaker. The four groups we have distinguished are present in it. We have in the first place a backchannel token ("mhm") by the Professor supporting the completion the Student's turn. When her turn is finished the professor expresses surprise (i.e. "mhm' ") but is reluctant to contribute a turn to the conversation (observe the pause after the token). After this, it is the Student who becomes the recipient of the information uttering an agreement token ("right"). The roles change again and now it is the Professor who

("right"). The roles change again and now it is the Professor who agrees with the student. Notice the shift from the negative token "no" to the affirmative "yeah yeah", depending on the negative or affirmative nature of the previous turn. The next backchannel token is uttered by the Professor, supporting again the completion of the Student's turn. Finally, there is another token expressing agreement ("yeah") followed by another two ("how interesting", "hm") confirming the interpretation of the second token ("mhm' ") as expressing some surprise.

B. Requesting feedback

One aspect to take into account when considering the strategies deployed by the speakers around the requirement of turn taking is the lack of synchrony between the participants in the administration of the necessary feedback to continue with the construction of the message. It is on occasions of this kind that the participant responsible for the message needs to resort to certain devices to demand feedback from the addressee. Most of the expressions used in this case take the form of short questions like *ok?*, *right?*, *you remember him?*, *you see?*, *can you imagine?* as well as question tags

(43)

P He owns a house in Brooklyn which he bought. Ok? - A friend of Lis from Peru - bought a lot and built a house in Palm Coast, in this big ITT development thing. >

P2 | Yeah.

> P1 You see? - But this guy is a lot younger. He's got little kids, and his wife and his wife came down there and didn't like it (...). And so, Polo rents his house in Brooklyn for more money than he has to pay to rent this one. Right? (4401-4412)

The complexity of the story in (43) (i.e. a Peruvian friend of P1 who owns a house in Brooklyn but lives in Florida in a house which he is renting in exchange for renting his house in Brooklyn to the owner of the house where he is living now), is further increased with the addition of extra-information (i.e. ITT development; the reason why the owner of the house he is renting moved to Brooklyn). Consequently, it is necessary for the addressee(s) to distinguish clearly the different steps of the narration and their order of succession. This is the reason why P1 ensures the understanding of his message by soliciting feedback from his addressees ("ok?", "you see?", "right?").

The parenthetical expression *you know* is another device used by the speaker as a means of asking for feedback from the addressee. This function coincides with the function assigned to it in Schiffrin (1987: 279). This author defines the functions of *you know* with the following words:

(...) *you know* functions both informationally and interactionally: it allows a hearer to affirm the receipt of information, and it displays the ways in which particular participant roles are undergoing gradual transitions in the discourse.

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(44)

P But uh - you know, to actually, th the way to turn it into an excellent paper would've take to take five minutes of dialogue, and actually count the number of times that ellipsis was used. Not just say it was used once or twice - or mentioned. - And - you know, just try to try to bring some precision to the analysis. (106-111)

The relevance of the expression "you know" in (44) is not fully understood without taking into consideration the general passivity of the Student in the preceding exchanges in which the Professor is trying to explain to him what he did wrong in his paper. Looking at the preceding turns by the Student we discover that in only one of his five turns he utters an expression which is not a simple backchannel token. The discourse segment *you know*, therefore, must be interpreted as an effort on the part of the Professor to trigger some kind of cooperation in the Student

C. Managing turn taking

The way to give the floor to another participant in the encounter, apart from asking a direct question to the addressee, consists basically of adding the particle *so* at the end of a turn. This is also a device which is pointed out by Schiffrin (1987: 218) as a marker of a speaker's readiness to relinquish a turn.

In order to perform the opposite action, that is, to keep the floor the speaker makes use of the particle *and*. This function is corroborated by the fact that in those cases where *and* indicates the speaker's willingness to maintain the turn, it is usually followed by some kind of hesitation in the form of a short pause, repetition of the same particle or the vocalisation *uh*.

(45)

(S) I mean, there is not much difference in amount of time
either one would take. So, and I'm really interested in -
in the other one. I have all the books and stuff (h)
!ike(h) that (h) too so uh

P |yeah take that thing you're interested >

S |yeah

>P in and and and that you can do a good thing you know

S |I think that I'm gonna stick with that one

(3443-3450)

We see in (45) how the Student signals her willingness to pass the turn with the particle "so". The uttering of "uh" is justified by the delay of the Professor to take up the turn. The next two turns show the 'struggle' between the Professor trying to keep his turn and the Student trying (and succeeding) to take it.

TURN TAKING

STRATEGY	SUBSTRATEGY	REGULAR LINGUISTIC FEATURES
A. Supplying feedback	A.1. Continuers	A.1.1. Vocalisation (<i>mhm, uh</i>).
	A.2. Agreement	A.2.1. Monosyllabic tokens (<i>yeah, no, right</i>); short expression (<i>that's true.</i>)
		A.2.2. Anticipation of current speaker's turn
	A.3. Reception/acceptance	A.3.1. Monosyllabic token (<i>ok, alright</i>); short expression (<i>I see, I understand that</i>).
A.3.2. Repetition of all/part of previous speaker's turn.		
A.4. Attitudinal reaction	A.4.1. Interjection (<i>oh, ah</i>)	
	A.4.2. Short question (<i>really?</i> , question tag).	
	A.4.3. Informal expression of emotion (<i>oh gosh</i>)	
B. Requesting feedback	B.0.1. Short question (<i>ok?</i> , <i>you see?</i> , question tag)	
	B.0.2. <i>you know</i>	
C. Managing turn taking	C.1. Giving the floor	C.1.1. <i>so</i> (turn-final position)
	C.2. Keeping the floor	C.2.1. <i>and</i>