Discourse and Pragmatics

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Recommended minimum reading time: 4 hours

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Contents

Introduction

Discourse and pragmatics are two very wide topics, and in this unit, we have selected some of the aspects especially interesting from a contrastive perspective.

As far as discourse is concerned, we cover issues related to coherence, cohesion and information structure, as they appear in written texts. Coherence deals with how the hearer or reader makes sense of a text, using linguistic and world knowledge, together with context. Cohesion studies the specific mechanisms that the speaker/writer uses to make a text coherent. Finally, information structure has to do with how known and new information is expressed in sentences. We will see that English, and Catalan and Spanish show systematic differences in these areas.

As for pragmatics, we have focused on politeness in three face-threatening acts, apologies, requests and complaints, and on terms of address. These aspects are interesting, because the differences between the interactional styles of English, and Catalan and Spanish are reflected in them.

Objectives

After having studied this unit, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the concepts of coherence, cohesion and information structure.

2. Understand and explain the various mechanisms used to maintain textual cohesion in English, Catalan and Spanish, identifying both differences and similarities.

3. Be aware of the different ways in which theme and rheme are expressed in English and Catalan/Spanish.

4. Explain the concepts of politeness, face, speech act, apology, request and complaint.

5. Formulate the differences and similarities between English and Catalan/ Spanish apologies, requests and complaints.

1. Discourse

It is not easy to provide a definition of **discourse**, because it covers a very wide area of language study. Jaworski & Coupland list ten different definitions from various disciplines, all of which share the following two aspects: beyond the sentence, and language in use.

Beyond the sentence we find texts, and a **text** is «any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole».

As for **language in use**, the unit of analysis of discourse studies are **actual texts**, not made-up examples provided to illustrate a given point of grammar. What discourse linguists are interested in is how people use language to carry out a variety of purposes.

In this section, we will deal with **written** discourse only, and, within written discourse, some features of language related to **coherence**, **cohesion** and **information structure**.

Bibliographical reference

A. Jaworski, N. Coupland (2014). *The Discourse Reader* (3rd Edition). London & New York: Routledge (p. 1-3).

Bibliographical reference

M. A. K. Halliday, T. Hasan (1976). *Cohesion in English.* London & New York: Longman (p. 1).

1.1. Coherence

When we read a text, we can all determine whether it is coherent or not, even if we do not know exactly why. According to Schubert, **coherence** is «the result of cognitive processing and inferencing on the part of the addressee, who uses context and world knowledge to create discursive meaning». A text is coherent if it shows the following characteristics:

Bibliographic reference

C. Schubert (2016). «Cohesion in contrast: A case study of English and German user manuals». *SKY Journal of Linguistics* (num 29, p. 96).

- It has a clear topic (**topic coherence**). A coherent text deals with a certain topic, which is easily identified by the reader. After reading a coherent text, readers can answer the question 'What is the text about?' The text in the example would not show topic coherence:

  The wolf was re-introduced in the Pyrenees a decade ago. President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963.

- Its component parts are connected to one another (**structural coherence**). The information presented in the text is adequately selected and ordered: there is a constant input of new information (not too little, not too much), and the main ideas are presented first, followed by the less important ones. Besides, the relationship between the various ideas is clear, and there is no contradiction between them. There is no structural coherence in the example:

  There was a terrible earthquake in Mexico last week, although Mexico is a very poor country.

- The ideas expressed agree with the basic principles of logic, common sense and human knowledge (**local coherence**), which does not happen in the example:

  After her death, my grandmother had a baby.

1.2. Cohesion

Cohesion is the set of devices used to make a text coherent. These devices include syntactic as well as semantic elements. What we present here are general characteristics of English, Catalan and Spanish, without taking into account generic variation.

1.2.1. Reference

Reference includes all the mechanisms used to make evident a relationship of identity between elements in a text. It can be **anaphoric**, when it refers back to an element occurring earlier in the text, and **cataphoric**, which refers forward to an element that occurs later in the text. The most frequent items used for reference are demonstratives, possessives, pronouns and the definite article.

Anaphoric reference

I bought a book and a film. **The** book is for my brother and **the** film for my sister.

Ahir vaig conèixer una parella. **Ell** és japonès i **ella** russa.

No me gustan ni tu propuesta ni la de Pedro. La **tuya** porque es absurda y la **suya** porque es ingenua.

Cataphoric reference

After **she** called her boss, Mary felt even worse than before.

Des del **seu** divorci, no he tornat a veure la Sílvia.

Desde **su** posición, Andrés no se da cuenta del sufrimiento de los demás.

The definite article

The anaphoric and cataphoric uses of the definite article is the same in the three languages.

I've read plays and novels by this author, and I prefer **the** novels.

He llegit obres de teatre i novel·les d'aquest autor, i prefereixo **les** novel·les.

He leído obras de teatro y novelas de este autor, y prefiero **las** novelas.

The museum that you visited is enormous.

El museu que vas visitar és enorme.

El museo que visitaste es enorme.

Demonstratives

In the three languages, there are **demonstrative determiners** and **demonstrative pronouns**. In English and Catalan, there are two degrees of distance in demonstratives: close to the speaker (proximal) and everywhere else (distal): *this*, *that* (both determiners and pronouns); *aquest*, *aquell* (determiners) and *això*, *allò* (pronouns). In Spanish, there are three degrees of distance: close to the speaker, close to the listener and everywhere else: *este*, *ese*, *aquel* (determiners) and *esto*, *eso* y *aquello* (pronouns).

In the three languages, demonstratives can be used **anaphorically**, that is, to refer to elements that have been mentioned earlier in the text.

> The best option was to go there together. **That** is what they had decided.
>
> La millor opció era anar-hi junts. **Això** és el que havien decidit.
>
> La mejor opción era ir juntos. **Esto** es lo que habían decidido.

We can see a difference here, in that in English the distal form (*that*) is used, and the in Catalan and Spanish the proximal one (*això/esto*).

In **English**, the demonstrative **determiner** *this* can also be used **cataphorically**, in other words, to refer to elements that will appear later in the text. This happens exclusively in informal contexts, and is very typical at the beginning of jokes, where the character is introduced (hence, it has not been mentioned before).

> So **this** woman calls her doctor and … [joke]

We find another difference between English and Catalan/Spanish with the demonstrative **pronouns** *this* and *that*, when they are used to refer to a larger segment of discourse (sentential antecedent). It is a very frequent choice in English, whereas in Catalan and Spanish, other alternatives are typically used, such as a relative clause or a full NP.

> **Note**
>
> The following examples are adapted from J. G.López Guix, J. M. Minett (1997). Manual de traducción inglés castellano: teoría y práctica. Barcelona: Gedisa (p. 112-113), and the Catalan translations are ours.
>
> In Rome, a statue of Marsyas stood in the Forum; **this** was imitated by Roman colonies.
>
> Al Fòrum de Roma hi havia una estàtua de Màrsies; **aquesta pràctica** va ser imitada per les colònies romanes.
>
> En el Foro de Roma se alzaba una estatua de Marsias; **esta práctica** fue imitada por las colonias romanas.
>
> The movement continues in equally flamboyant style until the second theme begins. **This** includes a more delicate little phrase on violins and violas.
>
> El moviment continua amb un estil igualment florit fins que comença el segon tema, **que** inclou una petita frase més delicada per als violins i les violes.

Bibliographical reference

R. Quirk *et al.* (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London & New York: Longman (p. 375).

Further reading

For a comparison of the use of deictic items in English, Spanish and Catalan (and other European languages), see:

E. Montiel Ponsoda (1999). «La traducció de la dixi espacial». In: J. L. Martos (ed.). *La traducció del discurs* (p. 35-49). Alacant: Universitat d'Alacant.

El movimiento continúa con un estilo igualmente florido hasta que empieza el segundo tema, **que** incluye una pequeña frase más delicada para los violines y las violas.

Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in subject position are much more frequent in English than in Catalan/Spanish. This is due to the fact that the subject is compulsory in English, whereas in the Romance languages it is optional.

We know that this issue is very important.

Sabem que aquesta qüestió és molt important.

Sabemos que esta cuestión es muy importante.

In fact, in Catalan/Spanish, the subject is usually elliptical, unless there is a good reason to use it, such as emphasis, or ambiguity.

Emphasis

He sent the letter. [not her]

Ell va enviar la carta. [no ella]

Él mandó la carta. [no ella]

Ambiguity

«She's not that rude, Helen» Anne said. «The woman is impossible», Hank insisted. She knew what he was doing.

—No és tan maleducada, la Helen —va dir l'Anne.

—Aquesta dona és impossible —va insistir en Hank. Sabia què estava fent.

—No es tan maleducada, Helen —dijo Anne.

—Esa mujer es imposible —insistió Hank. Sabía qué estaba haciendo.

Both in the Catalan and the Spanish version, in the second line, with pronoun ellipsis, it is impossible to know who knows and who is doing. There are different alternatives to solve this problem, such as the use pronouns or proper names, in different combinations:

Ella sabia què estava fent ell. / L'Anne sabia què estava fent en Hank.

Ella sabía qué estaba haciendo él. / Anne sabía qué estaba haciendo Hank.

1.2.2. Syntax

At the syntactic level, cohesion is carried out by different mechanisms that link the sentences of a text: parataxis, asyndeton and hypotaxis.

Asyndeton consists of juxtaposing clauses, with no connector. In **parataxis** the clauses are linked by means of coordinating conjunctions. **Hypotaxis** involves the subordination of a clause to another one, using subordinating conjunctions.

a) Asyndeton: John insulted her; she slapped him.

b) Parataxis: John insulted her, and she slapped him.

c) Hypotaxis: **When** John insulted her, she slapped him.

The meaning is the same in the three sentences. The difference lies in the degree of explicitness. In **a)** and **b)**, the reader has to infer the relationship between the two events, which is most probably causal. This relationship is much clearer in **c)**.

English favours parataxis and asyndeton, whereas in Catalan and Spanish there is more subordination. The reasons for this are twofold.

On the one hand, in English there are two subordinators that can be omitted (and then we have asyndeton, since two clauses are juxtaposed with no linker): **relative pronouns** and the **conjunction** *that*.

> I can't believe you are leaving tomorrow.
>
> No em puc creure **que** marxis demà.
>
> No me puedo creer **que** te vayas mañana.

When the relative pronoun is omitted, we have **reduced relative clauses**, which can be finite or non-finite:

• Finite reduced relative clauses only exist in English.

> Finally, we found the picture we had been looking for.
>
> Finalment vam trobar el quadre **que** havíem estat buscant.
>
> Finalmente encontramos el cuadro **que** habíamos estado buscando.

• For non-finite reduced relative clauses, past-participle ones exist in the three languages, but they are much more frequent in English than in the Romance languages (a). Present-participle reduced relative clauses exist only in English (b).

> **a)** The valuable manuscript lent to me by the library director has disappeared.
>
> El valuós manuscrit que em va deixar el director de la biblioteca ha desaparegut.
>
> El valioso manuscrito que me prestó el director de la biblioteca ha desaparecido.
>
> **b)** Do you recognize the girl talking to the clown?
>
> Reconeixes la nena que està parlant amb el pallasso?
>
> ¿Reconoces a la niña que está hablando con el payaso?

On the other hand, the differences in the use of hypotaxis, parataxis and asyndeton between English, and Spanish and Catalan are due to the stylistic conventions of each language, especially in writing. Let's have a look at the following excerpts:

Bibliographical references

J.Ainaud, A. Espunya, D. Pujol (2003). *Manual de traducció anglès-català*. Vic: Eumo (p. 89).

J. G.López Guix, J. M. Minett (1997). *Manual de traducción inglés castellano: teoría y práctica*. Barcelona: Gedisa (p. 98).

«Scripps left Mancelona. He was through with that place. What had a town like that to give to him? There was nothing to it. You worked all your life and then a thing like that happened. The savings of years wiped out. Everything gone.»

Ernest Hemingway. *The Torrents of Spring*

«El cronista, habitualment meticulós i gairebé llepafils pel que fa als detalls dels esdeveniments que conta, lamenta haver de confessar que encara no ha pogut establir d'una manera irrebatible l'hora exacta del començament d'aquesta historia; és a dir, en quin moment precís l'Elies Santapau va eixir d'escopetada de casa seva, al cap de Dalt de la costera del Forn, i va iniciar la correguda desenfrenada i memorable a través de la vila que deixà esbalaïts els veïns que la presenciaren.»

Jesús Moncada. *El cafè de la granota*

«Es también Sir Samuel Hoare quien consigue que la División Azul sea desarticulada en noviembre de 1943, y quien, a finales de enero del año siguiente, ya no ruega, sino exige sin contemplaciones que la Legión Azul, sucesora de la División integrada a todos los niveles en la Wehrmacht, ya sin relación orgánica aparente con el ejército franquista *–excusatio no petita, accusatio manifesta–*, sea desmantelada por completo.»

Almudena Grandes. *Inés y la alegria*

We chose these three authors, because they represent extreme examples of the general tendencies in each language. Obviously, this does not mean that all English writers write as Hemingway, or Catalan and Spanish ones like Moncada and Grandes, respectively.

Let's now see three examples from the conclusion section of academic papers (a completely different genre), where the same general tendencies can be observed:

«In this paper I have argued that the lexeme *time* constitutes a lexical category of distinct senses instantiated in semantic memory. The array of distinct senses constitutes a motivated semantic network organised with respect to a central Sanctioning Sense. The range of senses associated with time is derived by virtue of the interaction between the Sanctioning Sense, conceptual processing and structuring, and context. Hence, semantic representations, cognitive mechanisms, and situated language use are appealed to in accounting for the polysemy associated with time. The model adduced is termed *principled polysemy*.»

Vyvyan Evans (2005). *Journal of Linguistics* (41)

«El verb ESSE partia d'un sentit bàsicament existencial; en canvi, les dades que ens proporciona l'anàlisi actual de les llengües romàniques ens indica que aquest sentit sol ser residual: l'ús com a verb ple (*Déu és*) està limitat a contextos filosoficoreligiosos i el sentit derivat més immediat, el presentacional-existencial, es conserva fonamentalment en romanès, ja que, en altres llengües com l'italià, el sard i el català, el verb apareix acompanyat d'un clític locatiu gramaticalitzat.»

Joan-Rafel Ramos (2001). *Caplletra* (30)

«En este artículo hemos estudiado un solo aspecto de la estructura interna de los cardinales complejos en español: la imposibilidad sistemática de que, en los que se obtienen por adición, su primer término sea complejo, si la complejidad implica una conjunción copulativa u otro cardinal complejo en relación de adición, que hemos analizado como manifestación esencialmente de la misma categoría. Hemos argumentado que esta imposibilidad se debe a que una derivación que implique un primer término complejo es menos económica que una derivación en cascada –porque

implica dos derivaciones en paralelo– y, dado que en estos casos se obtendría el mismo significado, la segunda bloquea a la primera.»

Antonio Fábregas (2014). *Sintagma* (29)

In English, there are 90 words, 5 sentences and 7 clauses. In Catalan, 74 words, 1 sentence and 7 clauses. In Spanish 108 word, 2 sentences and 12 clauses.

1.2.3. Connectors

The class of **connectors** includes a huge variety of lexical items that can perform various functions. First, they can be used to establish **syntactic** (coordination and subordination) and/or **logico-semantic** relations (addition, cause, condition, consequence, contrast, disjunction, etc.) between constituents, clauses or paragraphs.

In the second place, we have **discourse markers** (also called **textual markers**), which indicate the structure of the text, the connections between clauses, the ordering of the information, etc.

Finally, we find **pragmatic markers**, which basically indicate the speaker's attitude. They are mainly found in spontaneous colloquial speech, so we will not deal with them here.

As was mentioned in the Section «Syntax», in English there is more parataxis and asyndeton than hypotaxis, and the opposite happens in Catalan and Spanish. Therefore, in Catalan and Spanish there tend to be more syntactic connectors than in English, both coordinating and subordinating.

In Table 1, we present a classification of connectors, with examples in the three languages:

> **Bibliographical reference**
>
> **J. Ainaud, A. Espunya, D. Pujol** (2003). *Manual de traducció anglès-català*. Vic: Eumo (p. 198).

Table 1. Connectors in English, Catalan and Spanish. Adapted from *Gramàtica de la llengua catalana* (2016)

		English	**Catalan**	**Spanish**
Addition	**Continuity**	in addition, then	a continuació, aleshores; després; doncs (bé)	pues, después
	Intensification	furthermore, moreover, besides	a més, més encara	además, lo que es más
	Distribution	first, second, for another thing, finally, last of all	d'entrada, en primer lloc, per acabar, d'altra banda, per un costat	de entrada, en primer lugar, finalmente, para terminar, por un lado
	Digression	by the way	per cert	por cierto
	Generalization	in general, as a (general) rule, generally speaking	en general, generalment	en general, generalmente
	Specification	in particular, particularly, specifically	concretament, en particular, especialment	concretamente, en particular, especialmente
	Emphasis	in fact, indeed, as a matter of fact, actually	certament, de fet, efectivament	ciertamente, de hecho, efectivamente

		English	Catalan	Spanish
	Equivalence	likewise, similarly, in the same way	així mateix, igualment, paral·lelament	asimismo, así, igualmente, en paralelo
Disjunction	**Reformulation**	that is, namely, in other words, put differently	això és, és a dir, o sigui, més aviat	es decir, o sea, en otras palabras
	Exemplification	for example, for instance, i.e., such as	per exemple, posem per cas	por ejemplo, a saber, como muestra
	Summary	in summary, all in all, to sum up	en resum, en síntesi, en suma	en resumen, resumiendo, recapitulando
Contrast	**Opposition**	on the other hand, in contrast, conversely	això sí, altrament, en canvi, tanmateix	ahora bien, en cambio, sin embargo
	Concession	nonetheless, in any case	així i tot, malgrat tot, no obstant, en qualsevol cas,	a pesar de (que), con todo, si bien
	Restriction	at least	almenys, si més no	por lo menos, cuando menos
	Refutation	on the contrary	(ben) al contrari, per contra	al contrario, por el contrario
	Contraposition	in fact	ben mirat, en realitat, fet i fet, de fet	en realidad, de hecho
Consecutive	**Consequence**	therefore, thus, accordingly, consequently, hence	així (doncs), per tant, com a conseqüència	(así) pues, por lo tanto, así que, en consecuencia
	Conclusion	in conclusion, to conclude	al capdavall, al cap i a la fi, en conclusió, en definitiva	en conclusión, para finalizar, en definitiva, finalmente

1.2.4. Lexical cohesion

Cohesion can also be achieved lexically, by means of:

•   Repetition

New York is a state in the northeastern United States. New York was one of the original thirteen colonies that formed the United States. (Wikipedia)

•   Reformulation (which typically requires world knowledge for its interpretation)

Monarch of suspense Stephen King is abdicating, sort of. The blockbuster author wrote his latest novel with his son. [*Time*, September 25, 2017]

Ada Colau i Gerardo Pisarello van viatjar a Madrid la setmana pasada, on l'alcaldessa de Barcelona va pronunciar una conferencia a la universitat.

El País entrevistó a Cristiano Ronaldo y Rafael Nadal el miércoles. El tenista declaró que estaba deseando pasar unos días en Palma de Mallorca.

•   Synonymy (or near synonymy)

Practising doctors and nurses must be insured, although the premiums paid by physicians are much higher.

A partir d'aquest any, les vacunes es posaran a les escoles. Els directors dels centres educatius han manifestat el seu desacord amb aquesta decisió.

Ayer hubo un terremoto devastador en Pakistán. El seísmo es el más fuerte que ha sufrido este país en los últimos 50 años.

- Hyponymy

A cat and a canary were rescued yesterday in an abandoned apartment in Brooklyn. The bird was adopted by the firefighter that found both animals.

La setmana passada, un cotxe va circular per la Diagonal a 130 km/h. El conductor del vehicle va ser detingut per la policia.

Ayer se subastó un sofá y un cuadro que habían pertenecido a Dalí. El mueble se encontró en el desván de una casa en Cadaqués.

Repetition (to avoid ambiguity) is much more frequent in English than in the Romance languages, where it tends to be avoided, by using the strategies mentioned above.

1.3. Information structure

In this section, we will deal with the sentence as a unit of information (Vallduví). The constituents of a sentence do not have the same information value: some of them contain known information, theme, and others new information, rheme. Consider the following sentences:

a) Noam Chomsky wrote *Syntactic Structures* in 1957.

b) In 1957 Noam Chomsky wrote *Syntactic Structures*.

c) *Syntactic Structures* was written by Noam Chomsky in 1957.

In the three of them, the content is the same, but they do not provide the same information: in a) something is said about the linguist Noam Chomsky, in b) about the year 1957, and in c) about the book *Syntactic Structures*. In other words, the theme and rheme are different.

All languages have ways of indicating what is to be interpreted as theme or rheme by the addressee. In English, Spanish and Catalan, this is done by means of syntax (the order of constituents in the sentence) and intonation.

As for intonation, in unmarked conditions, the **main stress** of the sentence falls on the last **content word**.

What did your brother see yesterday?

He saw a MONKEY.

A MONKEY.

Què va veure el teu germà ahir?

Va veure un MICO.

Un MICO.

¿Qué vio tu hermano ayer?

Vio un MONO.

Un MONO.

> The **main stress** of a sentence is the syllable in which the intonation contour starts.

In the three answers above, the new information (**rheme**) is the monkey. The rest of the sentence, the known information (**theme**) could perfectly be omitted, and the addressee would still receive all the information s/he needed. The monkey is also the direct object (DO) and its unmarked position in the three languages is after the verb. In cases such as these, both the **rheme** and the **main stress** are at the end of the sentence.

However, when there is a conflict between the two, in English word order prevails, whereas in Catalan and Spanish keeping the rheme at the end of the sentence is more important. Consider the following examples:

Who brought the present?

ANNA brought the present.

Qui va portar el regal?

El regal, el va portar L'ANNA.

¿Quién trajo el regalo?

El regalo, lo trajo ANNA.

In English, there is a displacement of the main stress: it is not at the end of the sentence, but on the rheme (the subject). In English, word order is highly fixed (SVO), so the constituents cannot be moved around, whereas the main stress can.

In Catalan and Spanish, on the other hand, the rheme and the main stress are at the end of the sentence, so that the subject appears in post-verbal position. Notice as well that part of the theme (the DO) appears at the beginning of the sentence, and is repeated immediately after, separated by a comma, as a clitic (*el/lo*).

The SVO word order (*L'ANNA va portar el regal* / *ANNA trajo el regalo*) would also be possible with main stress on *l'Anna/Anna*), but it would be marked, whereas in English it is the default.

In the example above the answers contain both the theme and the rheme. Other possibilities would have been the following:

> ANNA. / ANNA brought it. / ANNA did.
>
> L'ANNA. / El va portar L'ANNA.
>
> ANNA. / Lo trajo ANNA.

Thematic elements (and not rhematic ones) can be omitted or pronominalized (RAE). In English, the DO *the present* can be replaced by the pronoun *it*, and the whole verb phrase by *did*. In Catalan and Spanish, the DO can be replaced by the pronoun *el/lo*.

In Catalan and Spanish, there are some **intransitive verbs** which can have a pre-posed or post-posed subject: inaccusative verbs such as *arribar/llegar*, *caure/caer*, *entrar*, *sortir/salir*, and psychological verbs such as *agradar/gustar*, *encantar*, *preocupar*. When the subject is rhematic, it is post-posed; if the verb or another constituent of the verb phrase is rhematic, it is pre-posed. This does not happen in English.

> Què et preocupa?
>
> Em preocupa la INFLACIÓ.
>
> ¿Qué te preocupa?
>
> Me preocupa la INFLACIÓN.
>
> Estàs llegint la secció d'economia?
>
> Sí, perquè la inflació em preocupa MOLT.
>
> ¿Estás leyendo la sección de economía?
>
> Sí, porque la inflación me preocupa MUCHO.

In the three languages, there are function words that have a *weak* form (unstressed) and a *strong* form (stressed). The strong form is used when the word is rhematic or, even if it is thematic, when it is contrastive.

In English, function words with weak and strong forms include pronouns, auxiliaries, determiners and prepositions. The spelling of the two kinds of forms is identical, but the pronunciation changes: can /kƏn/ - /kæn/, would /wəd/ - /wʊd/, of /əv/ - /ɒv/ .

In Catalan and Spanish, only object pronouns have weak and strong forms, e.g. *el* - (*el*) … *a ell*, *la* - (*la*) … (*a ella*); *me* - (*me*)… (*a mí*), *os* - (*os*) … *a vosotros*. The strong forms do not occur on their own, but together with the weak ones.

In English there is no orthographic difference between the weak and strong forms. In writing, the strong form usually appears highlighted in some way, either capitalized or in italics.

Bibliographical reference

Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (2010). *Nueva gramática de la lengua española: manual*. Madrid: Espasa (p. 754).

Bibliographical reference

J. Ainaud, A. Espunya, D. Pujol (2003). *Manual de traducció anglès-català*. Vic: Eumo (p. 190).

Bibliographical reference

J. Ainaud, A. Espunya, D. Pujol (2003). *Manual de traducció anglès-català*. Vic: Eumo (p. 191).

Further reading

For a full list, see:
D. F. Finch, H. Ortiz Lira (1982). *A Course in English Phonetics for Spanish Speakers*. Heinemann Educational Books (p. 107-110).

She gave the book to ME.

Em va donar el llibre A MI. / *Em va donar el llibre.

Me dio el libro A MÍ. / *Me dio el libro.

> **Note**
>
> In Catalan and Spanish we need to use the «double pronoun», whereas in English, the distinction is in the pronunciation of the pronoun as /mi:/ (as opposed to /mɪ/).

Another element that can receive rhematic prominence in the sentence is polarity (true or false). In English, the strong form of an auxiliary can be used to emphasize that what is being said is true, or the full stressed form of *not* /nɒt/ (as opposed to the contracted form /nt/), to emphasize that it is not true. In Catalan and Spanish, we have to resort to syntax to convey the same meanings.

Why haven't you brushed your teeth?

I HAVE, daddy!

Per què no t'has rentat les dents?

sí que me les he rentades! / sí que ho he fet!

¿Por qué no te has cepillado los dientes?

¡ sí que me los he cepillado! / ¡ sí que lo he hecho!

I did NOT push her!

No la vaig **pas** empènyer!

¡**Que** no la empujé!

2. Pragmatics

According to Verschueren, Östman & Blommaert **pragmatics** is «the cognitive, social, and cultural study of language and communication». This broad definition can be more precisely characterised, and so pragmatics has variously been defined as:

- The study of **language use**.

- The study of the relationship between **form and function** and between **language and context**.

- The study of the science of language in relation to its **users**.

- The study of **meaning in use** or **meaning in context**.

- The study of how meaning is **created**.

- The study of **speaker meaning**.

- The study of **utterance interpretation**.

Among the **topics** included in pragmatics we can find: acquisition of pragmatics, address forms, construal of person, deixis, downgrading, formulaic language, interaction, intercultural pragmatics, mitigation, politeness, presupposition, speech acts, stance-taking, subjectivity, and/or upgrading.

In this section we will focus on three speech acts (**apologies**, **requests** and **complaints**), which, given their nature, will give us insight into the basic differences in **cultural styles of speaking** between English, and Catalan and Spanish.

2.1. Speech acts

The first person to talk about **speech acts** was **Austin** in *How to Do Things with Words*. He claims that we do not only say things with language, but we also **do** things with it. For instance, when we produce the utterances shown below, we are not only saying those words, each with its meaning, but we are also apologising, promising and commanding, respectively:

I apologize for being late.

Prometo venir-te a veure demà.

Le ordeno que se vaya ahora mismo.

According to Austin, each **speech act** consists of a **locution** (what is said, the actual words pronounced, the utterance) an **illocution** (the intention behind the words, what the speaker wants to accomplish with the words s/he utters), and a **perlocution** (the effect produced on the hearer by the speaker's words):

> I am sorry I offended you.
>
> **Locution**: the actual words used
>
> **Illocution**: apology
>
> **Perlocution**: the addressee's feelings after hearing the apology.

In later works about speech acts, such as Searle or Saddock, perlocutions are no longer considered. The focus on the more recent works is on the **relationship** between **locutions** and **illocutions** (also called **illocutionary acts**, **illocutionary force**, **force**).

One utterance (or **locution**) may express different illocutionary acts in different contexts. For instance, if the sentence *How old are you?* is said to a person one has just met, it means that the speaker wants to know the hearer's age. If uttered by a mother to her 17-year-old son, it means that she is upset by the son's behaviour.

On the other hand, different utterances can perform the same **illocution**, depending on the context:

> **Illocution: requesting something to turn off the lights**
>
> **a)** Turn off the lights!
>
> **b)** Can you please turn off the lights?
>
> **c)** Did you forget about the lights?

When the term **speech act** is used in the literature, it refers to the **illocutionary force** of a given utterance, and this is how it will be used in this unit. We can then talk about speech acts such as apologies, complaints, warnings, threats, invitations, requests, etc.

Speech acts can be more or less direct (Searle). Directness is related to how easily the illocutionary force can be understood from the words used by the speaker.

According to the example above, a request expressed through an imperative is a **direct speech act** (a), whereas if it is expressed by means of an interrogative (b, c), it is an **indirect speech act**.

Bibliographic references

J. R. Searle (1976). «A classification of illocutionary acts». *Language in Society* (num. 5, p. 1-23).

J. Saddock (2004). «Speech acts». In: Horn, L. R.; Ward, G. (eds.). *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (p. 53-73). Oxford: Blackwell.

An **indirect speech act** is a speech act whose form does not clearly express the illocutionary force. For example, the interrogative *Did you know that Mary is getting married?* can be used to assert that Mary is getting married, and then it would be an indirect speech act. Another one would be *I want to know who cleaned the kitchen*, which is a statement used to ask a question.

2.2. Politeness and face

Politeness is, according to the *Cambridge Oxford Dictionary*, the noun derived from *polite* «behaving in a way that is socially correct and shows understanding of and care for other people's feelings». **Linguistic politeness** is the way in which speakers are polite (or not) by the linguistic choices they make. In this unit, we will base our account of politeness on **Brown & Levinson**'s approach.

> **Bibliographic reference**
>
> **P. Brown, S. C. Levinson** (1987). *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In Brown & Levinson's model, the notion of politeness is inextricably associated to that of **face**, which was established in 1967 by Goffman, a very influential American sociologist. To put his rather abstract definition in simple words, we could say that face is the positive image that people want to give to those they interact with. This term is translated into Catalan and Spanish as 'imatge'/'imagen'.

Face can be lost, maintained or increased, and is always considered in interaction. When people are speaking to each other, they always try to make sure that nobody's face is threatened (that is, that no one loses face, but rather saves it).

> *Lose face* would be 'quedar malament' / 'quedar mal'; 'perdre prestigi' / perder prestigio', and *save face*, 'salvar les apariències' / 'salvar las apariencias'.

There are two kinds of face: **positive face** (people's desire that others also want what they want), and **negative face** (people's desire to be able to do what they want). Cultures are divided according to which face is more relevant for their speakers.

> **Bibliographic reference**
>
> **P. Brown, S. C. Levinson** (1987). *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (p. 62).

Positive-face strategies are usually more direct, and are mitigated by appealing to what speaker and hearer have in common (*Give me a cigarette, dear*). **Negative-face strategies**, on the other hand, show deference to the addressee and make sure that s/he has a way out if s/he does not want to perform the speech act (*Could you spare a cigarette?*). The two types of strategies are used both in positive- and in negative-based cultures, but in a different proportion.

The most important thing in a **negative-face based politeness system** is to avoid conflict and social disharmony. People from such cultures want to avoid limiting the addressee's freedom of action or individual rights.

British English is commonly considered to reflect such a politeness system, characterised by the acknowledgment of one's debts to others, and by a high emphasis on the other's relative power and etiquette.

British English speakers aim at preserving their and the addressee's **independence** and **privacy** (negative face). To put it very informally, Britons want to be left alone and their decisions to be respected.

In a **positive-face** based politeness system, on the other hand, speakers try to make sure that the addressee feels part of the group. They also show that they approve of the addressee's wants by displaying agreement, interest and sympathy. Catalan (Curell) and at least some varieties of Spanish–Peninsular (Díaz Pérez), Uruguayan (Márquez Reiter)–reflect a positive-based politeness system.

In the Catalan and Spanish cultures, speakers appeal for common ground and try to establish commonality with the addressee (positive face). They rely on mutual trust, openness, sharing, solidarity, explicitness and sincerity.

At first sight, it might seem that the British and the Catalan/Spanish politeness systems are quite similar. They are indeed **similar**, in the sense that the speakers from the three cultures generally produce the same speech act in the same situations (which is not the case with more remote cultures, for example Japan). They are **different**, however, in that British speakers work harder to preserve negative face (respect the other's privacy), whereas for Catalan and Spanish speakers it is more important to establish common ground between interactants (positive face). This difference is important, since Catalan and Spanish speakers tend to find Britons too polite, and *vice versa*, and this can lead to **problems in intercultural communication**.

> **Intercultural communication** is the communication between speakers from different cultures.

2.2.1. Politeness and face-threatening acts

According to Brown and Levinson, some speech acts intrinsically **threaten face**, positive or negative, the speaker's or the addressee's. **Face-threatening acts** include apologising, disagreeing, complaining, refusing an invitation,

Further reading

F. J. Díaz Pérez (2003). *La cortesía en inglés y en español: actos de habla y pragmática intercultural*. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén.

R. Márquez Reiter (2000). *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bibliographic references

H. Curell (2011). «Politeness and cultural styles of speaking». In Payrató, L.; Cots, J. M. (eds.). *The Pragmatics of Catalan*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 273-309.

F. J. Díaz Pérez (2003). *La cortesía en inglés y en español: actos de habla y pragmática intercultural*. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén.

R. Márquez Reiter (2000). *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bibliographic reference

P. Brown, S. C. Levinson (1987). *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (p. 65-68).

requesting, suggesting and warning. In this kind of acts, because they threaten face, it is not possible to save everybody's face. In different cultures, speakers have various devices to minimise face loss, if that is what they want to do.

2.2.2. Apologies

An **apology** is a speech act in which the speaker expresses sorrow or regret for something that s/he has done that has harmed or hurt the addressee.

Apologies are **face-threatening for the offender** (the speaker), since by uttering an apology s/he is accepting that s/he did something wrong. It is **face-saving for the offended** (the hearer), because it is made explicit that s/he has suffered some harm from the speaker's action(s). The aim of apologies is to compensate the hearer for an offence (real or virtual) carried out by the speaker.

An apology typically includes an **illocutionary force indicating device** (IFID), and one or more of the following strategies: taking on responsibility, explanation or account, offer of repair and promise of forbearance.

> I am really sorry (IFID), but I forgot to call the hospital (responsibility). I'll do it first thing tomorrow morning (repair).
>
> Adapted from S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, G. Kasper (eds.) (1989). *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex (p. 289-294).

> **IFIDs** are linguistic elements that indicate the illocutionary force of an utterance, that is, **formulaic linguistic expressions** used to make the apology explicit.

In English, there is one main IFID, (*I'm*) *sorry*, which is used 86% of the times. In the other two languages, a frequency of around 75% is accumulated by three different IFIDs: *ho sento* (37%), *em sap greu* (26%) and *perdona/i* (12%) in Catalan; *lo siento* (46%), *perdona/e* (16%) and *disculpa/e* (15%) in Spanish.

There is a **difference** here, in that English speakers have less choice than the Catalan and Spanish ones. In other words, in English there is a **more conventionalised system** of explicit apologies.

Now we will have a look at the various strategies that are also present in apologies, together with the IFIDs. As we will see later, all the strategies exist in the three languages. The **differences** are found in the **number of IFIDs and strategies per apology**, and in **intensifying and mitigating** elements.

- **Taking on responsibility**. The speaker accepts the responsibility of the offence that created the need for the apology. By recognising his/her fault, although it threatens his/her face, the speaker wants to appease the speaker.

I'm so sorry, **that was completely my fault**. I wasn't paying attention.

Ho sento molt senyor. **M'he equivocat de plat**. Ara mateix vaig a la cuina i li porto el seu *boeuf à la maison.*

Lo siento mucho, de verdad. **Ha sido culpa mía otra vez**. ¡Soy un desastre!

- **Explanation or account**. The speaker claims that the source of the offence is something out of his/her control. It includes all external circumstances which may mitigate the offence.

Thank you for waiting. **I was called away to an unexpected meeting**.

Perdona però **m'ha sortit una reunió inesperada**.

Lo siento mucho, **con el sol no he visto nada**. No se preocupe, tengo un buen seguro que cubrirá todos los gastos de la reparación.

- **Offer of repair**. The speaker offers to do something to compensate the hearer.

Sorry about that. **I'll just go and change it for you**.

Em sap greu però m'he oblidat de tornar-te el llibre. **Te'l porto demà**.

Lamento el retraso. **Para compensarte, pago yo la cerveza**.

- **Promise of forbearance**. The speaker declares that the offence will not happen again. This tends to occur when the feeling of responsibility is very strong.

Sorry, I hope you haven't been waiting long. I'll get myself a new alarm clock so that **this doesn't happen ever again**.

Ho sento. He tornat a arribar tard. **Et prometo que no passarà mai més**.

Perdóname otra vez, por favor. Soy un caso…, pero te juro que he intentado llegar a la hora y que **no se volverá a repetir**.

It is quite often the case that speakers use a **combination of strategies** to make their apologies stronger. In English, the mean average is 3.2 strategies per occasion, whereas in Catalan and Spanish it is around 4. The speakers of the Romance languages also tend to use more than one IFID per situation, whereas the English ones barely make it to one. Using a **higher number of strategies** is typical of **positive politeness** systems.

Apart from these strategies, there are other elements that appear in apologies with the function of either **intensifying** or **downgrading** the illocutionary force.

Intensification can be carried out in different ways:

- **IFID-internally**, by means of an intensifying expression within the IFID; the most frequent ones are adverbs (*awfully*, *molt*, *muchísimo*) and the politeness marker *please*; *sisplau*, *por favor*.

- **IFID-externally**, basically by expressing concern for the hearer.

- **By the use of multiple strategies or multiple IFIDS** (either the same or different).

> With intensification, the speaker achieves more self-humbling and more support for the hearer.

In English, IFID-internal intensification happens twice as much as in the Romance languages under study, which is typical for **negative-face** based politeness systems.

As **IFID-external intensification**, we find basically expressing concern for the hearer. These intensifying expressions can co-occur in the same apology. In this aspect, the three languages behave very similarly:

> I'm sorry I'm late again. **Have you been waiting long?**
>
> Ostres! Ha caigut la bossa! Perdoni. **S'ha fet mal?**
>
> Lo siento. Me he dejado el libro en casa. **¿Te hace mucha falta?**

The speech act of apologising can also be **minimised**. In other words, the offence or the harm that may have been done to the hearer can be downgraded in different ways, for example with an **offer of repair** or an **appeaser** (an attempt to compensate the hearer, not directly related to the speaker's offence).

There are other phrasal and lexical expressions that can also be used to modify apologies, the most important of which are cajolers and appealers:

- With **cajolers** (expressions whose aim is to establish harmony between the interlocutors, e.g. *you know*; *ja saps*; *ya sabes*), the speaker tries to persuade the hearer that the offence was not too serious.

  Sorry, Peter, **you know** what it's like, what with ... and I didn't see the time.

  Ostres, Maria. Ja he tornat a fer tard! No ho puc evitar, **soc així**...

  Me he dejado el libro en casa. ¡**Ya sabes** que soy un desastre!

- With **appealers**, the speaker tries to get the hearer to agree with him/her.

  I left your book at home. I'm really sorry. I can bring it tomorrow. **Would it be ok?**

  Perdoni senyor, em sap greu la confusió. Em sap molt de greu, ara mateix parlaré amb el cuiner i de seguida li porto el seu *boeuf à la maison*, **d'acord?**

  Lo siento mucho. No he visto su coche. No ha sido grave, **¿verdad?**

Finally, we need to mention **alerters** (expressions to catch the addressee's attention, such as vocatives and greetings) which express in-group status (positive-face politeness):

  I'm really sorry, **mate**, I didn't mean to offend you.

  Tia, ho sento però els trens anaven malament i m'he estat dues hores esperant a l'estació.

  Perdona, **Roberto**, pero me he dejado tu libro en casa. Te lo traigo mañana.

In Catalan and Spanish there is more offence minimisation, and more alerters, appealers, appeasers and cajolers (**positive politeness** strategies) than in English. English, on the other hand, shows some characteristics of **negative politeness** strategies: more admission of fault, more IFID-internal intensification and more politeness markers.

2.2.3. Requests

In a **request**, the speaker wants the hearer (not) to do something, typically something that the hearer would not do unless explicitly told to. Requests are essentially face-threatening acts for the **hearer**, since their aim is to affect the hearer's behaviour.

The speaker has the option of making the request **less imposing**, by making it less direct (Searle 1976), or by mitigating it in different ways.

According to Blum-Kulka & House, there are three general degrees of indirectness for the **head acts** expressing requests:

Bibliographic references

J. R. Searle (1976). «A classification of illocutionary acts». *Language in Society* (num. 5, p. 1-23).

- Direct

- Conventionally indirect

- Non-conventionally indirect.

> The head act of a request is that part of the utterance where the requests proper is expressed.

Blum-Kulka, Kasper, and House establish nine strategies for the head act, in a scale from most direct to least direct. These strategies, unlike the ones for apologies, are mutually exclusive. We present them in Table 2, and then we will explain them, illustrating with examples:

Table 2. Strategies for requests

Level of directness	Strategies
Direct	Mood derivable
	Explicit performative
	Hedged performative
	Locution derivable
	Want statement
Conventionally indirect	Suggestory formula
	Query preparatory
Non-conventionally indirect	Strong hint
	Mild hint

- **Mood derivable**. The illocutionary force of the utterance is determined by its grammatical mood. There are various types, listed below, and it is not possible for the hearer not to interpret them as requests.
  - **Imperatives**. In Catalan and Spanish, these very direct requests are frequent with people in a close relationship (such as parents and children, siblings, friends), with or without *sisplau*, *por favor*. In English, they are rare, and rather rude.

I'm fed up! **Clean** the bloody kitchen.

No se li acut res millor per fer? **Deixi** de molestar-me.

Oye, **limpia** la cocina, que fuiste tú el que la ensuciaste.

  - **Incomplete sentences**. These are especially frequent, in the three languages, in service encounters, with or without *please*, *sisplau*, *por favor*.

Two stamps.

Un cafè i una pasta.

Un cartón de Ducados, por favor.

- **a + infinitive**. Only in Catalan and Spanish, in informal and familiar contexts.

A dinar! El dinar és a taula.

A dormir, venga! Que es tardísimo!

- **Explicit performative**. The utterance contains a verb that unequivocally expresses the illocutionary force. These are extremely rare in the three languages.

- **Hedged performative**. The requesting verb is modified, for example by being preceded by verbs expressing intention, and/or by appearing in the conditional mood.

I'd like you to come and see me first thing tomorrow morning. There's an urgent matter that we need to discuss.

Li pregaria que em deixés tranquil·la. No m'agrada la seva companyia.

Le quería preguntar si le puedo entregar el trabajo más tarde. Me ha sido imposible terminarlo.

Although the requests in the example above are clearly direct, there is syntactic **mitigation**. The expectations that the request will be fulfilled are reduced, and, as consequence it saves both the speaker's and the hearer's **negative face**.

- **Locution derivable**. The illocutionary force of the utterance is derived by the hearer from its grammatical structure and from its semantic meaning, not from the mood or from a requesting verb present in it.

You will tell your mum as soon as you get home.

Recolliràs la cuina demà, abans de sortir amb els amics.

No te va a quedar más remedio que hablar con ella.

In English, requests such as the one in the examples below, always include a modal verb, typically *can*. Non-modal *yes*/*no* questions, frequent in Catalan and Spanish, are not possible in English.

Can you pass me the salt? / *Do you pass me the salt?

Em dones un cigarret?

¿Me guardas sitio?

- **Want statement**. The speaker explicitly expresses his/her desire that the event expressed in the utterance is carried out. The use of the conditional **mitigates** the request.

Bibliographical reference

F. J. Díaz Pérez (2003). *La cortesía en inglés y en español: actos de habla y pragmática intercultural*. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén (p. 275 & ff.).

I am having friends over for dinner, and I **need** you to clean the kitchen.

Ja sé que et tocava fer la presentación a final de mes, però **voldria** que l'avancessis un parell de setmanes. Et va molt malament?

Me **gustaría** que llamases a tu abuela hoy mismo. Está muy sola, la pobre.

- **Suggestory formula**. The request is expressed as a suggestion, using a routinized formula, which is an expression that speakers all understand as expressing a request. Being a suggestion, it is not as forceful as more direct requests.

John, **why don't you** make me a cup of tea?

Aquí no es pot fumar. **Per què no** baixes al pati?

¡Qué ganas tengo de verte! ¿**Por qué no** vienes mañana a cenar a casa?

- **Query preparatory**. The speaker asks about a condition that must exist so that the request can be fulfilled.

Have you got any cash? I need buy some bread.

Tu parles molt bé l'alemany, oi? No entenc el correu electrònic que he rebut de la universitat de Viena.

¿**Has venido en coche**? El mío está en el taller.

- **Strong hint**. It is not possible to directly derive the illocutionary force from the utterance. However, it refers to relevant elements of the situation, which are often related to preconditions of the request. They clearly give the hearer a way out, since s/he can claim not having understood the illocutionary force, and hence not fulfil the request.

Did you buy that nice dress that we saw together? [The speaker wants to borrow it.]

En Pere t'ha tornat la maleta que li vas deixar? [The speaker wants to borrow it.]

¿**A qué hora sales del trabajo**? [The speaker wants the hearer to go shopping.]

- **Mild hint**. The utterance contains no elements directly related to the intended illocution. It gives the hearer an even bigger way out, since s/he can more easily pretend not to have understood the request.

[A boy would like his uncle to give him a pen that he uncle has on his desk. While touching it, he says:] I love this pen!

The imposing force of a request can be **mitigated** using different devices. We have already commented on the **syntactic** ones.

Within the **head act**, it is possible to find **lexical** and **phrasal downgraders**, the most important of which are:

- **Politeness markers**

- **Minimisers**: *perhaps, only*; *potser, només*; *tal* vez, *solo*

- **Appealers**: *ok, d'acord, de acuerdo*

- **Consultive devices**: *would you mind*; *et faria res*; *te importaría*.

It is often the case that several mitigating devices co-occur in the same head act.

> Could I borrow **a little** sugar, **please**?
>
> **Et faria res** baixar a obrir, **sisplau**!
>
> Date prisa, ¡**por favor**!

It is also possible to find other mitigating devices before or after the head act:

- **Preparators**: the speaker asks the hearer whether s/he has the ability to perform the requested act.

- **Reasons**: why the speaker is making the request.

- **Disarmers**: reasons the speaker gives the hearer to 'disarm' him/her from refusing the request.

- **Alerters**.

As we have already seen in other cases, it is possible to combine several of these strategies.

> Excuse me (disarmer), sir (vocative). You should turn down the volume of your radio (head act), please (politeness marker); there are people trying to sleep (reason).
>
> Mira (cajoler), ja sé que els nens tenen dret a cantar (disarmer), però és que tinc una migranya horrorosa (reason). Els podries demanar que paressin una estoneta (minimiser), sisplau (politeness marker)?
>
> Oiga (alerter), señora (vocative), si no es mucha molestia (disarmer) le agradecería (syntactic mitigator) que bajara al perro de la silla.

In the three languages, the most frequently used strategy involves **conventionally indirect** head acts (Márquez Reiter, Pérez-Parent). There is a **difference**, however, in the frequency of use of **direct requests** when the two interlocutors have equal social status (e.g., friends): it is higher in the Romance languages than in English (Díaz Pérez). Being blunt about one's wants with socially equal people is a feature of **positive-face** systems.

As a matter of fact, the **use of imperatives** in English among equals is **rare**. This is very typical of **negative-face** based politeness systems, where the main objective is not to limit the hearer's negative face by making him/her do something that s/he might not want to do.

English speakers tend to use **more conventionally indirect head** acts (typical of **negative politeness**) than the speakers of the Romance languages under study.

In Catalan and Spanish there is a **higher use** of **positive-face** politeness strategies, such as downgraders, and different types of supportive moves (preparators, reasons, disarmers and alerters). In English, on the other hand, there is a higher use of **negative-face** politeness strategies, such as mitigators and politeness markers.

Bibliographical references

R. Márquez Reiter (2000). *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

M. Pérez-Parent (1999). *The Production of Requests by Catalan Learners of English.* M.A. Thesis. Bellaterra: Departament de Filologia Anglesa, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

F. J. Díaz Pérez (2003). *La cortesía en inglés y en español: actos de habla y pragmática intercultural.* Jaén: Universidad de Jaén.

2.2.4. Complaints

The function of **complaints** is to express the **speaker's discontent** about a situation that is bad for him/her, which the speaker assumes is the **hearer's fault**. They are much harder to define than apologies or requests, since there is not a specific list of IFIDs or head acts that perform them. They are face-threatening for the hearer, since the speaker is conveying that s/he disapproves of the hearer's behaviour.

The strategies used in complaints are presented here, ordered according to the degree of face threat to the speaker:

- **Below the level or reproach**. The speaker does not mention the offence directly, so that the hearer does not necessarily feel reprimanded. In fact, the hearer might not even interpret the locution as a complaint.

  Such things happen.

  No pateixis; li pot pasar a qualsevol.

  No te preocupes; no es nada grave.

- **Expression of annoyance or disapproval**. This category includes vague and indirect expressions that do not mention either the offence or the hearer. The speaker conveys a general expression of annoyance, but no open confrontation. The hearer can interpret the utterance as a complaint or else ignore its illocutionary force.

Bibliographical reference

M. Sabaté (2006). *The Interlanguage of Complaints by Catalan Learners of English.* M.A. Thesis. Departament de Filologia Anglesa, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

This is really unacceptable!

Això està molt brut!

¡Así no se puede estudiar!

- **Explicit complaint**. The speaker clearly blames the hearer. It can include explicit mention of the hearer or the offence.

  I know you have a concert next week, but you play the piano so late at night that I can't sleep.

  Quan regues les plantes, em mulles la roba estesa.

  Ayer te dejaste la puerta del ascensor abierta y tuve que subir andando hasta el ático. ¡Ya es la tercera vez esta semana!

- **Accusation and warning**. The speaker accuses the hearer of the offence and/or announces potential sanctions. This involves an open face threat.

  You said that you'd be home by 7. **I won't cook for you ever again**.

  Ja està bé! Has tornat a arribar tard. La pròxima vegada que quedem, **et faré esperar jo a tu**.

  Allá tú, pero a partir de ahora **no cuentes con mi apoyo**.

- **Immediate threat**. The speaker directly attacks the hearer, including insults.

  I'll make a formal complaint.

  Voleu fer el fotut favor de seure!

  ¡**Sois tontos o qué**! ¡Parad de gritar de una vez!

These strategies can be combined in different ways in one speech act of complaining. The **average number of strategies** per situation in Catalan is almost three, while in English it is below one, which conforms to the **politeness system** in the two languages: positive in Catalan and negative in English. Given the similarities found between Catalan and Spanish in apologies and requests, it is safe to assume that Spanish behaves as Catalan in this speech act as well.

Bibliographical reference

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> Look, dogs don't bother me (below level of reproach), but I get up very early (annoyance), and with the barking I can't sleep (complaint).
>
> Ja n'estic més que farta! (annoyance) Si no llences les escombraries cada dia, la cuina s'omple de formigues (complaint). Sembles burro (immediate threat)!
>
> ¡Hasta aquí podíamos llegar (annoyance)! ¡Qué falta de respeto (annoyance)! O se va usted del bar ahora mismo o llamo a la policía (immediate threat).

With complaints, as we saw with apologies and requests, it is possible to **downgrade** or **upgrade** the complaint.

Downgraders mitigate the circumstances around the offence, and so reduce the blame on the hearer. The following **lexical** and **phrasal items** occur **internally**:

- Politeness markers

- Minimisers

- Subjectivisers: *I guess*, *suposo*, *supongo*

- Appealers

English speakers tend to use more internal downgraders than Catalans and Spaniards, especially the politeness marker *please* and minimisers, which is typical of **negative-based politeness** systems.

> Perhaps (downtoner) the music is a bit (minimiser) loud. I would appreciate it if you turned it down, ok (appealer)?

As for **external** downgraders, the most frequent are cajolers and alerters. These are more frequent in Spanish and Catalan than in English, since they are **positive-face** elements.

> Hola (greeting), mira (cajoler), soc el veí de sota, i el pis tremola una mica (minimiser) quan els nanos salten.

> Buenas noches (greeting), Pedro (vocative). Oye (alerter), toda la casa huele a col. Podrías (syntactic mitigator) cerrar la puerta, por favor (politeness marker)?

Finally, we also find **syntactic downgraders**, including past tense, durative aspect, modal verbs, conditionals, negation, interrogatives, and so on, some of which can be seen in the examples above.

It is also possible to **intensify** the complaint, to make it even more face-threatening for the hearer, using **upgraders**. Upgrading strategies include:

- Intensifiers: *clearly*, *totally*; *clarament*, *totalment*; *claramente*, *muy importante*

- Time intensifiers: *immediately*, *always*; *ara mateix*, *urgent*; *ya*, *siempre*

- Expletives: *fuck*, *hòstia*, *hostia*

- Expressions of negative attitude towards the addressee: *I can't believe it*; *això és un fàstic*; *qué horror*.

> This kitchen is disgusting (negative attitude)! Clean it up immediately.

> T'he dit moltes (intensifier) vegades que no suporto que em mirin mentre menjo, hòstia (expletive)!

> ¡Qué guarro eres (negative attitude)! Haz el favor de llevarte tu ropa sucia ahora mismo (time intensifier).

In complaints, we find the same features that we found for apologies and requests. English shows **negative-politeness** features: fewer strategies, less direct complaints, fewer external downgrades, and more internal downgraders. In Catalan and Spanish, we find more **positive-politeness** characteristics: a higher number of strategies, more direct complaints, and more external downgraders (cajolers, vocatives and alerters).

2.3. Forms of address

This is a huge topic, with a lot of dialectal and social variation. Here we will mention a few factors that must be considered when studying this phenomenon, and we will provide some references where you will be able to find more information.

As you are undoubtedly aware of, there is a big difference between English and Catalan/Spanish in relation to terms of address. In Catalan and Spanish there is an **honorific** 2nd person pronoun (*vostè*/*usted*), with a verb in the 3rd person singular, that indicates social distance or formality.

> Tu tens tota la raó. / Vostè té tota la raó.

> Tú tienes toda la razón. / Usted tiene toda la razón.

This does not exist in English, where the only 2nd person pronoun is *you*, regardless of the relationship between speaker and addressee, with no distinction between singular and plural, except for the reflexive pronoun (*yourself/yourselves*).

The use of *vostè*/*usted* in Spanish and Catalan, combined with the various strategies that we saw in sections «Apologies», «Requests» and «Complaints», contributes to making the speech act (apology, request or complaint) more formal.

Another way of marking differences in social distance and formality is using **titles** in vocative expressions, such as *Mr* or *Sr*. In the three languages, it is possible to have the surname and the first name without a title.

> James / Bradbury, this is Dr Jones.

> Jordi / Castells, aquest és el Dr. Guasch.

> Andrés / Martínez, este es el Dr. Ferrandis.

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Further reading

For a review of forms of address in Catalan, see:
N. Nogué (2005). *Dixi de persona i marcs participatius en català*. Ph. D. diss. Barcelona: Departament de Filologia Catalana, Universitat de Barcelona (p. 367-371). Available at: <http://www.tesisenxarxa.net/TESIS_UB/AVAILABLE/TDX-0906105-110703/>.

For Spanish, see:
B. De Jonge, D. Nieuwenhuijsen (2012). «Forms of Address». In: Hualde, J. I.; Olarrea, A.; O'Rourke, E. (eds.). *The Handbook of Hispanic Linguistics*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd (ch. 13).

In Spanish and Catalan titles can be combined with first names and surnames, whereas in English they can only be combined with surnames.

> Mr Smith / *Mr John
>
> Sr. Soler / Sr. Joan
>
> Sr. García / Sr. Pepe

This title used to have three forms, one for men (*Mr*, *Sr*.), one for married women (*Mrs*, *Sra*.), and one for single women (*Miss*, Srta.). Nowadays, the vocative *Miss*/*Srta*. is avoided, because it is sexist. In English, it is replaced by *Ms*, and in Catalan and Spanish by *senyora*/*señora*.

In Catalan and Spanish, this whole picture is complicated by the various combinations of [± title] with the two 2nd person forms (*tu*/*vostè*; *tú*/*usted*). For example, it is possible to combine the first name with *tu*/*tú* and *vostè*/*usted*.

The exact social context in which each of these forms in the three languages is used is beyond the scope of this section. There is a lot of dialectal and sociolectal variation, which makes it a sociolinguistic topic, rather than pragmatic.

There are many other titles, some of which can be used on their own or followed by the name, while others are only used on their own. They include, to mention but a few:

- Terms for family relationships: *aunt, tia, tía*

- Titles of respect: *ladies* and *gentlemen, senyores* i *senyors, señoras* y *señores; your Majesty, sa Majestat, su Majestad*

- Markers of status: *minister, ministre, ministro*

- Terms of occupation: *nurse, infermera, enfermera*

The contrastive study of forms of address is extremely complex. Given the sociolinguistic variation just mentioned, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find the exact equivalence of one language (and culture) in another one.

Let's see a couple of examples:

- Given that the combination *Mr* + first name is not possible in English, what would the equivalent of *Senyor Ramon* / *Señor Ramón* be? In other words, how can we convey in English what *Sr*. + first name tells us about the relationship between the two interlocutors in Catalan/Spanish?

- In Catalan and Spanish there are more nuances than in English. For example, when people are on a first-name basis, they still have a choice between *vostè*/*usted* and *tu*/*tú*. How can the different possibilities be expressed in English?

Summary

In this unit, we have dealt with some aspects related to discourse and others related to pragmatics, establishing both similarities and differences between English and Spanish/Catalan.

As regards discourse, we have seen that there are differences in how English and Spanish/Catalan achieve cohesion in texts. In the former, there is a clear prevalence of asyndeton, over parataxis and hypotaxis, while in the latter hypotaxis is clearly more frequent than the other two. This is partly due to differences in syntax (some linkers can be omitted in English but not in the other two languages), and partly to the stylistic conventions of each language.

Still within discourse, we have seen differences in information structure, and, more specifically, in how new and old information (rheme and theme) are indicated in English vs Catalan/Spanish. In the three languages, the rheme tends to appear at the end of the sentence. However, when there is a clash between word order and thematic structure, intonation plays a stronger role in the Germanic language than in the Romance ones: the main stress of the sentence can be displaced from its unmarked position towards the end to whatever constituent is expressing the rheme. In Catalan and Spanish, on the other hand, rheme tends to keep its final position, and there can be a re-ordering of constituents, so that it is quite frequent to find post-posed subjects.

In relation to pragmatics, British English reflects a negative-based politeness system, whereas Catalan and Spanish reflect a positive-based one. This is seen in the face-threatening acts of apologising, requesting and complaining in 1) the number of strategies per situation (higher in Catalan/Spanish than in English); 2) more cajolers, alerters and appealers in the Romance languages than in English; 3) more politeness markers and internal intensification in English than in the other two.

Activities

1) Find examples of the definite article in both its anaphoric and cataphoric use in English and Catalan/Spanish. Are there any differences?

2) Take the conclusion of an academic paper on any aspect of linguistics in English and Catalan or Spanish. Note the connectors that appear in each. Then count how many words, clauses and sentences each has.

3) In relation to the marking of new and old information in the sentence, there are occasions in which in English we can use intonation, whereas in Catalan and Spanish we use word order. Find real examples of this, and explain them.

4) Learners of a second language are often told that it is better to be overpolite than underpolite. Consider the following situations and speech acts, and then think of whether this is always the case.

a) Two friends are having coffee. Accidentally, one of them spills some coffee on the other's newspaper, and she apologizes, by saying, 'I'm awfully sorry! I didn't mean it. It won't happen again, I promise. I'll make it up to you'.

b) A mother gets home after a long day at work, and finds, for the fifth time that week, her son's sneakers, backpack and bicycle right in front of the door. She says, 'Albert, maco, mira, diria que potser has deixat les teves coses una mica al mig, no?'

c) Two brothers are watching TV. One of them wants a soda, and asks the other to bring him one, by saying, 'Querido hermano, no quisiera molestarte, pero te agradecería muchísimo que fueras a la cocina y me trajeras un refresco de la nevera'.

5) Collect real examples (in your daily life, in a novel you may be reading, in a film or series you may be watching, or even those that you produce yourself) of apologies, requests and complaints in English containing different strategies. Then do the same for Catalan or Spanish. Finally, compare the English examples with the ones in the Romance language you have chosen. What similarities and differences can you see?

6) Consider this excerpt from the novel *Blood Lines*, by Angela Marsons. What would be an equivalent of this exchange in Catalan or Spanish?

«"I'm sorry I wasn't able to see you yesterday, Alexandra, but I was at an all-day meeting with the Chief Inspectorate". Alex inwardly groaned. There had been no requirement for any kind of explanation but his ego demanded it. She was unimpressed and irritated. "Mr Edwards, I do not believe that we are acquainted in any way, and I would be appreciative if you would refrain from using my first name".»

Glossary

alerter   Lexical item used to get the hearer's attention, including greetings and vocatives.

anaphora   The process by which a given element in a text gets its interpretation through something that has been mentioned earlier in the same text.

apology   Speech act used to express regret about some action carried out by the speaker that has harmed the hearer in some way.

appeaser   Lexical item used to compensate the hearer after an offence.

asyndeton   Juxtaposition of clauses or sentences without a connector.

cajoler   Expression used to establish harmony between the interlocutors.

cataphora   The process by which the referent of a noun is identified by some element that occurs after it in the text.

coherence   The process by which the meaning of a text is arrived at by the hearer/reader, using context and world knowledge.

cohesion   Set of devices used by the speaker/writer to make a text coherent.

complaint   Speech act in which the speaker manifests his/her displeasure at the addressee's actions.

content word   Word that expresses lexical meaning (noun, verb, adjective and adverb).

direct speech act   Speech act in which the illocutionary force is directly derivable from the locution.

discourse marker   Lexical item used to indicate the text structure (connection between clauses, ordering of information, etc.).

face   One's self-image.

face-threatening acts   Speech acts which affect the speaker's or hearer's face.

function word   Word that expresses grammatical meaning (auxiliaries, conjunctions, determiners, prepositions, pronouns).

genre   A formally distinguishable variety of language.

hedge   Expression that softens the force of a locution.

honorific   Grammatical or lexical expression that shows the levels of politeness or respect between interlocutors.

hyponymy   Semantic relation established between general and specific lexical items.

hypotaxis   Relation of subordination between two clauses.

IFID   Expression used to explicitly apologise (Illocutionary force indicating device).

illocution   The speaker's intention when producing an utterance. Also called 'illocutionary force' or simply 'force'.

inaccusative verb   Intransitive verb whose syntactic subject is not the agent but the patient; it is like the object of a transitive verb.

indirect speech act   Speech act in which the illocutionary force is not directly derivable from the locution.

locution   The actual words uttered by a speaker.

negative face   People's desire not to be imposed upon.

parataxis   Relation of coordination between two clauses.

perlocution   Effect caused on the hearer by the speaker's locution.

politeness marker   Expression used to indicate politeness.

positive face   People's desire that others want what they want.

reduced relative clause   Relative clause in which the relative pronoun (and sometimes other elements) are omitted.

request   Speech act in which the speaker wants the hearer to do something (or not to do it).

rheme   The part of the sentence that contains new information.

sociolectal variation   Set of specific linguistic characteristics, which are due to social class differences.

speech act   1) The act of saying something (locution) with a certain intention (illocution) to get a specific effect (perlocution); 2) Illocutionary force of a given utterance.

strategy   Expression used in a speech act to carry it out.

theme   The part of the sentence that contains known information.

title   Form of address, typically used in a vocative

utterance   Words used by a speaker at a specific place, at a specific time, and to a specific hearer.

vocative   Expression used to directly address somebody.

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