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**Mitigating Devices: An analysis of the corpus “El
Habla de Monterrey”**

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Dedications

Quiero dedicar esta tesis principalmente a mis padres sin los cuales no habría llegado tan lejos y que siempre confiaron en mí, a pesar de todo.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

When speakers communicate there are several factors that intervene such as level of education, social status, age, sex, closeness, etc. When trying to convey a message, these roles need to be considered in order to maintain a good communication and a good relationship, this relationship could change within the interaction depending on how it is conducted, this is why is very important to be *polite* when speaking.

Politeness is defined by Yule (1996) as “the means employed to show awareness of another person's face” (p. 60). According to Goffman (1967) face is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 5). Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that there are two types of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (p. 62), and negative face is understood as “the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others” (p. 62). There are certain speech acts that could threaten other people faces, these acts are called face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987), based on this theory, Mills (2003) defines politeness as “the expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face-threatening acts toward another”(p. 6). In order to save other people faces when they’re threatened we employ some politeness strategies. There are two types of strategies, positive and negative and each of them correspond to the face that is being threatened. The speaker may decide which of the strategies is the most appropriate.

Bravo (2003) gives an alternative classification to Brown and Levinson’s “positive and negative face” she mentions the concepts of “autonomy” (how the speaker sees himself

as an individual within a group and how he wants the others to see him in the same way) and “affiliation” (how the speaker wants to see himself as a part of the group by sharing characteristics with the members of it). She also sees the concept of politeness in a different way, she states that politeness is a strategy used to make feel well the other (*quedar bien con el otro*) and depending on the social conventions of the context in which the interaction is taking place (2003).

Based on the communicative politeness model presented by Bravo (2003), Bernal (2005) proposes that there are three types of acts of politeness: Polite acts, Anti-Polite acts, and Impolite acts. The latter represent a direct attack to the listener’s face. The Anti-Polite acts are neither polite acts nor impolite acts. Finally, the Polite acts, their main objective is to preserve the hearer’s face, these acts are divided into three groups: flattering, collaborative, and mitigating acts. Flattering acts are those in which the speaker tries to praise the other’s face. In the collaborative acts, the speaker and the listener cooperate by using diverse strategies to show interest and agreement. The main purpose of the mitigating acts is to maintain a good interaction by avoiding disagreements. They lessen the threat to the hearer’s face and appeal to an agreement in order to save both interlocutors faces.

As for the assertive acts, the mitigating devices help to avoid disagreement, look for agreement, repair what is said, avoid imposition and commitment. The most common strategies used on these acts are: justifications, the inclusion of the listener, the use of impersonal expressions, the use of concessions, and expression with doubt or uncertainty (Flores Salgado & Ramirez Cabrera, 2014; Briz, 2005; Albelda, 1999). This research focuses on the analysis of the mitigating devices used when performing assertive acts.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The research is part of the inter-institutional project: “El Habla de Monterrey-PRESEEA” (Rodríguez, Flores, y Pérez, 2009) whose main objective is to identify, classify and interpret the mitigating strategies used by men and women with the same social status and level of education, but different age range (20-24, 35-54, ≥ 55) from Monterrey, Mexico when performing assertive acts. In order to do this, we need to recognize, within the interviews, the assertive acts. Then, based on the categories proposed by Albelda and Cestero (2011) and Briz (2010) we will classify the strategies. Finally, we will analyze the results and compare and contrast the groups, pointing out the differences between them. By doing this research we intend to determine which strategies are used by people who belong to different groups within the same geographic area (Monterrey), when they use them, how much and what are the differences between them.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the mitigating strategies used by Spanish speakers in Monterrey?
2. What are the differences in the use of mitigating strategies between Spanish speakers from 20-34 years old, 35-54, and ≥ 55 ?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The use of mitigating strategies varies between the speakers of a language and this variation is tied to different factors, such as level education and sex, but within a language we usually find similar strategies and they appear in similar situations. Thus we consider that if the students of a second language know these strategies and their structures, it could be easier for them to learn the L2 because they could transfer those structures into the L2 or use them to contrast the features from the language they are learning. Kasper (1992) stated

that adult speakers that have achieved a good level of sociolinguistic competence in their L1 show sensitivity towards the features of the L2 using the patterns found on their native language.

Not only students of languages use mitigating strategies but people in general use them every day, it is so common that they are not aware of their use, being aware of the structures used in the L1 and the way they are used could contribute to the acquisition of a new language. The results of this investigations could also be used as a resource for further research and implemented on languages classes in order to narrow the distance between one language and another.

1.5 Key Terms

Assertive Acts: These acts show what the speaker thinks is true or false. They represent an opinion or a description of facts. “The speaker makes words fit the world (of belief)” (Yule, 1996, p. 53).

Face: “The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman 1967, p. 5).

Face-Threatening Acts: “Utterance or action which threatens a person’s public self-image” (Brown and Levinson 1987, cited in Yule 1996, p. 61)

Politeness: “The means employed to show awareness of another person's face” (Yule 1996, p. 60). “The expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face-threatening acts toward another” (Mills 2003, p. 6). A strategy used to make feel well the other (*quedar bien con el otro*) and depending on the social conventions of the context in which the interaction is taking place (Bravo 2003).

Negative Politeness: “The want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 62).

Positive Politeness: “The want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 62).

Affiliation: How the speaker wants to see himself as a part of the group by sharing characteristics with the members of it (Bravo 2003).

Autonomy: How the speaker sees himself as an individual within a group and how he wants the others to see him in the same way (Bravo 2003).

Mitigation: Is the strategy used “to ease the anticipated unwelcome effect” (Fraser 1980, p. 344). “Rhetorical devices, which soften the impact of some unpleasant aspect of an utterance on the speaker or the hearer” (Danet 1980, p. 525).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter some important concepts related to the thesis will be presented and analyzed. Terms such as face and politeness will be treated, Brown and Levinson, Bravo, and Bernal's theories will be described and analyzed. Other concepts also included in this chapter are: speech acts, mitigating acts, and mitigation.

Linguistic interactions always involve a social interaction between the speakers. What people say and how they say it is determined by the social relationships the interlocutors sustain. In order to maintain a good relationship, the speakers need to consider several factors; these factors have an influence on what we say and on what we "do not say". A great deal of what we communicate is not said during the interaction. Both things, the said and the unsaid could make an impact on the relationships. Speakers are *polite* when they are aware of the social conventions and the importance of consider the factors that have an influence on their relationships.

2.1 Face

One of the most important concepts in the theory of politeness is "face", Erving Goffman created the concept in 1967, he said face was "The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). This means that the face is determined by the speaker and the hearer(s), the speaker says something and the hearer(s) interpret it, then based on this interpretation the face could be modified or be maintained. Goffman (1967) saw the whole interaction as a ritual in which the face of the speakers needs to be maintained by performing "acts through whose symbolic component the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it" (p. 19). Goffman saw the concept of face as part of a whole ritual of

interaction, in which the speakers need to maintain a balance between the social values and the interaction itself. He also pointed out that the society is more important than the individual value and faces could be sacrificed for the sake of the group. According to Goffman, a “face-work” takes part during an interaction in which the speaker tries to save his own face and at the same time save others’ face. We can see that for Goffman, the concept of face “face” was merely social and not individual. His theory is still object of study and one of the most important concepts in the theory of politeness.

2.2 Politeness

In this section of the literature review, different approaches and theories related to the concept of politeness will be reviewed. Politeness could be defined on many different ways, a polite person should have various characteristics, depending on the context in which this person is the characteristics could vary. Within a normal context and interaction, people is capable of understand what politeness is, they can notice when someone is being polite or not. This concept is based on sociocultural norms that every speaker must follow in order to carry on a good interaction. Generally, speakers are aware of the norms that exist in their language and context and try to respect them, but this does not mean that the interaction will be a success because within an interaction there is another kind of politeness. Politeness within linguistic interactions is something different and this is the concept we used on the investigation. Yule (1996) defined politeness as “The means employed to show awareness of another person's face” (p. 60). Coulmas (2005) refers to politeness as a social behavior with some characteristics such as courtesy, respect, distance, formality and rapport, in this definition we can see that the main concern is not

communication but the social image. In 2003 Mills defined politeness as “the expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face-threatening acts toward another” (p. 6), which is similar to the concept of face saving act of Brown and Levinson. On the other hand Spolsky (1998) mentions the importance of the listener and the recognition of his/her rights during the interaction. As we seen before, Brown and Levinson introduced the idea of a positive and a negative politeness, depending on the type of face being “saved”. A few years later Bravo (2003) stated that politeness is a strategy which is tied to the social norms of the place in which the interaction is taking place and is used to please the other person (*quedar bien con el otro*). Some of these theories mention the listener and the importance of the interaction between the speakers and their attitudes towards each other during the interaction, some others focus just on the speaker and his characteristics. Given the fact that we intend to analyze interactions, we will base our study on Bravo’s theory of politeness which includes the listener.

2.3 Origins of Politeness Theories

One of the first studies of politeness from a pragmatic perspective was that of Lakoff (1973), even though his theory is now seen as an old approach, it was the first insight into the concept of politeness as we know it nowadays. He mentioned the three norms to follow in order to have a good linguistic interaction: ‘make the other person feel good, be friendly’; ‘don’t impose’; and ‘give options’. In 1983 Leech gave his own theory which was based on the Cooperative principle proposed by Grice (1975), he introduced something called the Politeness Principle which was composed by six conversational maxims similar to the ones proposed by Grimes. The Politeness Principle maxims are the

Tact maxim, the Generosity maxim, the Approbation maxim, the Modesty maxim, the Agreement maxim, and the Sympathy maxim. As Leech's politeness Principle could be transferred to any context it has been used in studies of cross-cultural pragmatics, which makes it different from other theories proposed before. Yet, many scholars (Brown and Levinson, Fraser, Thomas) have pointed out that his theory is not that accurate, they mention that it is impossible to adapt or create new maxims for the new features of politeness found in the linguistic interactions. According to some researchers, the Politeness Principle maxims were general and not as concrete as the Gricean maxims, that is one of the reason why the theory was not successful. As we can see, these two theories (Leech's and Lakoff's) were mostly general and didn't take into account some important variables from other contexts.

2.4 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has been largely acclaimed and studied, it has influenced a lot of works on the area. Based on Goffman's theory, Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) defined face as the public image that every speaker claims for its own and that changes during the interaction. According to Brown & Levinson (1987), there are some acts presented during the interaction that could threat the speakers' faces, they named these acts: "Face Threatening Acts". In order to avoid or at least lessen these threats and maintain a good interaction, speakers perform what is called **face saving act**, Yule (1996) defined it as an "utterance or action which avoids a potential threat to a person's public self-image" (p. 61). Face saving acts are not only used to save others' face wants, they are also used to save the face wants of the speaker who performs it. Sometimes we avoid telling something

that we know will affect our face wants, and the relationship with the other speaker, a face threatening act could affect the hearer face and simultaneously our own face. The decision to perform or not a face saving act could change a relationship, or even the social status of the speakers, it is very important to take this into account when we are involved within a social interaction.

In 1987 Brown & Levinson claimed that face could be divided into two categories: positive and negative face. Positive face is defined as the need to be accepted by the others and form part of their group; negative face is defined as the need to be treated as an individual and to be free, without the impediment of others. When we perform a face saving act we need to consider the positive and negative face of the hearers. A face saving act that tries to save the negative face of the hearer will show the independence of the hearer, it will also avoid imposition and emphasize the fact that an individual has freedom of choice. This is called **negative politeness**. On the other hand, when a face saving act is oriented to the positive face of hearer, the speaker will try to make the hearer feel as part of the group by showing him that they have a common goal and that both could work together in order to achieve it. This is called **positive politeness**. This shows us that Brown and Levinson saw positive and negative politeness as mutually exclusive, happening one at a time during the interaction between speakers. Consequently, if only one type of politeness happens at a time this means that only one type of face work, positive or negative, could be threatened. They also suggested that Face Threatening Acts could be analysed out of context, which according to other researchers is very difficult and the results would not be accurate.

2.4.1 Criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to create a theory of politeness that can be adapted to every culture and context and is precisely this that has brought a lot of controversy to the theories. One of the most important and also controversial theories is the one proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), it has been criticized because it is focused on occidental cultures and pretends to be universal, it doesn't consider several factors that could vary on different contexts and cultures, it is also criticized because they took the concept of face proposed by Erving Goffman and completely changed. One of the scholars that criticized their work is Gu, who wrote a paper named "Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese" in his study he mentions the deficiencies of the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson and how it cannot be adapted to the Chinese context. Gu argues that there are some important factors for which Brown and Levinson's theory is not suitable for the Chinese, such as the "negative face". He mentions that "offering, inviting, and promising in Chinese", would not be considered as a threat to negative face of the hearer as in other cultures would. Gu also mentions that politeness is rather normative than instrumental and not to recognize the importance of politeness during an interactions could bring negative consequences to a social relationship. Gu argues that Brown and Levinson's concept of politeness is misled because "being polite is not to be face-caring" which according to Gu implies that every FTA would be a threat and thus an impolite act. These two theories diverge a lot mainly because Gu's study is based on an oriental culture and its customs and Brown and Levinson tried to give a universal theory that could be adapted to any context and apparently they failed. A universal politeness theory would have to take into account every sociocultural context, every custom, every group, and different points of

view in order to fit each one of those features in an accurate and suitable way which would not only take a great amount of time but also could not adapt to every subject of a community. This does not mean a research focused on a universal theory would be pointless, obviously it would have a great impact on the future research.

Brown and Levinson claimed that there is an “extraordinary parallelism in the linguistic minutiae of the utterances with which persons choose to express themselves in quite unrelated languages” (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This means that they wanted to give a universal theory of politeness which has been criticized by many other researchers who claimed that politeness is not universal and rather depends on the socio-cultural context (see Baxter, 1984; Bravo, 1996, 1998, 1999; Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989 and Matsumoto, 1988). Brown and Levinson didn't take into account that interactions, relationships and social values vary across cultures. For some researchers the theory is based only on occidental cultures and the theory suffers from “cultural bias”. Brown and Levinson failed to see some important differences between cultures, while in some cultures silence is seen as an insult in some others is used to show respect for the others, the same happens with deference, social distance, proxemics, etc. Brown and Levinson had the idea that during an interaction, the speakers are concerned with protecting their own and hearer's face, as if the interaction would be a series of attacks and awkward moments, leaving out the possibility of improving, or maintaining face wants. In the last years, researches have directed their studies into these controversial topics, the results can be compared with the theory presented by Brown and Levinson. These recent studies are really important because Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness didn't consider these cultures and now that are analyzed, a more accurate theory for these contexts could be made.

2.5 Bravo's theory

On a different perspective (from that of Brown and Levinson), Bravo (2003) sees the concept of “face” as a non-universal concept which depends on the socio-cultural norms of the context, its meaning changes because it is an empty concept that needs to be filled with the appropriate cultural terms. From this theory is where the concepts of *affiliation* and *autonomy* emerged, this is an alternative classification to Brown and Levinson's “positive and negative face”. The concept of autonomy proposed by Bravo is defined as how the speaker sees himself as an individual within a group and how he wants the others to see him in the same way (negative face). Affiliation is defined as how the speaker wants to see himself as a part of the group by sharing characteristics with the members of it. The difference between the theories is that Bravo sees these concepts as empty and not as universals, she mentions that these concepts need to be adapted to socio-cultural framework of each context.

2.6 Bernal's model

In 2005, and based on the theory of politeness proposed by Bravo (2003), Bernal gave a classification of what she called acts of politeness: Anti-Polite acts, Impolite acts, and Polite acts. Anti-Polite acts are those in which exists a *false impoliteness* that it's not interpreted as impolite nor polite, but affects the relationship in a positive way. Impolite acts represent a direct attack to the listener's face and provoke a negative effect in the communicative situation. On the other hand, Polite acts are defined as those acts in which the speaker tries to preserve the hearer's face. These acts are divided into three classes:

collaborative, flattering, and mitigating acts. In the collaborative acts the speakers cooperate in order to come to an agreement. When performing a flattering act the speaker tries to praise the hearer's face. Mitigating acts are used when speakers try to maintain a good interaction, avoid disagreements, and lessen the impact of a message. Mitigating acts appeal to save both speakers faces during the interaction.

2.7 Speech Acts

In order to illustrate better the mitigation in the assertive acts, it is very important to define first what speech acts are. Searle (1969) claimed that "speaking a language is performing acts according to rules". The concept of speech act was first mentioned by Austin (1962) in his book *How to do things with words*. These speech acts were divided into three categories: *locutionary acts*, *illocutionary acts*, and *perlocutionary acts*. Illocutionary acts are those in which an action is performed by conveying a message with words. Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989) argued that "the minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving directions, apologizing, thanking, and so on". Yule (1996) defines speech act as "the action performed by a speaker with an utterance". Gazdar (1979) and Levinson (1983) saw speech acts as transformations from one context to another, this definition differs from the others and the utterance is not mentioned. Finally, Searle (1969) claims that a "speech act is the basic or minimal unit of linguistic communication". We can conclude then that a speech act is used to convey something more than words, is used to perform an action through an utterance.

Austin gave a classification of the speech acts in 1962; this classification consisted of five categories: verdictives, expositive, exercitives, behabitives, and commissives. Verdictives “give a finding as to something which is for different reasons hard to be certain about.” Expositives “how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words”. Exercitives are “the exercising of powers, rights, or influence”. Behabitives “have to do with attitudes and social behavior”. Finally, commissives are the acts which commit the speaker to do something. A few years later Searle (1975) continued with the studies of his former tutor and gave his own classification: directives, commissives, expressives, declarations, and assertives. An assertive act consists of assertions, Searle (1969) argued that “an assertion is an illocutionary act, but a proposition is not an act at all, although the act of expressing a proposition is part of performing certain illocutionary acts.” The assertive acts express what the speaker believes to be the case or not (Yule, 1996), these acts are those in which the speaker expresses an opinion. To give an opinion about something can create a conflict between the speakers, this is why these acts tend to be mitigated.

2.8 Mitigation

So far, we have defined the notions of face, politeness, speech acts, and assertive acts, now is necessary to define the concept of mitigation/attenuation. In 1980 Fraser introduced the term of mitigation and defined it as the strategy used “to ease the anticipated unwelcome effect”. On the other hand Danet (1980) defined it as the rhetorical devices used during the interaction in order to lessen the impact of an utterance. According to Fraser (1980) mitigation can be “self-serving” when is used to attenuate a possible threat to

the speaker or “altruistic” when is used to avoid possible negative effects for the hearer. In a further investigation Felix-Brasdefer (2004) claimed that mitigation is a strategy used by the speaker to soften the impact in the message during an interaction in order to avoid conflicts.

According to Brown and Levinson (1986) mitigation is the same thing as politeness. However Fraser (1980) pointed out that there are utterances that can be polite but that not necessarily mitigate. Briz, A. and Estelles, M. (2010) defined attenuation as “a particular argumentative strategy aiming to get other people’s agreement or acceptance”. As we can see, Fraser, Briz and Estelles disagree with Brown and Levinson and they see mitigation as a strategy that is used for more reasons besides of being polite to the interlocutor, it can be used to seek agreements, obtain things from the listener, gain respect, etc. So, politeness and mitigation are related but being polite is not the ultimate goal of mitigation.

Mitigation is used constantly when performing an assertive act because these acts involve opinions that can threat either the speaker or the listener face. In order to avoid conflicts or lessen the possible threat, speakers employ the mitigating strategies found in their language. Some of the strategies used in assertions are: justifications, impersonal expressions, use of hedges, false ignorance, prosodic features (laughs), etc. The main functions of these strategies are: seek agreements, avoid commitment, protect the speaker and/or the hearer face, lessen possible threats, praise the listener, avoid the imposition of an opinion, correct something said, etc. Assertions are very common in a language, people gives opinions all the time and this represents a higher possibility of using mitigation strategies.

2.9 Sociopragmatic Transfer

Leech (1983, p. 10) described the concept of sociopragmatics as 'the sociological interface of pragmatics'. Thomas argued that sociopragmatics, refers to “the social conditions placed on language in use” (1983, p. 99). Then, sociopragmatics is tied to the sociological context in which the speakers interact this means that the norms that govern the linguistic interactions vary from one community to another.

Learning a second language is a tough task, there are too much things to learn such as grammar rules and vocabulary and once you have learnt to use accurately all the grammatical features needed to communicate and you finally know lots of words to use when speaking you can have a normal conversation in the L2, people will understand you but using the language is more complicated because just then you realize that in a context where the L2 is the native language the expressions are used different and some things have different meanings depending on the place, the moment, and the people with whom they are used. Some people agree that this is the most difficult part of learning a second language, nonnative speakers struggle with these social norms that govern the language and it is mostly because when they learn a language they are not taught to use the language under this social norms, in general learning a L2 in a context where it is not commonly used makes the task more difficult. Some authors have assured that learners of an L2 can achieve a good level in the language by transferring the sociopragmatic structures found in their mother tongue into the language they are learning. According to Kasper (1992) adult learners who have developed a good sociolinguistic knowledge in their L1 show more sensitivity towards the context-external, and context-internal factors of the communication process which help them to understand in a better way the standards of requests, apologies,

and assertions. Kasper (1997, p. 3) stated that “without some form of instruction, many aspects of pragmatic competence do not develop sufficiently” However, it is still arguable whether sociopragmatic competence can be taught or not.

2.10 Discourse

Michel Foucault (1969) defined the term discourse as a series of signs that represent something in the world when they are used, these signs can be related to things or subjects. Based on Foucault’s definition, Iara Lessa (2006) gave her own definition: “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.” (p. 285). Although the most common definition for discourse is: the use of language in a written or oral form within different contexts. This definition is widely used in semantics, corpus linguistics, and also in discourse analysis; this is why our investigation is based on it.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology used in the project will be described: the subjects, instrument, and procedures used when analyzing the data. In order to analyze the proposals from the article, a set of segments taken from an oral corpus (El habla de Monterrey – PRESEEA, Rodríguez, Flores, & Pérez, 2012), which consists of 50 hours of spontaneous colloquial conversations spoken in the Spanish variation from Monterrey, Mexico have been chosen.

3.1 Subjects

All of the participants lived in Monterrey, Mexico by the time they were interviewed and had Spanish as their mother tongue. To work with this project, we focused only on the informants with a high level of education. We used 36 interviews total. 12 (6 men, 6 women) with people from 20-34 years old, 12 (6 men, 6 women) from 35-54, and 12 (6 men, 6 women) from 55 and more.

3.2 Instruments

The interviews used in this study represent different social aspects of the community and take into account three social variables: sex, age and educational level. As for the age, the interviewees were divided into three different groups according to their generation 20-34 years old, 35-54, and more than 55. As for the educational level, the corpus had three groups: basic (primaria and secundaria), medium (preparatoria), and high (universidad y estudios de posgrado), we used the high level only.

3.3 Procedures

The codification used in this project was based on that proposed by Albelda & Cestero (2011) and Briz (2010) and modified by Flores Salgado and Ramírez Cabrera (2014).

The following taxonomy will be used:

- 1) Lessen the quality of what is said
- 2) Expressing doubt or uncertainty
- 3) The use of impersonal expressions
 - 3.a Impersonal pronouns
 - 3.b External source
 - 3.c The verb say
 - 3.d Discourse markers
 - 3.e Evidence
- 4) Constraint what is said
 - 4.a First singular person
 - 4.b Conditional
- 5) Justify
 - 5.a Explanation and justification
 - 5.b Comparison

5.c Logic consequence

6) Correct or repair

6.a Lexical phrases

6.b Expressions of apology

7) Make concessions

7.a Concession

7.b Litotes

8) Inclusion of the listener

8.a The speaker involves the listener

8.b Phatic formulae

In the interest of taking into account every aspect some of the strategies are divided into sub-strategies.

In order to carry out this project, we will analyze the transcriptions of the interviews and listen to the audio at the same time. We will only consider for the analysis 20 minutes of each interview, going from the 20th to the 40th minute of each one.

Two analyses will be made, first a qualitative and then a quantitative. First, a qualitative analysis of the attenuated fragment. In this analysis we need to recognize the mitigated segment, the mitigating segment, and the segment that triggers the mitigation. Then, a quantitative analysis when classifying each mitigating strategy into its category. The frequencies will be written down into a data base on excel.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

As stated in the introduction chapter, the aim of this investigation was to identify, classify and interpret the mitigating strategies used by men and women with the same social status and level of education, but different ages from Monterrey, Mexico when performing assertive acts. In order to carry out this study, we analyzed 36 interviews which were divided into three groups regarding to the age of the participants (20-34, 35-54, and 55 and more). We detected every assertive act within each interview and looked for a mitigating strategy on each one of these, if one of the strategies was found, the assertive act was written down into a database. After all of the assertive acts from an interview were added to the database, the qualitative analysis was made and then the classification of the strategy found, finally we counted the frequencies of every strategy and put the results into a table in order to compare them. All of this process needed to be done with every interview and with the two groups, men and women.

The results will be presented on different ways: with tables presenting all of the frequencies and percentages of each strategy, with extracts from the interviews to illustrate every strategy and its results, and with figures if it's necessary. All of the strategies will be described in more detail and then the results for each one will be presented. Every table, example, and figure will be explained detail by detail in order to make the results clear.

4.1 Presentation of Results

Table 1. Total Results

Linguistic	Frequencies	Percentages	Frequencies	Percentages	Frequencies	Percentages
------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

Mechanisms	20-34	20-34	35-54	35-54	≥ 55	≥ 55
1.Lessen the quality	37	3.79	38	8.87	8	2.07
2.Expressing doubt or uncertainty	65	6.65	47	10.98	34	8.80
3.The use of impersonal expressions						
3.a	130	13.31	58	13.55	37	9.58
3.b	39	3.99	8	1.86	19	4.92
3.c	8	0.81	23	5.37	1	0.25
3.d	13	1.33	1	0.23	3	0.77
3.e	10	1.02	2	0.46	10	2.59
4.Constraint what is said						
4.a	53	5.43	45	10.51	40	10.36
4.b	7	0.71	3	0.70	5	1.29
5.Justify						
5.a	138	14.13	51	11.91	61	15.80
5.b	11	1.12	7	1.63	10	2.59
5.c	82	8.40	39	9.11	32	8.29
6.Correct or repair						
6.a	69	7.06	10	2.33	14	3.62
6.b	0	0	0	0	0	0
7.Make concessions						
7.a	144	14.75	37	8.64	15	3.88
7.b	16	1.63	1	0.23	17	4.40
8. Inclusion of the listener						
8.a	59	6.04	15	3.50	33	8.54
8.b	95	9.73	43	10.04	47	12.17
Total	971	100	428	100	384	100

4.1.1 Lessen the quality of what is said (semantic).

With this strategy the user hides the assertive act by using semantic mechanisms, thus mitigating the logical content of the assertive act (Flores & Ramirez, 2014). This can be seen in the following example (1):

(1) I: él dejó trunca *la carrera comercial / de contador / algo así / parecido algo así*
(H13_HMP030)¹

In this case, the expressions “algo así (something like that)” “parecido algo así (similar, something like that)” are used by the speaker to demonstrate that he is not sure that his assertion was real (*la carrera comercial / de contador*) and in this way save his face by avoiding assuring something that he is not sure is real or completely accurate. By using this strategy, the speaker reduces the impact of the assertion.

Table 2. Lessen the Quality.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
1.Lessen the quality	37	3.79	38	8.87	8	2.07

As we can see in Table 2 the groups with ages that went from 35 to 54 was the one that most used this strategy with 38 frequencies which represent the 8.87% of the total strategies used by that group. The second highest is the group with ages that went from 20 to 34 with 37 frequencies, almost the same as the first group but with a big difference in the

¹ The first letter of the code (H) corresponds to the gender of the interviewee. The following number (1) corresponds to the age range which can be 1 (24-35 years old), 2 (35 a 54) and 3 (≥ 55). The number that follows (3) represents the level of studies of the interviewee, “1” corresponds to básico, “2” to medio-superior and “3” to licenciatura y estudios de posgrado. The next three letters of the code (HMP) refer to the context where the interview took place, it can be Marco Socializador (MS) or Marco Profesional (MP). The last 3 digits correspond to the number of the interview, the first interview has the number 001.

percentage with only 3.79% of the total of that group. The last group (≥ 55) had only 8 frequencies which represent 2.07% of the total. These results let us see that the most elderly and the youngest groups don't use this strategy very often and, prefer to use others instead.

4.1.2 Reduce the assertion by expressing doubt or uncertainty.

This strategy employs devices that reduce the impact of the assertion through expressing doubt or uncertainty. The expressions employed on this strategy are used to make seem that what is said is not completely accurate, that the speaker is not certain about what he is saying. Some of the expressions used were: *supongo que* (I guess that), *creo que* (I think that), *parece* (it seems), *imagino que* (I imagine that), *probablemente* (probably), *tal vez* (maybe), *no sé si* (I don't know if), etc. The following examples illustrate this more clearly (2), (3):

(2)I: una vez que fuimos a las grutas de García / eh **yo creo que**/ *el contraste del ambiente de adentro de las grutas de García / a afuera / el calor y el frío / me provocó un / una reacción* (H13_HMP025)

(3)I: **no sé si sea la edad** / pero ¿verdad que ora lo sientes diferente?
(M23_HMP070)

In the first example (2) we have “yo creo que (I think that)” which precedes an assertion that the speaker is performing and that he is not sure if it is true or at least, completely real, and in this way he is saving his own face. In the second example (3) the device “no sé si (I don't know if)” is used to express uncertainty about the opinion the speaker is about to give

because even though that is what he thinks is the reality might not be seen in the same way by the listener.

Table 3. Expressing Doubt or Uncertainty.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
2.Expressing doubt or uncertainty	65	6.65	47	10.98	34	8.80

The results of this strategy can be seen in Table 3. As we can see, the group that used this strategy the most was the 20 to 34 years old with 65 frequencies but with only 6.65%, which contrasts with the results of the group that went from 35 to 54 which had only 47 frequencies but represent the 10.98% of the total frequencies from that particular group. The group of 55 and more had the smallest number on frequencies with 34 but were the second one with the highest percentages with 8.80%. These results shows us that the group of 35-54 is the one that uses this strategy more often in comparison with the strategies. And that frequencies can be confusing when the percentages are not considered.

4.1.3 The use of impersonal expressions to reduce the impact of what is said: the use of personal, spatial, and temporal deitics.

By performing this strategy, the speaker tries to hide the fact that he is responsible for an opinion by attaching it to another person or persons, could be the listener, someone with a higher hierarchy, or a whole group of people. According to Flores Salgado and

Ramirez Cabrera (2014) there are five different manners of mitigation that lessen the impact of what is said:

(a) **Impersonal pronouns.** Use of impersonal pronouns, with the objective of not referring to a specific person or group. Some of the devices used were *uno* (impersonal pronoun one), *tú* (impersonal pronoun you), *they* (impersonal pronoun they), *se* (), *nosotros* *inclusivo* (inclusive we). This can be seen in the following example (4):

(4) I: *sí / pero con mucho problemas / que **tú crees** / que porque tienen cierto nivel socioeconómico* (M33_HMP105)

(b) **External source.** Use another person or group as the source of the opinion in order to hide the responsibility of the speaker. See the example (5):

(5) I: *pero entre semana nada porque / no / **mucha gente dice** / ay qué bonito que eres bibliotecaria / **han de creer que** era como los antiguos tiempos que / te daba tiempo de leer / muchas horas* (M33_HMP105)

(c) **The verb say.** The use of the impersonal form of the verb *decir* (say) in the second person of the singular: *dices* (you say), and *digamos* (let's say). For instance (6):

(6) I: *católico **podríamos decir*** (H23_HMP063)

(d) **Discursive markers.** The interlocutor uses ambiguous statements to avoid commitment and responsibility for what he is saying in order to reduce the impact of what is said. Some of the expressions found were: *me han dicho* (I've been told), *alguien me dijo* (someone

told me), por lo que dicen (it is said), aparentemente (apparently). The following example illustrates it better (7):

(7) I: no sé / yo creo / creo que / **alguien me / me dijo que** como seis horas / mjm
(M33_HMP105)

(e) **Evidence.** The use of expressions the speaker uses to show that what he is saying something that he really believes in or to show that he is saying the truth and in this way soften the assertion by pointing out that it is only truth and the speaker is just carrying the message. Some of the expressions found on the corpus were: la verdad (the truth is), para ser honesto (to be honest), francamente (frankly), a decir verdad (to tell you the truth), etc. See the following example (8):

(8) I: pues / a mí no hasta orita no / **la verdad** no se me hizo mucho
(M13_HMP032)

Table 4. The Use of Impersonal Expressions.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
3.The use of impersonal expressions						
3.a	130	13.31	58	13.55	37	9.58
3.b	39	3.99	8	1.86	19	4.92
3.c	8	0.81	23	5.37	1	0.25
3.d	13	1.33	1	0.23	3	0.77
3.e	10	1.02	2	0.46	10	2.59
Total	200	20.46	92	21.47	70	18.11

In Table 4 we can see that the group with the highest frequencies was the 20 to 34 years old group with 200, followed by the group of 35-54 with 92 and, at the end the group of 55 and more with only 70 frequencies. The percentages tell us that the group that uses more these strategies compared to the others is the 35-54 one with 21.47%, then with 20.46% we have the 20-34, and finally the ≥ 55 group with 18.11%. The most used type was (a) with one of the groups (20-34) reaching more than 100 frequencies (130), while (b), (c), (d), and (e) had 5% or less each.

4.1.4 Constraint what is said to save face.

By using this strategy the speaker delimits his opinion and let the listener know that the opinion is just his, a personal point of view. This sends a message to the hearer that the speaker is not trying to express the absolute truth, but only his opinion. There are two different types of this strategy.

(a) **First singular person.** Forms used referring to the own speaker: yo digo (I say), en mi opinion (in my opinion), yo creo (I think), etc. Expressions referring to a space, place, or context: donde yo vivía (where I used to live), por lo menos aquí (at least here), por ahora (for the time being), etc. See the following examples (9), (10):

(9) I: pos **yo creo que** ya está igual de feo en todos lados (M33_HMP105)

(10) I: **para mí / para mí / sí** representan un valor / mucho muy fuerte (H33_HMP100)

(b) **Conditional.** The use of conditionals. See the following example (11)

(11) I: no / si / nomás porque a un pelado se le antoja / pagarme la cena / ya está bien visto / pero ¿cómo por qué?! / **si ya tengo uno que me la paga** <risas = “E”/> / feliz / o sea ¿por qué? / y le mandé hablar al gerente ¿quién se cree usted para aceptar que a mí me paguen cena? / o sea ¿quién? / ¿en dónde dice que está bien visto? / si yo vengo y me siento es porque traigo con qué / si yo busco quien me pague ese es problema mío / pero como no ando buscando / ¡n’ombre! me enojé (M13_HMP035)

Table 5. Constraint what is said to Save Face.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
4.Constraint what is said						
4.a	53	5.43	45	10.51	40	10.36
4.b	7	0.71	3	0.70	5	1.29
Total	60	6.14	48	11.21	45	11.65

The complete results are in Table 5, we can see the group with highest frequencies is the 20 to 34 one, with 60. Then we have the 35 to 54 one with 48, and really close we have the ≥ 55 with 45. Regarding the percentages, the group with the highest percentage is the ≥ 55 one with 11.65%. With almost the same percentage we have the 35 to 54 years old group with 11.21%. Finally, with only 6.14% of the total frequencies we have the 20 to 34 years old group. As for the sub strategies, the one with most of the frequencies and therefore the percentages was “4.a”. This means that generally, speakers from Monterrey prefer the 4.a sub strategy over the 4.b.

4.1.5 Justify.

Speakers use arguments to support their opinions, arguments make the opinions stronger. We found that sometimes this strategy is used before another one. Three types of this strategy were found:

(a) **Explanation and justification.** The use of justifications and/or excuses through lexical connectors (*porque, es que, como que, lo que pasa es que*). The following are examples of this strategy (12), (13):

(12) I: **como que** generalmente orita / te rodeas más de amistades / o de / el trabajo no sé (H23_HMP066)

(13) I: *estando allá no aprendí mucho* **porque** yo salí / de allá cuando terminé la prepa (H23_HMP065)

(b) **Comparison.** In this sub strategy the speaker uses comparisons to justify his opinion (*como por ejemplo, como aquí en Monterrey, como en mi pueblo*). This can be seen in the following example (14):

(14) I: **como que** / *más permisivos* (M33_HMP107)

(c) **Logic consequence.** The use of expressions that show a logical consequence such as: *entonces* (then), *en consecuencia* (as a consequence), *por consiguiente* (consequently), *pues* (well), etc. See the following example (15):

(15) I: o sea una / pu- / tú puedes ir tranquilamente / o venir tranquilamente y pos no sabes qué / quien venga en el otro coche o / qué / balacera se vaya a atravesar en el camino / **entonces** sí es una / es una ciudad / con mucho / pos ya con mucho peligro (M13_HMP036)

Table 6. Justify.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
5.Justify						
5.a	138	14.13	51	11.91	61	15.80
5.b	11	1.12	7	1.63	10	2.59
5.c	82	8.40	39	9.11	32	8.29
Total	231	23.65	97	22.65	103	26.68

According to Table 1, this is the mechanism with the highest percentages and with the highest frequencies. In Table 6 we can see that the most used sub category was 5.a with percentages that go from 11.91 (35-54) to 14.13 (20-34) and 15.80 (≥ 55). As we can see the first group (20-34) has the highest number of frequencies, more than the other groups' frequencies altogether and it is also the one with highest of all the mechanisms of the study. This mechanism had a total of 431 frequencies which tells us that it is the one that the speakers used the most. We can clearly see that the interviewed speakers prefer to justify through lexical connectors being "porque" the one that appeared more frequently within the interviews.

4.1.6 Correct or Repair.

When speakers realize they threatened or will threat the listener's face, they employ this strategy to reduce the impact. There are two sub categories of this mechanism:

(a) **Lexical phrases.** This one is used when the speaker tries to reduce the disagreement by changing what he said or repair it by adding something else to the assertion.

(16) I: se fuera a expresar / palabras que / ahora / ya son completamente / e / aberrantes / o mal escuchadas (H23_HMP061)

(17) I: Andrea / pos es nombre de hombre /es Andrés /y aquí es nombre de mujer
 <risas= “I” / > / **se pone de moda** (H33_HMP097)

(b) **Expressions of apology.** This mechanism is not used with assertive acts, just with directives. Flores Salgado & Ramirez Cabrera (2014) describe it as a mechanism used to apologize when an interruption is presented, when the speaker is going to ask for something to the listener, when asking a question, etc.

Table 7. Correct or Repair.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
6. Correct or repair						
6.a	69	7.06	10	2.33	14	3.62
6.b	0	0	0	0	0	0

As we can see in Table 7 this mechanism was not used regularly by the interviewees, the number of frequencies of this mechanism is far lower compared to the most used strategies. The group with the highest number of frequencies was again the 20 to 34 one with 69 which is a lot compared to second highest (≥ 55) that has only 14, and the last one (35-54) with 10. The percentages are distributed in the same order, with 7.06% the group with ages from 20 to 34 years old, followed by the ≥ 55 group with 3.62% and finally with just 2.33% the 35 to 54 group.

The results show us that younger people tend to mitigate their assertions by correcting or repairing them more frequently than older people, this could mean that older people don't

have to use this device (the opportunity is not presented) or they prefer to use other mechanisms, being the latter the most plausible.

4.1.7 Make Concessions.

Using this strategy is like playing the devil’s advocate, the speaker gives an argument in favor of what the listener says or believes or against what himself thinks or believes. This mechanism has two sub-categories:

(a) **Concession.** The speaker disagrees first and then makes the concession or he makes the concession and then disagrees. This can be seen in the following example (18):

(18) I: el domingo de resurrección para los metodistas / en realidad no sé por qué / que / voy a decir / **no voy a hablar por los metodistas / pero en mi casa sí era muy importante** / (M33_HMP106)

(b) **Litotes.** This strategy is used to reduce the threat that an opinion might cause on the listener. See the following example (19):

(19) I: yo no estudié bibliotecología o sea / la bibliotecología es todo una ciencia / y yo la respeto mucho / pero no tengo paciencia yo para eso (M33_HMP105)

Table 8. Make Concessions.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
7.Make concessions						
7.a	144	14.75	37	8.64	15	3.88
7.b	16	1.63	1	0.23	17	4.40

The total results of this mechanism are in Table 8, it is remarkable the difference between the group with ages that go from 20 to 34 years old with the other groups, while the 30 to 34 group has 144 frequencies on the 7.a sub-category, the other two groups have only 37 (35-54) and 15 (≥ 55) which is a huge difference. The percentages of this sub-category follow the same order: with 14.75% we have the 20 to 34 group, then with 8.64 we have the 35 to 54 one, and finally, with 3.88 the ≥ 55 one. As for the 7.b sub-category, the frequencies are lower and follow a different order, the group with the highest number of frequencies is the ≥ 55 group with 17 and 4.40%, followed by the 20-34 group with 16 frequencies and 1.63%, and with only 1 frequency we have the 35-54 group at the end, this lone frequency represents the 0.23%.

As stated before, and based on the results, we can clearly see that older people (≥ 55) don't use this strategy very much and the order (7.a > 7.b) is not followed in the same way as in the younger groups (20-34, 35-54). This might be related to the age, elderly people don't see the necessity of using arguments against their own assertions or in favor of the listener's opinion. On the other hand, younger people use this strategy to mitigate their opinions, very often, which means they choose to use arguments to avoid disagreements or at least to lessen their impact on the interactions and/or the relationship between them and the listener.

4.1.8 Include the Listener in the Speaker's Discourse.

In this mechanism, the listener is included in the speaker's assertion in order to support it and lessen the possible threat. Two different sub-categories are part of this mechanism.

(a) **The speaker involves the listener.** In this strategy the speaker makes the listener part of the assertion by mentioning him, as if he was making that assertion too. This can be seen in the following examples (20), (21):

(20) I: es una escuela privada / no sabe inglés / de que / lo que sabe de inglés es **haz de cuenta** pollito chicken nomás <risas= E, I/> (M13_HMP034)

(21) I: a mí me ha tocado vivir en otros países / en temporadas cortitas **si tú quieres** (H33_HMP097)

(b) **Phatic formulae.** The speaker uses short questions to reach a consensus with the listener. The most common expression used were: “¿verdad?”, “¿no?”, “¿sí?”, “¿apoco no?”, etc. See the following example (22):

(22) I: ya no hay / valores / religiosos este / tomamos lo que / lo que queremos o lo que nos conviene de / de/ dentro de la religión **¿no?** (H13_HMP026)

Table 9. Include the Listener.

Linguistic Mechanisms	Frequencies 20-34	Percentages 20-34	Frequencies 35-54	Percentages 35-54	Frequencies ≥ 55	Percentages ≥ 55
8. Inclusion of the listener						
8.a	59	6.04	15	3.50	33	8.54
8.b	95	9.73	43	10.04	47	12.17

Table 9 shows the complete results of this mechanism. As we can see, the results vary a little from group to group. The group with highest number of frequencies is the 20 to 34

group with 59 for the 8.a sub-category, and 95 for the 8.b. The second highest is the ≥ 55 group with 33 for the 8.a and 47 for the 8.b. The group with the lowest frequencies is the 35 to 54 one with only 15 for 8.a and 43 for 8.b. Now the percentages, the ≥ 55 group had 8.54% for 8.a, the 20 to 34 group had 6.04%, and the 35 to 54 had only 3.54%; as for the 8.b sub-category the highest percentage belongs to the ≥ 55 group with 12.17%, then with 10.04% we have the 35 to 54 group, and finally with 9.73 the 20 to 34 one.

The percentages tell us that this mechanism is used frequently by the speakers and that they prefer the 8.b sub-category. The fact that they use a mechanism that includes the listener in a regular basis, let us see that they feel more comfortable when the listener approves the assertion, that is the reason why they look for the consensus.

The complete results will be summarized and analyzed on the next chapter.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is composed by a summary of the study which includes the results and the most important features of it. The implications of the study and its limitations along with some directions for further research are also presented.

5.1 Conclusions

As stated in chapter I, the purpose of this research was to identify, classify and interpret the mitigating mechanisms used by men and women living in Monterrey, Mexico who shared the same social status but with a different age range when performing assertive acts. In order to carry out this investigation, 36 interviews were analyzed. The 36 interviewees were distributed into 3 groups of 12 people each based on their age range. The 3 age ranges were: 20-34, 35-54, and ≥ 55 , each group had 6 women and 6 men. The investigation is part of the project: “El Habla de Monterrey-PRESEEA” (Rodríguez, Flores, y Pérez, 2009). We looked for the assertive acts that were mitigated, then we classified the mechanisms used. The mechanisms considered were proposed by Flores Salgado and Ramirez Cabrera (2014) based on the categories created by Albelda & Cestero (2011) and Briz (2010). After the mechanisms were classified into the correct category, a counting of the frequencies of each mechanism was made. Once we had all of the frequencies and correspondent percentages, we made an analysis of them.

In the previous chapter we could see clearly how the number of frequencies was getting lower as the age of the speakers was higher. We also can see that there are three mechanisms with high number of frequencies in the three groups: 5.a (Justify), 3.a (Use of impersonal expressions), and 8.b (Inclusion of the listener) in that descending order. These three sub-categories represent the third part of each group. In group 20-34 we can see a sub-category with big number of frequencies and that is not any of the three I mentioned before, this strategy is the 7.a (Make concessions), this is a very special case because the 20-34 group got 144 frequencies while the other two got only 37 (35-54), and 15 (≥ 55). A

future research focused only on this particular strategy could give us an explanation of why this happened.

The results of the research show us that speakers from Monterrey normally justify when they want to mitigate an assertive act, they also frequently use impersonal expressions or, include the listener in their assertions. This is seen as an urge of acceptance, they want the listener to understand the reasons for their opinions that is why they look for a consensus or they use another entity to support their assertion.

The most used mechanisms were “Justify”, “Use of impersonal expressions”, and “inclusion of the listener”, these strategies represented one third of the total used by the speakers. The use of those strategies demonstrate that the speaker seeks the approval of the listener, by mentioning him or by giving him a justification for the assertion made. The least used mechanisms were “Constraint what is said” and “Correct or repair”, these strategies give complete responsibility of what is said to the speaker and this might be the reason why the speakers didn’t use it very often.

The results also showed that there was a variation in the use of the mechanisms regarding the age of the participants, the older they were the less strategies they used, with some exceptions, of course. We need to take into consideration that older people have a higher hierarchy than younger people, normally the interviewees were undergraduate students from the UANL (Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León) so they were younger than the 55 year-olds which could be the reason why the interviewees from the ≥ 55 group didn’t mitigate as much as the ones from the 20-34 group.

5.2 Implications for Language Teaching

As stated in Chapter I, this research can help students of languages to understand how mitigating strategies in Spanish are used and then compare its use with that of the language they are learning. Several researchers have concluded that a good knowledge of the pragmatic features in the L1 can help to acquire the pragmatic features of the L2 cause

being conscious of the patterns and structures in the L1 increases the possibility of noticing the ones found in the L2, either because they are similar and they are presented in similar contexts or even because they are found in the L1 and not in the L2. When students notice that the feature “is missing” they can recognize another one presented in the L2 that mitigates what the one that is missing should mitigate. Another possibility is that the student realizes that in the L2 some assertive acts are not mitigated at all.

In order to avoid negative sociopragmatic transfer it is important to, at least, raise awareness on the students inside the classroom and teach them that the rules of their native language are not always the same of all of the other languages and they need to be used only to compare and contrast.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The results obtained are only from the interviewees with a high level of education and as I stated in chapter III, the corpus consist of interviews to speakers with basic, medium, and high levels of education. The results from those groups could be different, certainly they are. So, in order to get better results and be able to compare them it is necessary to continue with the investigation and analyze the other groups.

The categories are not absolute, they might be changed in the future or some other mechanisms will have to be added, it depends on the findings. However, these categories consider enough mechanisms to analyze the assertive acts thoroughly; and the results obtained with them are good enough to come to a conclusion regarding, at least, the speakers with a high level of education.

5.4 Directions for Further Research

As I said before, this research focused only on the speakers with a high level of education, in order to obtain better results it is necessary to analyze the basic and medium groups. Clearly the results will be different and a comparison might change the approach. Some new categories could be added to the ones used in this research, there are some mitigating strategies that couldn't be categorized maybe if they are included in the future, the results will completely change.

I strongly recommend to study the mechanisms that presented uneven results from different groups, the ones with a great difference could tell us more about the groups, the mechanisms, and the mitigation itself.

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