Greetings and leave-taking in Texas
Perception of politeness norms by Mexican-Americans across sociolinguistic divides

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The present study reveals how 16 Mexican-Americans residing in Texas perceive and follow politeness norms (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987; Locher and Watts 2005; Scollon and Scollon 2001) related to greetings and leave-takings in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Data from online questionnaires identify a significant difference in perceived level of social expectation (i.e. politeness) for employing the speech acts with Spanish- versus non-Spanish speakers. The data support previous research in identifying a sense of solidarity among Mexican-American extended families, but also suggest that this bond extends to other Spanish-speaking acquaintances. Better understanding of these norms should facilitate inter-cultural exchanges between linguistic in- and out-group members.

Keywords: greetings and leave-takings, bilingualism, politeness

1. Introduction

Over the past half century, researchers have identified multiple functions of greetings and leave-takings (Austin 1962; Goffman 1971; Searle 1969) and documented considerable cross-cultural variation in their use (e.g. Duranti 1997; Li Wei 2009, 2010; Thomas 1994). Such variation in speech acts across cultures has often been analyzed in terms of politeness norms (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1987; Hickey 1991; Sifianou 1992). Few studies, however, illuminate how bilingual and bicultural individuals in regions of cultural and linguistic contact employ these particular speech acts. Do such speakers perceive a difference in the acts across languages and sociocultural boundaries? If so, do they vary when and how they employ the acts?

This study addresses the current knowledge gap by assessing the perception of Spanish-English bilingual and bicultural individuals regarding appropriate usage of greetings and leave-takings across sociolinguistic and cultural boundaries.
Specifically, it evaluates the social expectations that bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas link to use of greetings and leave-takings in three different social settings. I begin with an overview of the literature on the following: greetings and leave-takings and their association with politeness theory; the variation that exists when carrying out greetings and leave-takings within and across languages; and speech acts in bilingual/bicultural communities in the U.S. After posing four research questions, I detail the methodology used in their investigation and present the study’s results. This is followed by a discussion tying the results to the research questions, identifying the study’s limitations, and suggesting avenues for future research. I conclude by summarizing the study’s main findings and potential implications.

2. Background

2.1 Greetings and leave-takings and politeness

Based on Searle’s (1976) classification of illocutionary acts (i.e. speech acts), greetings and leave-takings fall under the category of expressives, as they show the emotional state or attitude of the speaker, but say nothing about the world. Searle (1969) asserts that greetings need only satisfy two of his four felicity conditions: the preparatory condition that the speaker and hearer have just come into contact or been introduced, and the essential condition that the greeting represents a “courteous recognition of the hearer” (Searle 1969, 67; Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 216). The latter reflects the act’s illocutionary point or purpose; a greeting is successful when the hearer recognizes it as a courteous recognition of the hearer (Searle 1976; Searle and Vanderveken 1985). Leave-takings, on the other hand, express a speaker’s desire to end an ongoing interaction with the hearer or, as Clark and French (1981) propose, a speaker’s “feeling of willingness to break contact immediately with the addressee” (p. 2). The present study departs from this basic understanding of greetings and leave-takings as expressive speech acts, while considering the role they play in interpersonal relations and relationship maintenance.

Goffman (1971) suggests that greetings and leave-takings serve both to signal accessibility between interlocutors and to maintain their relationship across interactions. Because greeting and parting behavior is conventionalized and follows certain routines (Firth 1972), it motivates analysis under the umbrella of politeness (Laver 1981; Watts 2003). Ide (2009, 18) remarks on the importance of being able to carry out these routines within a given speech community, contending that greeting rituals convey “norms and expectations of how language is used” and also reflect the localized values of the community. This social norm view predicts
that the absence of an expected greeting or farewell would be perceived as socially inappropriate, and that the same would hold true if either speech act fell short of a qualitative standard. This would apply to interactions between both acquaintances and strangers within the speech community.

Meier (1995) argues for a view of politeness in terms of what is socially appropriate or socially acceptable, often labeled ‘politeness 1’ or ‘first-order politeness’ in the literature. This view of politeness is utilized in the present study to uncover differences in politeness norms as perceived by speakers, as it represents a commonsense conceptualization of the term (Dimitrova-Galaczi 2005). The study follows Locher and Watts’s (2005) distinction between appropriate (unmarked or positively marked) acts on one side and inappropriate (negatively-marked, i.e., impolite, over-polite and rude) acts on the other. This division is motivated by observations that routine acts may be associated more with appropriate than polite behavior (Félix-Brasdefer 2008). Schneider (2012) emphasizes the value in investigating speaker perception of what is or is not socially appropriate using experimental methods, such as the questionnaire used in this study.

Such an approach allows for insight into perceived norms governing why and, of particular interest here, when speakers use greetings and leave-takings. Moreover, it illuminates variation in these norms in bilingual, bicultural speech communities whose boundaries are not well-defined and where interactions across sociolinguistic divides are frequent. This notion of a dynamic, generalized speech community, in which a speaker may shift fluidly between languages, dialects, styles, and perceived politeness norms, is particularly relevant along the U.S.-Mexico border, where studies of acculturation can effectively inform linguistic investigation. I adopt Hazuda, Stern, and Haffner’s (1988, 690) definition of acculturation as:

\[\text{a multidimensional process, resulting from intergroup contact, in which individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture (e.g. the Mexican or Mexican American culture) take over characteristic ways of living (attitudes, values, and behavior) from another culture. (e.g. mainstream, non-Hispanic white culture)}\]

The present study targets Texas, a contiguous section of the border region representing high linguistic and cultural contact spanning multiple generations, while asking: Do speakers perceive different norms across sociolinguistic boundaries that govern when a greeting or leave-taking is socially expected? Speaker judgments regarding socially appropriate or acceptable usage of the speech acts shed light on this consideration, while the construct of ‘face’, or self-image (Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1987; Scollon and Scollon 2001), offers insight into forces operating behind perceived norms. In addition, the notion of face enables
inspection of how politeness norms are encoded in individual greeting and leave-taking tokens across distinct sociolinguistic settings.

Brown and Levinson (1987, 61) identify face as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself.” It is often likened to self-esteem, and can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. The individualistic notion of ‘self’ captured in this definition has led to much criticism and to alternative accounts. Within Brown and Levinson’s (1987) construct lie both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ face. Positive face represents an individual’s desire to be approved by others, while negative face represents an individual’s right to freedom of action.

2.2 Politeness and cultural variation

Scollon and Scollon (2001) put forth an alternative dichotomy to capture the concepts of positive and negative face while avoiding the pitfalls associated with Brown and Levinson’s framework, namely, its western cultural bias and the confusion generated by use of the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’. Instead, Scollon and Scollon opt for the terms involvement and independence politeness. Their framework shifts to include the notion of collective face, captured by the term ‘involvement’, that has been observed in multiple politeness studies of non-western cultures (e.g. Li Wei 2009; Matsumoto 1988; Nwoye 1989, 1992; Thomas 1994). This conceptual shift is apparent in the definition of face adopted by the researchers: “Face is the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event” (p. 47). The terms negotiated and mutually granted emphasize the collectivistic over the individualistic conceptualization of self.

Scollon and Scollon’s (2001) framework captures the (a)symmetry of speaker pairs along two relational axes – power (P) and distance (D) – while tangentially considering a third situational variable, weight of imposition (W). The principal social variables (P and D) enable classification of social interactions into three different face systems. The present study limits its scope to one of these: solidarity face systems (i.e. interactions between individuals who experience similar relative power and have a close social relationship; -P, -D). While the study examines perceived norms in three different sociolinguistic settings, all three involve (-P, -D) interactions. Holding the face system constant allows a direct comparison of perceived norms across the settings. It follows from Scollon and Scollon’s (2001) framework that any differences in perceived greeting and leave-taking norms across the settings orient to the relative importance of involvement and independence face associated with each social group. The framework predicts that speakers will use involvement or independence strategies accordingly. As Scollon and Scollon (2001) point out, the most extreme contrast between these strategies is communicating (involvement) and not communicating (independence). Other
involvement strategies include explicitly claiming in-group membership with the hearer, noticing or attending to the hearer, using names and nicknames, claiming a common point of view, and being voluble. Consideration of these strategies allows exploration within a bilingual/bicultural speech community into the notion of a ‘cultural’ barrier tied to the perceived relative importance of involvement and independence face.

Félix-Brasdefer (2006) provides compelling arguments for using the involvement/independence dichotomy when investigating politeness among Mexican Spanish speakers, citing a tendency for face needs to “orient towards the group” (i.e. involvement). He claims that Scollon and Scollon’s model “better fits the notion of ‘self’, projected by Mexicans as collectivistic and more related to membership in a group such as a family, friends, or working group” (pp. 2162–2163). A succession of studies has highlighted the importance of extended family in Latino culture (e.g. Castillo, Conoley, and Brossart 2004; Marín and Gamba 2003; Paniagua 2014; Sabogal et al. 1987). Mexican-American families, in particular, are characterized by Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos (1979, 144) “as a large and cohesive kin group embracing both lineal and collateral relatives,” with “[t]ies beyond the nuclear family [that] are strong and extensive.” In contrast, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) notes the tendency for U.S. mainstream society to orient towards independence. Given that the present study investigates individuals of Mexican cultural/linguistic heritage who reside in a majority western-Anglo society, it benefits from an analysis that includes a notion of collective or involvement face while simultaneously considering the pressures of negative or independence face-wants shown to predominate within U.S. Anglo society. Unfortunately, the prevalence of the terms ‘positive and negative face/politeness’ in the greeting and leave-taking literature makes a complete departure from the terms difficult, if not impossible. I therefore utilize the terms offered by both frameworks in tandem (i.e. ‘positive/involvement face’ and ‘negative/independence face’), when needed to facilitate the conversation with extant literature.

I now propose a view of how these conceptions of face operate via the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings. Goffman (1967) recognizes that greetings and leave-takings (in part) serve to mitigate the temporally-limited display of solidarity between interlocutors. His observation demonstrates the applicability of the face-saving model by affirming the importance of positive politeness or involvement face (i.e. expression of solidarity) between speakers. This applies both to greetings, as in (1a), and farewells, as in (1b):

(1) a. Hey, it’s great to see you! I’ve missed you.
   b. I hate to leave you, but I really need to get to work.
The greeting in (1a) displays positive politeness (involvement) by expressing the speaker’s desire to interact with the interlocutor; it includes a positive comment and reassurance that the speaker enjoys the interlocutor’s company. Similarly, the farewell in (1b) articulates the speaker’s reluctance to end the show of solidarity and utilizes an excuse to further mitigate the potential face-threat; had this speaker left without saying goodbye, the interlocutor might have taken it as a threat to positive (involvement) face.

García (2006, 129) expands the face-saving model to include negative politeness (independence face) by way of a poignant question: “Do people prefer to have their positive face acknowledged (flowery greetings, effusive thanks, for example) or is it more polite to respect negative face in the community (not calling attention to someone, leaving them alone, for example)?” The question presents a dilemma: the presence of a greeting could presumably be considered a threat to negative (independence) face, while the absence of the greeting could be perceived as a threat to positive (involvement) face.

2.3 Intra- and Inter-lingual variation in greetings and leave-takings

Researchers (e.g. Duranti 1997; Li Wei 2009, 2010; Thomas 1994) have documented considerable variation in greetings and leave-takings across cultures and languages. Regarding greetings and leave-takings in Spanish, a few studies have specifically targeted the acts as central objects of inquiry (e.g. García 1981; Placencia 1997; Pinto 2008), while several others have considered their deployment within larger turn-taking structures (e.g. in initiating a request sequence [Márquez Reiter 2002], in relation to insistence at leave-taking [Placencia 2008a, 2008b], or in the context of service encounters [Márquez Reiter and Placencia 2004; Placencia 2008c]). These studies have found variation in the use of greetings and leave-takings across national varieties of Spanish, as well as at the sub-national level.1

Pinto (2008) examines passing greetings from a cross-linguistic perspective, comparing realizations of the speech act in Peninsular Spanish to American English. The author suggests that the English norms reflect a greater relative importance of negative (independence) politeness, while the Spanish norms show preference for positive (involvement) politeness strategies. This claim resonates in the present study, along with Pinto’s observation that greetings conforming to

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1. Placencia (2008c), for example, demonstrates regional variation in the use of both greetings and leave-takings during corner store interactions in Ecuador. In comparing the cities of Quito and Manta, the author observed a substantial difference in the rate of occurrence of each speech act.
English norms may be interpreted as impolite (i.e. inappropriate) by individuals following Spanish norms, and vice versa.

2.4 Speech acts in U.S. bilingual/bicultural settings

Pinto and Raschio (2007) continue into the bilingual/bicultural sphere in their comparative study of requests by heritage speakers of Spanish in the U.S., L1 Spanish speakers, and L1 English speakers. While the study targets requests, its findings nonetheless inform research of other speech acts by bilingual heritage Spanish speakers. Pinto and Raschio observe that heritage speakers in their study had a unique intercultural style, further supported by Pinto and Raschio’s (2008) study of complaints. Similarly, García (1981) identifies certain aspects of leave-taking among a family in Los Angeles that she considers particular to Mexican-Americans. Most pertinent to the present study is the closeness and importance of family reflected in leave-taking practices.

Beaudrie and Fairclough’s (2012) overview of research on heritage Spanish speakers in the U.S. illustrates the breadth and depth of this burgeoning field of study. The present study bolsters this growing body of work while contributing new insights into the highly understudied speech acts of greetings and leave-takings.

2.5 Research questions

The present study analyzes the perceptions of bilingual Mexican-American residents of Texas regarding greeting and leave-taking usage in informal settings with three social groups: extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, and non-Spanish-speaking friends. Due to the closeness and importance of the family in Mexican-American communities, as observed in the context of leave-takings (García 1981), this study investigates whether overt greetings and leave-takings hold high value and are expected by in-group members in social situations, and whether lack of the speech acts in these contexts is perceived as socially inappropriate or unacceptable. Given that research (e.g. Hazuda, Stern, and Haffner 1988) has shown that Mexican-Americans maintain certain Mexican cultural norms despite acculturation to English, this study also compares perception of greeting and leave-taking norms as related to participants’ self-reported language practices (use of Spanish vs. English). Additionally, the study investigates whether norms that participants associate with family members extend to informal settings with Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking friends. In this sense, it aims to gauge participants’ sense of ‘in-group’ identity with respect to politeness norms encoded in greeting and leave-taking usage. This line of inquiry generates the following research questions:
1. Do bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas consider greetings and leave-takings a social obligation in informal settings? Do they expect the acts to be delivered directly to each individual?
2. Is there a difference in this expectation according to the reported English versus Spanish language practices of these bilingual Mexican-Americans?
3. Does the level of expectation vary according to the social groups of extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, and non-Spanish-speaking friends?
4. Is there a qualitative difference in the types of greetings and leave-takings Mexican-Americans claim to use with each of these social groups?

I base my hypotheses on literature identifying strong familial ties and the importance of solidarity among Latinos (e.g. Castillo, Conoley, and Brossart 2004; Marín and Gamba 2003; Paniagua 2014; Sabogal et al. 1987) and, more specifically, among Mexican-Americans (e.g. García 1981; Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos 1979), as well as research demonstrating a sense of collective face or spirit in multiple speech communities (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2006, 2008; Li Wei 2009; Matsumoto 1988; Nwoye 1989, 1992), which may be encoded in greeting and leave-taking norms (Garcia 1981; Thomas 1994). I thus propose the following research hypotheses:

1. Bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas consider the use of greetings and leave-takings a social obligation in informal settings. Greetings and leave-takings are expected to be delivered directly to each individual.
2. The level of social obligation that bilingual Mexican-Americans attribute to greetings and leave-takings is consistent regardless of the speakers’ language practices.
3. The level of social obligation attributed to greeting and leave-taking usage varies according to social group, as follows, from highest to lowest: extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, non-Spanish-speaking friends.
4. Speakers will use a greater variety and quantity of involvement strategies with extended family, followed by Spanish-speaking friends and, finally, non-Spanish-speaking friends.

3. The present study

3.1 Methodology

In order to seek answers to the research questions, data were gathered on the perceptions of 16 Mexican-American residing in Texas as described below.
3.1.1 Participants
The participants in the study were 16 bilingual Mexican-American residents of Texas – 10 females and 6 males. They were first- or second-hand acquaintances of the researcher ranging in age from 27 to 68 years old, with a median age of 37 (mean: 39, standard deviation: 9). Participants were divided into two groups to address research question 2 regarding the role of Spanish-English language use: Group 1 comprised 8 individuals who reported speaking mostly or only Spanish with their parents, while Group 2 consisted of 8 individuals who reported speaking mostly or only English with their parents. In effect, this division served to identify any correlation between English-Spanish language use and the targeted politeness perceptions. The division follows Valdés’s (2001, 102) observation that, due to the linguistic diversity of Mexican-Americans, “it is impossible to conjecture about language strengths and weaknesses based on generation, age, schooling, period of residence in the United States, or any other such criteria.” In southern Texas, for example, Anderson-Mejías (2005) observes that patterns of language shift from Spanish to English do not follow the traditional three-generation pattern (e.g. Pew 2009). Nonetheless, for reference, Table 1 shows the breakdown of each group’s members with respect to their generational status as a resident in Texas. Note that here “first generation” refers to subjects who were born in Mexico and later migrated to the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants by Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Spanish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 Instruments
In order to assess the targeted participant perceptions presented in the research questions, subjects completed an online questionnaire with particular demographic information as well as responses to 25 research-related items. The questionnaire was presented in English and Spanish to ensure adequate understanding across the language proficiency range of the sample group.² The demographic information was used to categorize participants into the two aforementioned language groups (the between-subjects independent variable). The research-related items sought responses from participants regarding greeting and leave-taking usage in three

². The questionnaire is not included due to space limitations, but is available from the author upon request.
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social settings: (1) a cookout with extended family, (2) a party with 20 Spanish-speaking friends, and (3) a party with 20 non-Spanish-speaking friends. There were three main components of the research-related section: a rating scales tool, a discourse completion task (DCT), and a retrospective report. Of the 25 research-related items, 18 required a rating on a five-point Likert scale, six solicited discourse completion tokens of greetings and leave-takings via open-ended prompts, and the retrospective report asked participants to explain any similarities or differences in their responses across the social settings. These three tools were chosen in tandem to yield more valid and well-rounded insights into perceived norms.

Retrospective reports were chosen as a third instrument because they have been shown in pragmatics research to offer insight into speech act production and perception (e.g. Cohen 2004). As such, they serve here to substantiate both speaker ratings and production data and also to provide additional information regarding perception of norms. Pinto (2011, 218) calls for research that considers “the biased beliefs and attitudes that underlie [the assessment of im/polite phenomena].” Félix-Brasdefer (2008) demonstrates the utility of retrospective reports in investigating perceptions of politeness, in particular the ‘folk notions’ of politeness (metapragmatic politeness 1) explored herein. What more, the author highlights the role these reports can play in uncovering different associations with involvement and independence face across cultures (e.g. Mexican and U.S.) when used in conjunction with other methods.

3.1.3 Data analysis
The data gathered in this study fall into three categories: numerical data generated from the rating scales tool, qualitative discourse production data elicited by the DCT, and metalinguistic commentary garnered from retrospective reports.

To analyze the numerical Likert-scale data, a statistical approach was employed. First, a repeated-measures ANOVA was run to identify potential effects of the independent factors, social setting and language group. Where statistically-significant

3. Placencia (2011) notes that the production questionnaire methodology has been the most-widely utilized across speech acts and languages. While the data that DCTs elicit are not natural, per se, they have been shown to approach natural behavior. Regardless, contrived productions may prove more useful in the present study than natural speech (Schneider 2012), as they permit “access to (metapragmatic) perceptions about appropriate behavior” (Placencia 2011, 100).

4. The Likert-scale ratings aid in making comparable generalizations across both the experimental groups and the settings. While Eelen (2001) cautions that statistical approaches such as the rating scales tool used here reduce the surface variability of data, the author concedes that they also facilitate detection of patterns and allow inter-cultural comparisons. Recognizing that individual details are lost in the emergent statistical patterns, I corroborate generalized perceptions using the DCT and retrospective reports.
differences were found in participants’ mean ratings for social setting, post-hoc pairwise t-tests were run across the factor’s three levels – family cookout, party with Spanish-speaking friends, and party with non-Spanish-speaking friends. By comparing two levels at a time, these t-tests pin-pointed the specific location of significant differences.

With regard to DCT data, token greetings and leave-takings provided by participants were classified into sub-types and according to the face-saving (involvement) strategies they represented. They were analyzed in terms of number of tokens per social setting in tandem with a qualitative discussion.

Finally, the metalinguistic data included in participant retrospective reports were used to substantiate findings gleaned from the rating scales and DCT data; this triangulation supports the claims and speculations presented in the discussion.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Rating scales tool: Presence versus absence of greetings and leave-takings
Subjects were asked to respond to each of the statements in Table 2 on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = completely agree). The mean ratings appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived expectation of greeting in three social settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean Ratings</th>
<th>Group 1 (Span)</th>
<th>Group 2 (Eng)</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>At a cookout with your extended family, you are socially expected to greet each person individually.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>At a party with 20 Spanish-speaking friends, you are socially expected to greet each person individually.</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>At a party with 20 NON-Spanish speaking friends, you are socially expected to greet each person individually.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that both language groups perceived the highest social obligation in settings with extended family members, followed by Spanish-speaking friends, and finally, non-Spanish-speaking friends. A minimal difference was seen across language groups (Group 1 = speak Spanish with parents; Group 2 = speak English with parents). The data, analyzed using a repeated-measures ANOVA, yielded the following results:
– There was a significant main effect for social setting (the within-subjects independent variable): $F_{(2, 14)} = 16.147, p < .001$
– There was no effect for language group (the between-subjects independent variable): $F_{(1, 14)} = .368, p = \text{n.s}$

The plot in Figure 1 below displays the main effect for social setting. Language groups are denoted by Span (Group 1) and Eng (Group 2).

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Mean perceived expectation of individual greetings in three social settings

Figure 1 suggests that the main effect for social setting is significant among all three independent variables. To test this effect for statistical significance, post-hoc paired-samples t-tests were used to evaluate differences between the settings of (1) family and Spanish-speaking friends, and (2) Spanish-speaking friends and non-Spanish-speaking friends. The results indeed indicated a significant difference between the social settings in each instance: (1) $t_{(15)} = 3.22, p = .003$; and (2) $t_{(15)} = 3.17, p = .003$.

The mean ratings motivated deeper investigation, however, as they fell below ‘completely agree’ in all three settings. While participants did report a significantly different level of social expectation for greeting individuals in each setting, they did not report feeling entirely obligated to greet each person individually in any of the settings.

To gain more insight into participant expectations of how greetings and leave-takings are used in each of the settings, participants were asked to rate five statements regarding selective use of the speech acts. The statements and corresponding mean ratings appear in Table 3. For the purpose of quantitative analysis of these items, neutral was designated as the baseline with a value of zero. Statements classified as acceptable were given positive values (somewhat acceptable = 1,
completely acceptable = 2), while statements classified as rude were assigned negative values (somewhat rude = −1, completely rude = −2). Based on this valuation, the more socially acceptable an item, the higher its value, with an upper limit of 2; the less socially acceptable an item, the lower its value, with a lower limit of −2.

Table 3. Mean politeness ratings by speech act across three social settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Family Cookout</th>
<th>Party with Spanish-speaking Friends</th>
<th>Party with Non-Spanish-speaking Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. You greet only people you have close relationships with.</td>
<td>−.688</td>
<td>−.438</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. You greet only the entire group as a whole.</td>
<td>−.688</td>
<td>−.500</td>
<td>1.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. You say goodbye only to people you have close relationships with.</td>
<td>−.569</td>
<td>−.438</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. You say goodbye only to the entire group as a whole.</td>
<td>−.250</td>
<td>−.125</td>
<td>.750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. You leave quietly without saying goodbye.</td>
<td>−1.375</td>
<td>−1.250</td>
<td>−.500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 shows, for two of the three social settings – family cookout and party with Spanish-speaking friends – the mean rating for all statements fell below the neutral baseline (i.e. they fell on the side of being rude/socially unacceptable). Notably, for the third social setting – party with non-Spanish-speaking friends – all but statement 5 yielded a positive mean rating (i.e. were evaluated as being socially acceptable to varying degrees). A separate repeated-measures ANOVA was run for each statement (1–5) across the three social settings. Each showed a main effect for social setting, but no effect for informant language group. The following plot of statement 1 (Figure 2) is fairly representative of statements 1–5.
It is apparent from the plot that the main effect for social setting is centered on the third setting, *party with non-Spanish-speaking friends*. Therefore, post hoc paired-samples t-tests were conducted across the following settings to isolate the significant difference: (1) *family cookout* vs. *party with Spanish-speaking friends*; (2) *party with Spanish-speaking friends* vs. *party with non-Spanish-speaking friends*. The t-tests for (1) *family cookout* vs. *party with Spanish-speaking friends* yielded no significant differences for any of the five statements. The tests for (2) *party with Spanish-speaking friends* vs. *party with non-Spanish-speaking friends*, however, revealed significant differences for each of the five statements, as follows:

1. \( t (15) = -3.46, \quad p = .002 \)
2. \( t (15) = -4.70, \quad p = .001 \)
3. \( t (15) = -2.80, \quad p = .006 \)
4. \( t (15) = -4.34, \quad p = .001 \)
5. \( t (15) = -2.42, \quad p = .02 \)

The mean politeness ratings assigned to statements 1–5 are shown graphically in Figure 3, which compares *Spanish-speaking friends* to *non-Spanish-speaking friends*. 
As evident in Figure 3, statements 1–4 were considered socially acceptable to some degree in the setting of a party with non-Spanish-speaking friends. Statement 5 (leaving quietly without saying goodbye) was not, but along with 1–4 it was relatively more acceptable than in the context of a party with Spanish-speaking friends. All five situations were perceived as socially unacceptable (mean rating < 0) in the latter setting. An analysis of the acts represented by statements 1–4 shows little difference in assigned politeness values. All four involve a greeting or leave-taking of some sort, either confined to limited individuals or to the group as a whole. They fall short of direct delivery to each attendee. Statement 5, however, describes the omission of a leave-taking: “You leave quietly without saying goodbye”. It was rated substantially lower than the other acts, which I interpret as a perception that the act carries a relatively higher threat to the attendees’ involvement face. This is not surprising given that in both domains interlocutors are friendly acquaintances. Following Goffman’s (1967) observations, a farewell in this scenario may serve to explain or mitigate the end of the participants’ present display of solidarity. The participants’ judgments and metalinguistic commentary support this view.

### 3.2.2 DCT: Types of greetings and leave-takings

Beyond their judgments regarding appropriate greeting and leave-taking usage across the three social settings, participants provided an example of a greeting and leave-taking they might use in each environment. The prompts were open-ended to allow for potential inclusion of both verbal and non-verbal (i.e. physical contact) aspects of greetings and leave-takings (e.g. “Upon arriving to a family cookout, to greet an extended family member you____”).

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5. The prompts were open-ended to allow for potential inclusion of both verbal and non-verbal (i.e. physical contact) aspects of greetings and leave-takings (e.g. “Upon arriving to a family cookout, to greet an extended family member you_____”).
assessment of how the speech acts compare across the domains. The tokens were analyzed and classified into sub-types and according to the face-saving (involvement) strategies they represented (Table 4).

Table 4. Greeting and leave-taking sub-types and strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Spanish-speaking</th>
<th>Non-Spanish</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Comment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Contact</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Meeting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greetings Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leave-takings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Comment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This classification was based in part on observations made by Coppock (2005), Schegloff and Sacks (1973), and Scollon and Scollon (2001). I discuss these strategies and sub-types individually here, with examples.

**Questions** regarding the interlocutor’s status, offered exclusively in greetings, appeared to express positive politeness or involvement through a show of solidarity and interest in the hearer. Common tokens, such as “How have you been?”, “How are things?”, “¿Cómo has estado?”, and “What’s new?” follow Goffman’s (1967) characterization of greetings as showing that the relationship is still intact from the previous encounter. They are indications that the speaker cares about the hearer and thus show positive politeness or involvement. These types of greetings were fairly balanced in number across the three social settings and were the second most commonly found type.

**Positive comments**, which are demonstrations of positive politeness or involvement, included compliments such as “You look great!”, and well-wishes such as “Take care”. Most often in this study, positive comments could be evaluated as
affirmations that the speaker is, in the case of greetings, or was, in the case of leave-takings, happy to see the hearer. Such tokens included: “So good to see you!”, “Me dio gusto saludarte”, and “Thanks for the invite”. Positive comments were the most abundant type of greeting and leave-taking (combined) and were fairly evenly distributed across the two speech acts. This finding may suggest that they are either the most formulaic or are considered the most effective in demonstrating solidarity.

**Personalization** of the greeting or leave-taking (e.g. uttering the hearer’s name, making remarks specific to the hearer as an individual) is a means for accentuating solidarity and closeness. Coppock (2005) notes that personalization mitigates the threat that a speech act might be seen as overly conventionalized and insincere. This strategy was used by three of the sixteen subjects in each of the social settings in the form of a vocative during both greetings and farewells. In (2), one informant indicated a preference to tailor greetings to extended family members:

(2) If I know specifics about family or job, I would ask. I am always aware about how long I should stick around bullshitting, because I do not want to be rude. So I stick around and pretend I care for just as long as not to be rude.

(male, 37, Eng)

Tellingly, this subject admitted using the strategy of personalization to appear polite, regardless of whether or not his actions or words were genuine. He explicitly signaled his awareness of a politeness norm that assigns value to time spent with and interest shown in a hearer during a greeting.

**Physical contact** was mentioned in some of the token greetings and leave-takings in each of the three social settings, but was more common with family (nine instances) and Spanish-speaking friends (seven instances), as compared to non-Spanish-speaking friends (four instances). The contact took the form of a hug, handshake, or kiss on the cheek. Only one instance of a kiss on the cheek was mentioned for non-Spanish speaking friends.

**Excuses** were uncommon in all settings (four in total) and were confined to leave-takings. One subject showed preference for an explicit excuse: “‘We should/need to get going’, adding excuses like having to work early the next day or having things to do at home”. Another subject was vaguer: “Ya me tengo que ir”. Based on Goffman’s (1967) observation that greetings and leave-takings may be used to address circumstances that keep participants from interacting or serve to end their show of solidarity, one might expect more excuses than were found here. Perhaps other displays of solidarity such as positive comments carry more weight or are employed to avoid any negative connotation or implication of fault associated with excuses. An excuse could also be employed in such a way as to address the hearer’s
independence face (e.g. *I know you’re busy, so I should get going*), although no such instances were found in this study.

Reference to a future meeting of interlocutors was included in roughly one-third of all leave-takings, and was balanced across the social settings, with six instances in each. Tokens include: “Let’s visit again soon”, “Hasta pronto”, and “Thanks for the invite, can’t wait for the next one”. The last example shows how strategies or sub-types of leave-takings can be used in tandem. By thanking the hearer, the speaker supports the hearer’s positive (involvement) face; simultaneously, the speaker mitigates the threat to solidarity by looking forward to the hearer’s next visit. A combination of sub-types was used in 33 of the participant tokens. Fifteen combinations were used with family, while nine were used with both friend settings. This finding supports the observation in the literature of the importance of family unity (e.g. Sabogal et al. 1987). The most commonly combined strategies in greetings were positive comments and questions (e.g. “Hello, so good to see you. How have you been?”), while in leave-takings, they were positive comments and references to future meetings (e.g. “Nos vemos pronto, me dio gusto saludarte”).

Only seven tokens did not represent any of the strategies listed in Table 4. They consisted of single word greetings such as “hello” and bald on-record farewells such as “I’m leaving”, and “adiós”. The scarcity of such tokens along with the relatively high number of combined strategies suggests a norm that calls for some form of positive politeness or involvement corresponding to the sub-types and strategies analyzed.

4. Discussion

The quantitative results from the ratings experiment present an intriguing finding: certain politeness values / social norms tied to the Mexican-American family setting appear to extend to friends, but only within the Spanish-speaking domain. This result is further supported by the following participant comments taken from retrospective reports in (3–5):

(3) If you come from a Hispanic background you are expected to acknowledge everyone even you don’t know them. Non-Hispanics usually don’t care if you acknowledge them or not. (female, 42, Span)

(4) If you are at a party with mostly Hispanics, you are expected to greet them individually because of our culture. We are taught that not doing so is a sign of bad manners. I am married to a white American guy and his family is not used to greeting people individually. (female, 37, Span)
(5) I was taught growing up that greeting everyone at a family gathering was a sign of respect and hospitality, and if you didn’t greet everyone it was considered rude. I believe it was part of our culture. I was also expected to tell everyone bye when we were leaving. I wouldn’t do it at a non-family gathering with all or mostly other ethnicities. I don’t think they would understand the reason for greeting everyone, they may think we’re running for office.  

(female, 38, Eng)

The division by participants between in- and out-groups (e.g. “Hispanics” vs. “other ethnicities”) is clear in these examples. Note the use of deictics: the reference to “our culture” in both (4) and (5), and the comment “I don’t think they would understand” referring to other ethnicities in (5). The pattern is consistent across the two language groups (and four generations of participants) in terms of Likert-scale ratings and retrospective reports. This notion of perceived in- and out-group norms is further illustrated by the comments in (6) and (7):

(6) Most of my friends who are non-Spanish-speaking don’t usually greet each other – it’s very rare.  

(female, 35, Span)

(7) At home growing up we always individually greeted each other, my parents and close family showed and raised me that way, it’s just the way it’s always been. If you don’t greet a certain person it shows everyone you are either upset or uncomfortable with that person. When I’m around non-Spanish-speakers just a “hello” from afar will do and that is also because that’s how I’ve seen them do it. It has a lot to do with your comfort level also.  

(female, 27, Span)

Again observe the deictic pronoun them denoting non-Spanish speakers in (7). These examples show that informants are aware of norms, as in (6) “it’s very rare”, and (7) “it’s just the way it’s always been”. Example (7) raises two additional considerations: an awareness of potential for individual differences (“it has a lot to do with your comfort level also”), and a perceived threat to involvement face explicitly tied to the group as a whole (“it shows everyone you are either upset or uncomfortable with that person”). The latter comment suggests an orientation to collective face, as observed by researchers in other speech communities (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2008; Li Wei 2009; Matsumoto 1988; Nwoye 1989, 1992). An in-/out-group distinction along lines of involvement versus independence face-wants is further supported by the comments in examples (8) and (9):

(8) I think it may be perceived as rude to not greet someone in the Spanish bunch.  

(male, 37, Eng)
The Spanish heritage definitely expects a personal social greeting. At non-Spanish parties a person stays with the person they came with.

(male, 44, Eng)

Statements (8) and (9) suggest that each informant perceives an expectation of more versus less interaction depending on the social group, with (9) pointing to perception of a more individualistic norm in the non-Spanish group: “a person stays with the person they came with”. This finding prompts a return to García’s (2006) question regarding norms related to preference for positive (involvement) versus negative (independence) face. It appears that this informant perceives an expectation among Spanish speakers to acknowledge their involvement face via a personal greeting; the same participant, however, alludes to a different norm among non-Spanish speakers in which independence face should be respected and a greeting is not expected. That this informant perceives a greater expectation for using involvement strategies among linguistic or cultural in-group members should perhaps not be surprising; greetings and leave-takings may be a primary means of displaying in-group solidarity or unity. Research on acculturation has shown that Mexican-Americans tend to maintain a strong sense of family unity across generations, regardless of level of acculturation (e.g. Sabogal et al. 1987) and despite characteristic language loss by the third generation (Pew 2009). Considering the generation-wise language loss supported in the literature, the consistency in ratings across generations in this study could be interpreted as an indication of the primary role of culture over language. One informant did, however, specify that the language being spoken at a gathering (rather than the ethnicity of attendees) would impact his greeting and leave-taking behavior. Whether or not these factors can be teased apart, the results suggest a general in-group identity among these Mexican-Americans in Texas that goes beyond the extended family and maintains at least some social norms distinct from those of out-group members. The lack of significant differences in the quantitative analysis across language groups regarding the inclusion of Spanish-speaking friends as in-group members profoundly suggests the relationship may be shielded from acculturation in a similar fashion to family. In other words, speakers may maintain certain Mexican or Mexican-American cultural norms for expressing solidarity (e.g. via involvement strategies in greetings and leave-takings) with Spanish-speaking acquaintances, rather than adopting greeting and leave-taking rituals they perceive as Anglo or non-Hispanic-American. However, there was only a minor qualitative difference in the types of token greetings and leave-takings participants provided across the settings in the DCT. This pattern could be an artifact of the questionnaire methodology, which elicits decontextualized tokens of what participants might say in each of the settings. Nonetheless, the use of combined sub-types or strategies was
considerably more consistent in the extended family setting, suggesting a perceived norm requiring relatively higher face work with that group. This seems reasonable considering the importance of family unity cited in the literature (e.g. Garcia 1981; Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos 1979; Sabogal et al. 1987). Despite the relative familiarity among extended family members, it appears that a cultural norm calls for an overt expression of this unity. Additionally, use of physical contact was more frequently reported in the family and Spanish-speaking friend scenarios (and the type of contact was more uniform) than in the non-Spanish-speaking scenario. This pattern supports the notion of a broader cultural norm that includes Spanish speakers in one group and assigns non-Spanish speakers to another. Mexican-Americans have been shown to rely more on family and less on friends for emotional support than do Anglos (Keefe et al. 1979). While the present study does not address emotional support, it does suggest a pervasive sense of in-group solidarity among Mexican-Americans that includes Spanish-speaking friends. Perhaps the broader in-group solidarity expressed by informants suggests a mixture of Mexican-American and Anglo norms. This explanation is speculative, but warrants further study, especially given the unique intercultural style observed in several studies of heritage Spanish speakers (e.g. Pinto and Raschio 2007, 2008).

Returning to the research hypotheses, data from this study support Hypothesis 1, in part, indicating that bilingual Mexican-Americans in Texas may consider the use of greetings and leave-takings a social obligation, but only in the informal social settings of extended family and Spanish-speaking friends. Participants reported a greater expectation that the acts be delivered directly to each individual in these settings; in the context of non-Spanish-speaking friends they considered the absence of the speech acts somewhat acceptable. The study also supports Hypothesis 2, showing no correlation between participant language group and level of social obligation attributed to greetings and leave-takings. These findings show that, whether participants reported speaking primarily in English or Spanish with their parents, there was no significant difference in their expectations across the social settings. In addition, while the generational distribution of informants did not permit a statistical analysis, no generational patterns were observed. The results also supported Hypothesis 3, showing that the level of social obligation attributed to greetings and leave-takings varied according to social context, as follows, from highest to lowest: extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, and non-Spanish-speaking friends. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the difference between the first two settings was shown to be insignificant in the majority of participant responses. Finally, the results only partially supported Hypothesis 4, related to involvement strategies expressed by token greetings and leave-takings across the social settings. While the results did show the greatest variety and quantity of such strategies in the family setting, the other two social settings yielded less clear
results. One notable exception is the use of physical contact; this strategy was more
common in the Spanish-speaking friends setting, with the quantity of tokens and
type of physical contact more in line with the data provided for the family setting.
Again, the patterns uncovered here may be an artifact of the questionnaire meth-
odology, which elicits decontextualized tokens of what participants might say in
each of the settings.

This study has provided evidence that bilingual Mexican-Americans recog-
nize and ascribe to certain in- and out-group greeting and leave-taking routines
based on a perception of different politeness norms across sociolinguistic groups.
It motivates further research into their practice of shifting between these two
norms, both linguistically and non-verbally, and in determining whether other
personal perceptions (e.g. feelings of inclusion, depth of relationship) attached
to the speech acts shift accordingly or remain fixed to one norm or the other.
Insight into the latter could have central bearing on relationship dynamics be-
tween Mexican-Americans and in- versus out-group members. Specifically, future
research might investigate whether an individual’s departure without any form of
a farewell is perceived by others as a threat to solidarity on an individual or a group
level. This would further explore the tension between individual versus collective
face wants. Placencia’s (2008a) study of Quiteño society proposes that insistence
(that a friend or relative not leave) during a leave-taking attempt serves to show
how much the speaker appreciates the company of the addressee, thus functioning
as an involvement strategy. In a related study, Placencia (2008b, 337) observes that
some Quiteño guests “slip away” from social gatherings (i.e. avoid leave-taking) to
bypass anticipated insistence. The author comments that this avoidance strategy
serves to protect the host’s feelings while preserving the guest’s image in the eyes
of others and acting in accordance with the guest’s own wishes. This observation
reflects the complexity of involvement versus independence face considerations
and the difficulty in drawing conclusions without participant insight into natural
interactions. A combination of methodologies in future studies, for example, an
analysis of natural conversational data (e.g. Gumperz 1978) combined with par-
ticipant retrospective reports might better elucidate perceived norms and their
correlations to actual speech practices.

5. Conclusions

This study has identified phenomena that may have bearing on current theories
dealing with both acculturation and the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings.
First, it has supported the sense of solidarity among Mexican-American extended
families recognized in the literature, as well as the tendency for solidarity to persist
across multiple generations, as expressed through greeting and leave-taking practices. In addition, the study suggests that greeting and leave-taking practices with both extended family members and Spanish-speaking friends may be shielded from acculturation to a dominant society. At the very least, it offers evidence that certain politeness norms associated with presence versus absence of greetings and leave-takings are maintained across heritage speaker language groups and are applied to both family and Spanish-speaking friends. While participants’ perception of social obligation for using individual greetings varied across all three social settings, their assessment of five specific scenarios of greeting and leave-taking usage revealed an intriguing pattern: there was no significant difference in perception of social acceptability across the *family* and *Spanish-speaking friend* settings; there was, however, a significant difference between these two settings and the *non-Spanish speaking friend* setting. This finding, supported by participant comments, suggests an in-group delineation that reaches beyond family along cultural, ethnic and/or linguistic lines. It lays fertile ground for future research seeking to isolate factors that govern in-group identity and associated behaviors. These observations also suggest that greetings and leave-takings may be an integral part of the culture as a method of expressing in-group solidarity to the extent that they show little variation and change. Notably, however, participants demonstrated a greater use of combined politeness strategies in their greetings and leave-takings with extended family members. This tendency may suggest that speakers perceive expressing solidarity with family members as somewhat more important than doing so with other in-group members.

References


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