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Survey on Conversational Strategies in Catalan

Abstract

A semi-expert interview on communicative strategies (SICS) with 23 informants shows that Catalans use a semi-direct communicative style that may vary according to the following variables: whether the interlocutors know each other, the age of the interlocutors and social conventions. The age and social conventions are considered important variables when choosing the address-form; however, the switch from V-forms to T-forms is carried out relatively fast except in some conventionalised contexts. Small talk is regarded as reserved for conversations with acquaintances, not with friends or relatives; weather is the most common small talk topic and religion and politics are usually avoided. Catalans normally identify offers from people they do not know very well as "ostensible invitations". They turn invitations and offers down with a direct but respectful answer. Very direct and direct expressions are also used to give arguments, show disagreement or to end a conversation. As a conclusion, Catalans follow the maxim "Talk respectfully but not too much to strangers, meaty conversations are reserved to the family and real friends". In Grice's terms, Catalans respect the maxims of manner and quantity; in Brown & Levinson's terms, Catalans usually use bold-on-record strategies and positive politeness strategies.

Sommaire

Un « semi-expert interview on communicative strategies » (SICS) fait avec 23 personnes montre que les Catalans ont un style de communication demi-direct dépendant des variables suivantes : la connaissance et le degré de connaissance des interlocuteurs, leur âge et les conventions de la société. Ce sont l'âge et les conventions de la société qui sont considérés comme des variables importantes quand il s'agit de choisir la forme d'adresse ; pourtant, on passe assez vite des formes de V à des formes de T, avec l'exception dans quelques contextes conventionnalisés. Le Small Talk est vu comme stratégie de politesse parmi les connaissances, pourtant pas parmi les amis et les proches, avec qui on parle, en règle générale, du temps, en évitant des sujets tels que la religion ou la politique. Les Catalans interprètent des invitations d'inconnus comme formule de politesse. Ils déclinent directement les invitations et les offres. De même s'expriment-ils de façon directe ou même très directe quand il s'agit de discussions, du désaccord ou de comment terminer une conversation. Pour conclure, on peut constater que les Catalans suivent la maxime suivante : « Parle avec du respect mais en quantité modérée avec des étrangers, car les conversations de fond sont réservées à la famille et aux amis. » En appliquant la terminologie de *Grice*, on peut dire que les Catalans respectent les maximes de la manière et de la quantité. En appliquant celle de *Brown & Levinson*, les Catalans utilisent généralement des stratégies de « bold-on-record » et de politesse positive.

Zusammenfassung

Ein "semi-expert interview on communicative strategies" (SICS), das mit 23 Befragten durchgeführt wurde, zeigt, dass Katalanen einen halb-direkten Kommunikationsstil haben, der von folgenden Variablen abhängt: ob sich die Gesprächspartner kennen und wie gut, das Alter eben dieser und gesellschaftliche Konventionen. Hierbei werden sowohl das Alter als auch die gesellschaftlichen Konventionen als wichtige Faktoren angesehen, wenn es um die Wahl der formalen Anrede geht, wobei jedoch relativ schnell die T-Form anstelle der V-Form verwendet wird, außer in einigen konventionalisierten Kontexten. Small talk wird als Höflichkeitsstrategie zwischen Bekannten, nicht aber zwischen Freunden und Verwandten angesehen, wobei hierbei normalerweise über das Wetter gesprochen wird und Religion oder Politik als Themen lieber vermieden werden. Katalanen interpretieren Einladungen von ihnen unbekannt Personen als Höflichkeitsfloskel. Einladungen und Angebote lehnen Katalanen mit einer direkten Antwort ab. Ebenso drücken sie sich in Diskussionen, wenn sie nicht zustimmen oder um ein Gespräch zu beenden, direkt oder sogar sehr direkt aus. Abschließend ist festzustellen, dass Katalanen nach der folgenden Maxime leben: "Sprich respektvoll aber in Maßen mit Fremden, denn gehaltvolle Gespräche sind der Familie und den Freunden vorbehalten." In Gricescher Terminologie wären die Katalanen Menschen, die vor allem die Maxime von "manner" und "quantity" respektierten; nach Brown und Levinson verwenden Katalanen in der Regel positive Höflichkeit und Bold-on-record-Strategien.

Resumen

Esta entrevista semi-experta sobre estrategias comunicativas (SICS) muestra que los catalanes al comunicarse usan un estilo directo que puede variar según el nivel de conocimiento de los interlocutores, su edad y las convenciones sociales. Al elegir un pronombre para referirse al interlocutor, la edad y las convenciones se consideran variables a tener muy en cuenta; sin embargo, el cambio de pronombres formales a informales se lleva a cabo relativamente rápido excepto en casos donde existe alguna tradición de usar un pronombre específico. El *small talk* se considera conversaciones de cortesía a mantener con conocidos, no con familiares y amigos; el tiempo es el tema de *small talk* preferido y en este tipo de conversaciones se evita hablar de religión y política. Los catalanes identifican como “ostensible invitations” las invitaciones provenientes de personas que no conocen muy bien y las rechazan con expresiones directas pero respetuosas. Las expresiones muy directas y directas también se usan para dar una opinión, mostrar desacuerdo o para terminar una conversación. En resumen, los catalanes siguen la máxima “habla a los extraños con respeto a los extraños, las conversaciones de verdad se tienen con la familia y amigos”. En términos de Grice, los catalanes respetan las máximas de modo y cantidad; en términos de Brown y Levinson, usan estrategias de tipo *bold-on-record* y *positive politeness*.

1. Background

2008 is the European year of intercultural dialogue. As Europe is becoming more culturally diverse, intercultural dialogue has an increasingly important role to play in fostering European identity and citizenship. This project is related to the European year of intercultural dialogue and it is part of the ECSTRA project (European Communication STRategies) conducted by Joachim Grzega. This project is available on the ELiX Wiki via <http://www.eurolinguistix.com>. The main goal of this project is to collect components for a European “language guide”, focusing especially on pragmatic differences and similarities between different languages and nations: greeting, addressing, small talk, giving arguments, making and turning down an offer and ending a conversation. This language guide could be used to improve communication not only between people speaking different languages, but also between people speaking the same language but coming from different nations. The importance of this projects lies in the fact that pragmatic mistakes often disturb communication more than grammar mistakes. However, in research and language teaching the focus is mostly on grammar and vocabulary, while the use of language is pushed into the background.

This project seemed a nice way to start analysing and describing the communication strategies used in Catalan, in the Spanish areas where Catalan is spoken. As part of the ECSTRA project, the semi-expert interview on communicative strategies (SICS) was the method used to gather the necessary data (cf. Grzega/Schöner 2008). The SICS interview is a questionnaire designed for being filled in by language and culture (semi-)experts who should adopt a general point of view: this means that the informants do not answer according to their personal behaviour but they describe acceptable behaviour in their nation in each of the situations that the questionnaire presents. This is a new way of analysing communicative strategies, since research carried out up to now asked for the personal behaviour of the informants. Asking about the typical and untypical behaviour without concentrating on the personal behaviour allows the researcher to gather more general data. The selection of the informants also helps on this aspect; as mentioned before, (semi-)experts on the language and culture of each community are the informants used in this project, e.g. philology students and language teachers, because of their professional skill to generalize and describe the most common behaviour.

Earlier studies on communication strategies in the Iberian Peninsula were based on linguistic structures out of context. However, researchers have incorporated into their analyses actual language use in specific contexts, examining speakers’ interactions and their perceptions of politeness through recorded conversations, role plays or discourse completion tests (cf. Blum-

Kulka et al. 1986). Even if parts of their researches have also been carried out in Catalan speaking areas, these studies have focused on the Spanish language. However, it is interesting to mention that these studies “admit the existence of sociocultural variation” among the different Spanish varieties themselves due to different tolerance for directness in speech acts, different markers of tentativeness and different levels of mitigation in areas where other languages are also spoken (Iglesias Recuero 2001: 31). This points out the need to study separately the communicational strategies used in languages and the cultures in areas where other languages are spoken. Thus, this article tries to analyse the communicative strategies of the Catalan speaking communities.

The Catalan language belongs to the western Neo-Latin languages and is spoken in areas of four different states: Spain, France, Andorra and Italy (Casanovas 2005). In Spain it is spoken as a co-official language in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia, it is spoken as a non-official language in parts of Aragón and Murcia. In Andorra Catalan is the only official language of the principality. It is also spoken as a non-official language in the county, or *département*, of Pyrénées Orientales in France. In the Italian city of Alguer Catalan is also spoken as a non-official language. Its social status and extension in the different communities varies a lot; therefore, there are places where it is in danger of disappearing, and places where it has a fairly high social status (Vallverdú 2007: 154). According to official data, 9,118,882 people speak Catalan, thus, this language occupies the 88th position in the Top 100 languages by Population Ranking made by Ethnologue (Generalitat de Catalunya 2008¹). However, Catalan is still regarded as a minority language. As a minority language, much effort has been put into the language policies with the aim of normalising its use: the Language Normalisation Law (Llei de normalizació lingüística) 1983 and the Language Policy Law (Llei de política lingüística) 1998 (Vallverdú 2007:152). Quite a lot has also been done with regard to lexicology and grammar description and prescription, considered as the two pillars of linguistics by some linguists like Yngve (1995: 50), but up to now not much has been done on communicative strategies. Thus, this project is one of the first research studies on the communication strategies used in Catalan.

2. Data Collection

2.1. Distribution of the Questionnaire

Different methods were used in the distribution of the SICS questionnaire in order to gather the data: a) some questionnaires were given to informants personally and they were asked to fill them in, b) an electronic version of the questionnaire was created using the surface available at www.esurveypro.com, c) personal and collective e-mails were sent with the questionnaire attached as a *.doc file and the addressees were asked to fill it in and send it back to me, d) announcements with the address of the electronic version and the *.doc questionnaire attached were posted in the home page of two Catalan speaking universities (www.upf.edu and www.ub.es), e) university professors were contacted and asked to forward it to their students, f) announcements with the address of the electronic version of the questionnaire were posted in three different forums on the Catalan: WordReference, Geogebra and Emagister².

In order to attract attention and keep the e-mail brief and to the point, the e-mails and postings were not longer than 15 lines, they were all written in Catalan and contained encouraging

¹ <http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/Llengcat/menuitem.df5fba67cac781e7a129d410b0c0e1a0/vgnextoid=fe8c949b22741110VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=fe8c949b22741110VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=detall&contentid=65502b4d4bc87110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD>

² The thread in Emagister is still available at http://foros.emagister.com/tema-projeu_europeu_destrategies_comunicative-13453-684306-1.htm

sentences such as “Help me to make Catalan popular throughout Europe!” The aim of distributing the questionnaire in different ways was to contact both informants I knew and informants whom I did not know. Furthermore, the different methods used, allowed gathering data from informants with different motivations as regards this research and language in general: some of the students who wrote back to me did so because their professors asked them to and did it as a compulsory task (this fact can be deduced from sentences such as “Professor X has told us to send this questionnaire filled in” written in their e-mails).

In the end 23 questionnaires were collected. It is not a high number taking into account the number of people that received some kind of announcement on the survey. Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that all the informants that filled the questionnaire in were native Catalan speakers who studied or were studying the Catalan, this may be presumed since, even if some did not specify their studies in the questionnaire, all the announcements claimed explicitly that the questionnaire should be filled in by native Catalan speakers who studied or were studying Catalan. Due to the fact that this questionnaire did not ask about their personal behaviour, but about the general or normal behaviour in their culture, their answers allow building up a first impression on conversation strategies in Catalan speaking areas. The informants come from different Catalan-speaking autonomous communities in Spain, but there is a stronger representation of the city of Barcelona and surroundings with 15 informants. 14 of the informants were females, 9 males and they were aged between 19 and 27, the average age being 22.5.

2.2. Problems Encountered

The most successful method to get questionnaires filled in was the personal e-mail with the attached questionnaire, since all the people contacted by personal e-mails were friends of mine and they filled in the questionnaire as a personal favour. On the other hand, the least successful method taking into account the number of people that it reached were the posts on university home pages: this method provided me with 7 completed questionnaires, but this is an insignificant number taking into account that the announcement must have reached every translation and philology student at the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. The fact that my posts and e-mails were treated as spam has to be taken into account in order to explain this situation. The same reason may explain that not one answer ever arrived from institutions working on the Catalan language (except universities) or from people who received collective e-mails.

There were also problems derived from the questionnaire itself. The SICS questionnaire was distributed in English, and the language used seems to have affected negatively the data-gathering process. Even if the informants were explicitly told to feel free to answer the questionnaire in Catalan, all the questionnaires filled in were totally or partly answered in English. One can presume that informants felt uncomfortable filling in an English questionnaire in Catalan: some informants might feel insecure when reading/writing in English, the extra effort to be made might have pushed back a number of potential informants, or they might simply could have felt weird when they were asked about their Catalan conversational strategies in English. In some questionnaires the quality of the answers was not the best due to lack of attention or commodity: some questionnaires had no explanation to any of the answers provided, the electronic version of the questionnaire was visited by a higher number of people than the number of people who actually filled it in; among the informants who filled the electronic questionnaire in, not all of them answered it until the end; in those questions where examples of possible answers were provided, a relevant number of informants limited their answers to the examples underlining them or citing their number, this makes the interpretation of the results easier, but might well also

leave out some original answers. These are all practical aspects worth mentioning since they should be taken into account in further research projects.

3. Results

3.1. Addressing

All the informants distinguished the common address pronouns in Catalan and explained the differences between them. Grzega (2006: 217) points out as a characteristic of the European cultural area the existence of a grammatical duplicate of informal and formal pronouns. In Catalan there exist 3 different address pronouns; two of them fit perfectly in Brown and Gilman's 1960 classification of T-form and V-forms: *tú* and *vostè*. The first one is the informal address pronoun and the latter one is the formal address pronoun, which is grammatically a third person singular pronoun. Apart from these two, there exists a third one: *vós*. Some of the informants described it as more informal than *vostè* while others put it between *tú* and *vostè*. The reason for this disagreement seems to be a historical change of its use. According to the description of the Catalan pronouns of the Institute of Catalan Studies (Institut d'Estudis Catalans 2002³), the official organisation that regulates the use of the Catalan language, *vós* is the traditional V-form even if the form *vostè* has almost completely supplanted it. Therefore, this research will regard both *vostè* and *vós* as V-forms. Even if the pronoun *vós* can be used in everyday language, it is mainly used in very formal and written contexts (like legal/administrative documents) and in contexts that in the past were considered formal and nowadays are considered informal, for example, as some informants have pointed out for this project, conversations with elder relatives. One of the informants described its use with these clarifying words: "a pronoun that was used to express respect to someone you already knew, but it was never used with a stranger. I still use it with my grandparents, but there is very few people who use it and it's getting lost". It seems to be the case that on the one hand, some informants perceive this pronoun as an informal pronoun because it is also used to address family members; on the other hand, other informants perceive this pronoun as a very formal pronoun because it is used in legal/administrative documents.

The Institut d'Estudis Catalans (2002) makes reference to another formal address pronoun, namely the first person plural: *nos*. This pronoun is considered very formal and usually used only by politicians, royal people and translation of popes' speeches; so it is not used in everyday language.

These are analyses of answers gathered in Item #1 of the questionnaire:

- Nowadays children address their parents with the informal pronoun *tú*. Some informants point out that adults in their 40s and 50s and older still address their parents using the pronoun *vós*. This is an example of a context of use that the pronoun *vós* has lost over time.
- Most of the informants agreed that children also address older relatives with the informal pronoun *tú*. However, some point out that depending on the age of the addressed relative the pronouns *vostè* and *vós* could also be used (e.g. *vós* - children to grandparents, but not to aunts and uncles; *vostè* – same context for people in their 40s or 50s to address their older relatives).
- According to the impressions collected, colleagues at work would use the T-form *tú* to address each other, since they are supposed to know each other.
- The T-form is seen as a preferred form by an employee to his or her employer by a slight majority of the informants; but in cases where no personal relationship exists between the two of them, the form *vostè* is also seen as quite common.

³ <http://www.iecat.net/institucio/seccions/Filologica/gramatica/default.asp>

- When an employer addresses an employee, he or she usually follows the same criteria: *tú* is the most common pronoun except in cases where there is no personal relationship.
- Nowadays children usually address their teachers using the T-form; the V-forms (especially *vostè*) can also be used depending on the age of the teacher and on the rules of the school itself (e.g.: private schools).
- Nowadays teachers usually address their pupils using the T-form, however, the V-form can also be used depending on the rules of the school. In general, pupils and teachers usually use the same pronoun to address each other.
- When referring to administration officials the formal pronoun *vostè* is usually chosen.
- Among business partners most of the informants see the choice between the formal *tú* and the informal *vostè* as depending on how well the partners know each other.
- Clerks always use the V-form *vostè* to address customers.
- Customers always use the V-form *vostè* to address clerks. Shops and stores seem to be a prototypical context where the V-form is used.
- People address strangers in the street with the pronouns *tú* or *vostè* depending on the age of the addressee, but the T-form is seen as generally more frequent.

It is also worth pointing that in a conversation the interlocutors use the same pronoun to address each other (except for the pronoun *vós*, which is restricted to some specific contexts and, if spoken, is only used by the younger interlocutor to address the older interlocutor) and that no titles are used in any of the contexts described. As a conclusion, the social position of the interlocutors or the level of formality of the conversation does not seem to be a variable to choose between the different pronouns. Instead, the variables to be taken into account are the following: the tradition of certain pronouns in specific situations, whether the interlocutors know each other or not and the age of the addressee.

3.2. Answering the Telephone

As Hopper (1992) pointed out, different cultures sometimes use different telephone-answering expressions. Item #2 tries to analyse the expressions used when answering the telephone in different contexts.

After checking the answers provided by the informants, it could be said that there is no fixed form to answer the phone at home; in this part of the questionnaire I got 8 different forms that could be used in this context: *Digui?/ Digui'm?/ Sí?/ Qui demana?/ Mani'm?/ Qui és?/ Qui hi ha?/ Si digui?*. However, some forms seem to be more popular than others, the most cited ones are *Digui?* and *Sí?*; these expressions literally mean “Tell me?” and “Yes?”. Another very frequent form is *Mani'm?* which literally means “Order me?”. It is worth mentioning that the forms containing a verb are inflected in the third person singular, this means that the non-expressed pronoun is *vós* or *vosté*, the formal addressing pronouns.

On the other hand, when asked about telephone-answering methods in a completely different context, the informants provided totally different answers. In the workplace there are strict rules as regards how to answer the telephone. After comparing the answers provided, this is the resulting formula to answer the phone at work: name of the company + greeting + name of the person speaking + offer phrase. According to some informants, mentioning all the components or only some would depend on the type of job, so sometimes only the name of the company and the name of the person would be expressed. However, all the informants agreed in two points: that the name of the company should be said first, and that the order shown in the formula should be respected. According to the study by Prunés and Solé Cardamons 2002, that the Direcció General de Política Lingüística (Office of Language

Policy) has published as official information, Catalan is not very extended in the economic sector; however, since the Language Policy Law was passed it has become more and more popular. Nowadays the task where Catalan has most presence in the economy sector is exactly phone calls: in Catalonia 66.1% of the phone calls are answered in this language (Prunés/Solé Carmadons 2002⁴). However, this sector has adopted English terminology and international conventions (Rovira 2005: 249). Our project seems to verify that conventional expressions to answer the phone have been translated almost word-for-word into Catalan.

If we compare both strategies, we can see that both strategies follow the “distribution rule for first utterances” introduced by Schegloff (1968: 378): *the snawerer speaks first*. Then, the caller is supposed to answer, following an *ababab* conversation sequence formula. In a private context the expressions are “skewed” in the direction of the caller-identification problem, since the answerer expects the caller to identify him or herself; this is the second observation of telephone identification methods made by Schegloff (1979: 65); on the other hand, the way phone-calls are answered at work indicates that in this case the answerer’s objective is to be recognised by the caller.

3.3. Small Talk

Small talk is regarded as a polite conversation about trivial and uncontroversial matters. Small talk has received sporadic treatment in linguistic literature, starting with the seminal work of Malinowski (1923), who defined “phatic communion” as “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”. More recent works have further characterized small talk by describing the contexts in which it occurs, topics typically used, and even grammars which define its surface form in certain domains (cf. Laver 1975, Cheepen 1988, Schneider 1988), this kind of information is being used to build conversational guides like the ECSTRA project or to create conversational interface agents (Blickmore, T. / Cassell, J. 2005⁵). For this article we will consider small talk as a conversation, or comments, expressed with the objective of starting a conversation or to put off a comment of a wish or similar (Grzega 2006: 226). This project tries to characterise small talk in Catalan speaking areas by describing the context where it occurs, topics typically used and taboos.

On item #3 informants had to point out the places or contexts where small talk is usually carried out; the most typical places to engage in small talk seem to be the elevator (9 informants), and public transport (8 informants). On the other hand, no informant mentioned that small talk is carried out during a meal (example provided in the question), instead, 3 informants explained that “small talk is not done during a meal because you usually eat with people you know”. This shows that in Catalan speaking communities small talk is not done with friends, relatives or people one knows well, or at least that these conversations are not regarded as small talk. On the other hand, 11 informants agreed that the toilet is not a common place to start small talk, no other place was mentioned by more than 5 informants; thus, the toilet is the prototypical place where it is more common to remain silent.

In item #4 all the informants agreed that weather is the most common small talk topic; 12 informants also mentioned sports. The other topics proposed, politics, travelling or family for example, seem to be quite common as well, but the informants that mentioned these topics made clear that the topic one chooses depends on how well one knows the other person. On the other hand, according to the results of item #5, religion and politics seem taboo topics in Catalan speaking communities (mentioned by 12 informants) as well as money (mentioned by 8 informants). Some stated that there is no taboo topic as long as you know how to handle the

⁴ <http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm02tardor/catalana/cecot.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.lcc.gatech.edu/~mateas/nidocs/BickmoreCassell.pdf>

issue; talking about religion without making any critic or criticising politicians in general is accepted according to the explanations of 3 informants.

Item #6 shows another interesting result: 18 informants agreed that in private conversations less small talk is done than in business conversations. This might be linked to the fact that small talk is not regarded as a usual conversation type to do with people one knows from before, as some explained on item #3.

3.4. Giving Arguments

Since presenting arguments in a conversation can be done differently in different cultures, item #7 tries to analyse the strategies that are usually used in Catalan. Each informant was able to choose one or more options among the possible answers provided; thus, in the end I got 54 positive marks, or ticks, among all the informants. In order to interpret the results, I counted each positive answer as a point. The most frequent strategy to give arguments happened to be the following one:

1: you say your opinion – 2: you give reasons related to the issue itself

This option got 22 positive points, the 41% of the total amount of points. The other points are distributed quite evenly among the other answers. Having chosen this answer hints that in the Catalan culture direct strategies are the most typical ones used when giving arguments.

However, some informants commented that the strategy would depend on the context and the level of closeness to the addressee. This comment happened to be the most frequent comment made on all the questions, and it is linked to the idea of *confiança*. This term, mentioned by many of the informants in some of their comments, points out that the closeness to others is exactly what allows people to speak and act freely and openly with others, showing the individual as integrated into the group. Similar conclusions on politeness have been drawn in researches on Spanish (Hickey 2005: 318-329).

3.5. Making and Turning Down an Offer

Question #8 of the questionnaire aims at analysing how invitations are perceived in Catalan speaking areas. With the introduction of the term “ostensible invitations” Isaacs/Clark (1990) made clear that there are invitations which are intended to demonstrate politeness or friendliness, without any intention of making a real invitation.

10 of the informants said that one would reasonably interpret an invitation or an offer as an honest invitation; 6 admitted one would reasonably interpret this invitation as a politeness phrase; and the other 7 stated one would reasonably interpret it as an honest invitation or a politeness phrase depending on the person making the offer. The two latter groups show their awareness of the fact that there are invitations that are made as polite or friendly expressions. This shows that even if most of the informants said they would interpret an invitation as an honest invitation, the informants that at least consider the possibility of an invitation to be an “ostensible invitation” are more (58%). This shows that in Catalan speaking areas there are invitations made just to show friendliness and politeness.

The next item in the questionnaire tries to find out the most frequent or common means used to turn down an offer or an invitation in a polite way. This item presents 8 possible answers and a 9th line where the informants may suggest another method used to turn an invitation down. The question of the item in the paper and *.doc version of the questionnaire also presented a suggestion of how the informants should present their answer: it suggested answering using grades as in a Likert scale and/or indicating whether it is informal or formal.

However, the use of modal verbs in this explanation seems to have misled some of the informants: 13 informants who answered the questionnaire in paper or in *.doc format did not follow this request. Most of them marked the most frequent means by simply underlining it or putting it in bold. As a result, only 10 informants gave information on the frequency of one or more examples. No other mean was proposed on the 9th open question. Due to the different nature of the answers provided, I used a two-step method to interpret the data:

- In order to draw a general picture from all the questionnaires, the answers were classified as positive (answers that indicated that method is used regardless of their frequency or context) or negative (answers marked with a “no”; unmarked answers or answers marked with “never”). This allowed classifying the data as if it was a YES/NO questionnaire. Each positive answer counted as 1 point whereas negative answers were counted as 0 points. Thus, the sum of the points of each example indicates the **acceptability** or **plausibility** of use indicated by the informants.
- In order to analyse more precisely the **frequency** of use of the methods that got a positive answer, the answers with frequency references were analysed. Four frequency-levels were built and each level was converted into points from 4 to 1: very frequent: 4 points; frequent: 3 points; sometimes: 2 points; rare: 1 point (Attention: only 10 questionnaires used here; among these, most did not have a frequency reference in every example. Thus, after adding all the points for each strategy, I calculated a ratio of points divided by the number of commentators for each strategy.

	Acceptability	Frequency
(2) a vague excuse like “No, I don’t have time.” or “No, I have something else to do.”	20	3.4
(3) a phrase like “(I don’t know yet) I’ll let you know”, though you will surely not contact the person again	19	3.6
(6) a concrete brief and invented excuse (if there is no concrete true excuse)	14	3.1
(5) a concrete brief and true excuse (if there is one)	12	3.3
(4) a phrase like “I will have to think about it”, though you won’t surely contact the person again	12	3.4
(1) a direct phrase that means “No, I don’t feel like going there/doing X.”	12	1.3
(7) a concrete long and true excuse (if there is one)	12	1.3
(8) a concrete long and invented excuse (if there is no concrete true excuse)	9	1.1

The level of frequency and acceptability show that, on the one hand, patterns (2) and (3) are the most plausible and the most frequent ones; on the other hand, patterns (1), (7) and (8) are the least plausible and least frequent ones.

3.6 Expressing Disagreement

A threat to a person’s s face has been called **face-threatening act**. **Face**, a term introduced by Goffman (1967), refers to the image people want to present about themselves. Face can be positive or negative: **positive face** is the desire of all speakers to be approved of by their listeners, while **negative face** is the desire of all speakers to be unobstructed in their autonomy.

The next item of the questionnaire tries to explain how a face-threatening act is handled. In order to do so, the questionnaire presents a situation where a speaker has to express his or her disagreement. Disagreement indicates a contradiction or negative evaluation of a person’s

face; thus, expressing disagreement can threaten the receiver's positive face. Due to the fact that the answers provided in this item presented the same problems as in item #9, the same two-step method to interpret the data was used. Again in this case, the frequency is calculated from the information provided by a small number of informants (9 informants), which, at the same time, did not give this information for each example.

	Acceptability	Frequency
(1) a direct "No"	14	2.0
(3) a phrase like "(No), I disagree.", "(No), I have a different opinion."	14	3.1
(6) a phrase like "Yes, I see what you mean, but I think that ..."	12	3.3
(7) a phrase like "Yes, I see what you mean, but wouldn't you also think that ..."	12	2.4
(11) people just make a disapproving look	11	2.0
(9) people just shake their heads	10	1.2
(8) people just say nothing at all and remain silent	9	1.3
(10) people just smile	9	1.8
(2) never the word "No"	8	3.0
(4) a phrase like "I think you have to think about this again."	4	1.4
(5) a phrase like "I think we have to think about this again."	3	3.1

As the table shows, strategies (1), (3) and (6) are the most plausible and frequent ones; strategies (4) and (5) are the least chosen ones (even if the 2 of the 3 informants that chose strategy (5) marked it as frequent). This clearly shows that direct answers are preferred when expressing disagreement. However, some informants pointed out that the strategy used would depend on the relationship or *confiança* with the interlocutor, meaning that the allowance to speak more freely shows also integration.

3.7 Ending a Conversation

An expression used to show one's wish to end a conversation could also be seen as another threat to the receiver's positive face. In this case the SICS questionnaire provides certain possible patterns that could be used to show that you want to end a conversation and asks the informant to choose and comment on the most usual one in his or her culture. This item formulates the same kind of question as in item #9 and #10, and again, the same problem occurs: most of the informants did not make any kind of comment, and the ones that did, did not comment on every example provided. Thus, the same analysis-method as in item #9 and item #10 was used.

	Acceptability	Frequency
(3) a phrase like "I have to go now, I have something else to do"	16	3.1
(4) a phrase like "It's already late now"	13	3.5
(5) a phrase like "I don't want to bother you any longer"	12	3.3
(7) say what they have to do now (if there really is something)	12	2.6
(8) invent a reason	9	1.3
(1) a simple "Ok, good-bye now"	7	2.5
(6) a phrase like "We've already talked for too long"	7	1.5

(2) a phrase like “I want to go now”	4	1.0
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In this case the acceptability and frequency numbers indicate that strategy (3) and (4) would be the most preferred over the other strategies; again, we are facing a quite direct expression. On the other hand, (6) and (2) are the least preferred ones; some informants pointed out that these same examples are “rude”. It must also be said that according to the few informants who provided comments on this question I draw the following conclusion: the closer you are to the person, the more direct you can be without any fear of being impolite. Thus, this shows again that Catalans show closeness and integration—linked to positive politeness—by using direct strategies.

Finally, item #10 analyses the reaction the informant expects after saying the sentence or sentences on item #9. Two possible answers were provided: “the other person immediately lets you go” and “the other person tries to persuade you to stay”. 17 out of 23 informants chose the first one; 5 informants marked both as possible but marked the second one as “rare” or made comments such as “only pests”; only one informant chose the second option. This shows that in Catalonia the answers chosen in item #9 are seen as direct or key-expressions and that the addressee is expected to act according to it.

4. Summary

Taking into account the data gathered for this project, we could say Catalans follow the maxim “Talk respectfully but not too much to strangers, meaty conversations are reserved to the family and real friends”; as shown in the analysis of different questions, directness is also a quality of common conversations in Catalan. In Grice’s terms, Catalans respect the maxims of manner and quantity, being brief but clear; in Brown and Levinson’s terms, Catalans usually use bold-on-record strategies and negative politeness.

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