1   Introduction

This chapter is designed to present this study. It is divided into five sections. Section 1.1 explains how this study was conceived. Section 1.2 presents the three research questions that will be investigated in this study. Section 1.3 provides an overview of this study. Section 1.4 discusses the study's significance and a chapter summary is provided in Section 1.5.

1.1   Statement of the Problem

After graduating from college in the United States, I decided to go to Mexico to study for a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics. I had a good level of Spanish since it had been my major in college, but did not have much practice in its use since there were not many native Spanish people with whom I could interact in the United States. In Mexico, I learned to use Spanish in real social situations. This included pragmatic use such as forms of address.   I had been taught that in Spanish, the second person formal form is *usted* and the second person informal form is *tú*. As a young woman, I was used to being referred to as *tú* by almost everyone. There was no need to be formal with me because I was young and the majority of people with whom I interacted were also students, which gave us kind of a bond and informal relationship. There are many complexities about form of address use, but what I understood was that people rarely used *usted* when talking with me.

After a year in the graduate program, I began teaching English classes at the same university. Being only twenty-three at the time, I was a fairly young graduate student but an even younger graduate teaching assistant. One of the first days of classes, something

happened that seemed really odd to me. After class, one of my students came up to my desk to ask me a question. What surprised me was that when he asked the question, he referred to me as *usted*. I wondered why he was calling me *usted*. I assumed that my students were going to be my friends, have an informal relationship and call me *tú* just as all the other students at the university had done before. No one else had called me *usted*, much less another fellow student. I began to think that it was because I was their teacher and that they were going to identify me now as their teacher and not as a fellow student. But then another student came to talk to me and he referred to me using *tú*. I began to pay attention to what form of address the students used with me. I noticed not only that some used *usted* and some used *tú*, but some also alternated between the two and never settled on just one form of address to use with me. This really surprised me. Why was there no consensus about what form of address to use with me? Why did some use *usted*, some use *tú,* and some use both? This question and my confusion in general about the forms of address that my students were using with me prompted me to choose this apparent dilemma as the topic for my thesis.

There are groups of language users which are called speech communities. Speech communities are defined by a specific characteristic which all members of that community must have to belong to the community. This topic will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2. Individuals belong to multiple speech communities and when these speech communities conflict, it is often difficult for the speaker to decide which form of address should be used. My research project stems from this apparent dilemma which is described above. I believe that the form of address that my students use when they are

talking with me is problematic for them because I belong to multiple speech communities, some of which oerlap with theirs and some of which are distinct.

In school, my students all belong to similar speech communities which are defined by the following attributes: Mexican nationality, student status, late-teens to early-twenties age group, and English learners. The only main characteristic in which they differ is sex. The problematic issue which they need to address each time they speak with me in Spanish is into which speech community they place me. I will explain why this is problematic.

First of all, during the time period in which the study took place, I was twenty-three and twenty-four years old, so I was approximately the same age as my students. I was also a student (albeit a graduate student) at the same university where they were studying. These two characteristics placed me into two of the same speech communities as my students and would normally prompt the use of the informal *tú* form of address. I also shared the sex speech community with the female students.

However, since I was their professor I also belonged to the professor speech community which has a higher honorific status than the student community. It is also possible that students wish to express respect and use the negative politeness strategy with the formal form of address to show respect for their professor. This alone makes the choice between the informal and formal forms of address quite confusing.

However, their decision becomes even more unclear because since I am from the United States, I also belong to the foreigner-in-Mexico speech community. This means that my relationship with the students is not as close as if I were in the Mexican speech community. The added distance in the relationship makes it more likely that I would be

addressed with the formal address form used for relationships which are not close. As seen above, the students' choice of which form of address they will use with me is very complex with many factors to take into consideration.

Reasons for using forms of address have been the topic of research done by many linguists. Saville-Troike (1982), Williams (1992), Fairclough (1989) and Labov (2001) believe that forms of address are chosen because of the relative relationships or the perceived relationships between the speakers. Individuals can use forms of address to implement or maintain power relationships, social distance or solidarity and also to use politeness strategies. Fairclough (1989) states that forms of address are also dependent on setting.

In this study, I want to show that speech community membership is a factor in deciding what form of address the students use with me. This has also been mentioned by the Kretzenbacher, Clyne and Schüpbach study (2006) mentioned in section 2.3.5. I believe that, while other factors such as cultural concepts of how to use politeness strategies, setting, topics of conversations, upbringing of the individual and type of relationship affect the form of address used, speech community membership is also one of the principal factors in this choice. Membership not only provides speakers with a reason to choose one form of address over the other, but it also changes, defines and maintains the speaker and interlocutor's identity in some of the other factors mentioned above. Politeness strategies are affected by membership because they are based on the speaker and interlocutor using recognition of the desired identity of himself and the other in social negotiation strategies. The upbringing of the individual does not change when

he[1] interacts with someone later in his life but the type of person with whom he interacts has an effect on how the upbringing is executed. For example, if someone was raised to always speak to teachers using the formal form of address, this custom would be carried out regardless of whether the teacher is sixty years old or twenty years old. Others may have been taught to use the formal form with only elderly people and would not use one's status as a teacher to decide which form of address to use. Social relationships are also affected by membership in speech communities because the relationship that a speaker desires with another is due to the characteristics of the other person, which are what give that person membership in speech communities with those same characteristics. I believe that when the speech community membership of a person poses a conflict to the speaker, these other factors are used to shift his decision to one form of address or another. In the case of this study, if a student had been taught to use the formal form of address with teachers but to use the informal form of address with someone of the same age and I am a member of both of these speech communities, then the setting might help the student decide which form to use. If the student is in my class, he would identify me more with the teacher speech community; however, if we meet outside of school, he would identify me more as a co-member of his own age speech community.

1.2   Research Questions

This research revolves around the question of how the participants' awareness and interpretation of speech community membership is reflected in their choice of form of address use. It investigates if speech community membership plays a role in deciding

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[1] In this study, when not speaking about specific participant, the pronoun "he" will refer to an individual (male or female).

whether to use the informal or formal form of address or if this decision depends on other factors such as politeness, solidarity and social distance. I anticipate finding that the participants use both the informal and formal forms of address with me because of the fact that I belong to multiple speech communities and that this fact causes ambiguity when they choose the form of address to use. I want to answer three questions with my research:

(1) What form of address do the students use with their professor (the researcher) who belongs to the shared communities of age and, in the case of female students, of sex but also belongs to the non-shared community of professors?

(2) What factors influence the participants' choice to use a particular form of address with me, and do they consciously recognize that they choose what form to use based on these factors?

(3) Are the female students who share both the age and sex speech communities with me more likely to refer to me in the informal form of address than the male students who share only the age speech community with me?

1.3   Overview of the Study

In order to answer the research questions, data was collected and analyzed in a variety of ways. Data collection was done through tape-recorded conversations, ethnographical observations, emails and internet instant messaging conversations, Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaires and interviews. These methods are discussed in depth in Chapter 3. The study is in the qualitative research paradigm. This means that the data is more subjective and not as generalizable as quantitative studies

because qualitative studies are designed to observe specific situations and not to form rules. The data from qualitative studies is also more subjective if the researcher or observer is personally involved in the research setting such as in my study. Implications of this are discussed in Section 3.3.2. This study is limited to only this specific context and is not meant to be generalized to other people, countries, languages, etc.

The advantage of qualitative research is that specific cases and examples of a language phenomenon can be observed. Although the goal of qualitative research is not to form generalizations, these cases can be used as evidence to support or contradict theories about the language phenomenon. Another advantage of qualitative research is that it is possible to gather more in-depth opinions and observations from the participants because the research design emphasizes individual responses as opposed to strictly gathering numbers. It is possible to not only see the variations but also to gain a better understanding of why they exist. In quantitative research the focus is more on making generalizations, so individual variations are often discarded as not being helpful towards that purpose. Qualitative research allows the researcher to not only see how the participants behave but also to describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate why, if the researcher decides to do so.

1.4   Significance of the Study

This study is aimed at learners of Spanish, which has pronominal forms of address. Hymes (1971) believes that a language student should not only know the grammatical rules, but should also have communicative competence. Communicative competence means that the learner should know how to *appropriately* use the language in

social situations. Appropriateness is judged by how closely the language learner's utterances are to those that a monolingual native-speaker would use in a similar situation. A monolingual native-speaker is used as the model for appropriateness because his knowledge of another language would have no influence on his language use. For example, if a Mexican lives for an extended period of time in Spain, the Spanish pragmatics may have an effect on the Mexican pragmatics of that person. If that person is studied, the study will obtain results about a mix of Spanish and Mexican pragmatics instead of solely Mexican pragmatics.

This study is designed to show non-native speakers of the Spanish language that the decision of when to use the formal or informal form of address is not as simple as explained in language classes, and that there are many factors to consider when deciding what form of address to use. I will try to illustrate this through my study by explaining the dilemma in this specific situation and then explaining the variety of student responses as to why one form of address was chosen over the other. Hopefully, this will help the readers to better understand the complexity of this issue and to be more conscious of how the form of address that they use may be interpreted by their interlocutors. The reader can also use the reasons cited by the students in this study to build a larger base of knowledge in striving for communicative competence.

It is possible that this study can also be of help to applied linguists. The information collected on form of address use in the Mexican university setting described in this study provides data which could help gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the choice of which form of address to use. I have also presented an explanation for a possible way that a speaker could negotiate the identity of his

interlocutor through his speech community membership (see Section 2.2.4). This new idea could be tested through future applied linguistics studies.

While reading this study, one who has not studied linguistics may come into contact with new terms and concepts. These will be explained in Chapter 2. Although this topic may not seem as important to foreign language learners as the actual language itself, it is important to remember that learning a foreign language also involves learning the culture and social behavior of the country where you intend to use that language. This is especially important for those learners who live or plan to live, work, study or visit a specific country where that language is spoken by native speakers because, in a classroom setting when you are talking to your classmates or teacher, there is more tolerance and comprehension of "unconventional" language use, but when you are in the native speaker's environment, they may not understand if you use the socially unacceptable form. To give an example of this, imagine that you want to work in Mexico. You go to the interview and meet the owner of the company who is younger than you are. What do you do? Do you use *tú* or *usted*? If you have only been taught in your language class that *usted* is for older people, you may use *tú* and may possibly offend the owner and not get the job.

The motivation for this study is to investigate how membership to multiple speech communities plays a role in how identity is negotiated via forms of address. People can be confused as to what kind of relationship to form with a person who belongs to multiple speech communities, which appears as confusion in what form of address to use with that person. This is important because if someone has the expectation that a certain form of address will be used when someone else is speaking to him or her and that expectation is

not met, the person may become offended or feel that the other person is not respecting him or her. Understanding the possible confusion may avert feelings of disrespect that may be produced by using a "wrong" form of address.

This study is also important because there have been no significant studies done on the effect of speech communities on the use of the formal and informal form of address in Mexico. This study can add to the knowledge of forms of address by supplying some data about their use in Mexico. It can also help non-native speakers of Spanish to see one example of the complexity of form of address use in Mexico.

1.5   Chapter Overview

This study is presented in five chapters plus two additional sections at the end. Chapter One is the Introduction which gives an overview of the study, its rationale and the research questions. Chapter Two is the Literature Review, which gives an overview of the theoretical topics linked to this study and discusses studies done on forms of address in other languages. Chapter Three discusses the Methods used in this study. This chapter also includes information about the participants and the data collection procedures. Chapter Four presents the data collected during the course of the study and includes the analysis of the results of the study with discussion about what the results mean. Chapter Five summarizes the study and offers views as to what contributions this study adds to the field of linguistics. After the chapters, there are two additional sections. The References section includes all of the external sources cited in this study. The appendixes follow the bibliography and include materials referred to in the Methods Chapter and data referred to in the Results Chapter.