

3 Methodology

This chapter will explain the methodology used in this specific study. This chapter is divided into four sections. Section 3.1 discusses the participants in the study and the environment in which the study takes place. Section 3.2 discusses the procedures that were used in data collection. Section 3.3 discusses the analysis methods that will be used on this data. Section 3.4, the final section of this chapter, will discuss the possible methodological limitations that this study has and some possible questions that may arise about the methodology used.

3.1 Participants

3.1.1 Student-Participants

The participants in this study were Mexican students enrolled in four separate sections of high intermediate English classes. These classes were given at a large private university in Puebla, Mexico. The classes met two days per week for one hour and fifteen minutes per class period. The classes were held for a four-month-semester. Two of the sections were in the fall semester and two of the sections were in the spring semester. There were a total of thirty-four students in the two classes in the fall semester and twenty-two students in the two classes in the spring semester, for a total of fifty-six student-participants who enrolled in the classes in this study. However, information was only collected on fifty-five students because the fifty-sixth student did not provide any speech acts useful to the purposes of this study.

Of the fifty-five students, there were twenty-six males and twenty-nine females. This distribution is important in order to examine the effect of the females belonging to

the same sex speech community as me as opposed to the males not belonging to that speech community on the forms of addresses used by males and females. The students were all Mexican and were all students at the same private university in which the classes were given. They ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-nine. This is important to mention because I fall into the middle of the range of ages and therefore into the same age speech community.

The majority of the students grew up in central Mexico. A few had lived in other areas of Mexico and some had lived in other countries although for no more than two years. This means that there is little effect of the pragmatics of other languages on their Spanish use. For example, if one student had lived in France for many years, he would have considerable knowledge of the French pragmatics and this knowledge may unconsciously influence his use of Spanish pragmatics, thereby making all the data from this student invalid due to the outside influence.

The students studied a range of majors but none of them was majoring in languages or linguistics. This is of note because they were not likely to have learned theories about speech communities, politeness or forms of address. The English class that they were taking is a mandatory requirement for graduation.

The students did not know me prior to enrolling in the class. This is important because no student had a prior relationship or social interaction with me, since as stated in the previous chapter, social relationships affect forms of address. Since all students started out not knowing me, they all started out with an equal social relationship to me. The students did not have any prior knowledge of the study besides giving me their permission to be in a study which would be used for my thesis project. They did not

know any information about the topic of this study until after all the data had been collected.

3.1.2 The Researcher

If not for the specific characteristics of the researcher, this study would not be possible. If the researcher did not belong to the same age speech community and a different professional status community, the study would not be the same or would not exist at all. Therefore, it is important to describe myself, since I am the researcher and also an important participant in the study. When the study began, I was twenty-three years old and a few months into the study I turned twenty-four. My age is important because it puts me almost in the middle of the range of ages of the student-participants. Some participants are older than me and some are younger. Originally I am from the state of New York, but I had been living in Mexico for approximately two years at the time of the study. I am a graduate student at the same private university in which the English classes are given. The student participants all knew my age and that I was a graduate student. They knew this because in each section at the beginning of the semester we played an introductions game which revealed these facts. I am a graduate teaching assistant at the aforementioned private university. During the two semesters that this study was conducted, I taught the same level of intermediate English.

It is important to note that I was a participant-observer in this study, not just a participant and not just an observer. When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher often must choose whether and how much he will participate in the study instead of just observing (Patton, 1990). Due to the predetermined fact that I was the teacher of the

student participants, it was impossible to become just an observer because I had to interact with the students by teaching the class and, therefore, I took on the role of a participant-observer. This is important because of the possible effects that this may have on the results of the study. A participant-observer knows that the study is occurring. There is no separation between participating in the environment and observing and collecting data. This has both advantages and disadvantages in the research collection process. Since the researcher participates with the participants, the researcher shares experiences, knowledge and relationships with the participants. The researcher is able to gain an insider's view of the situation and I was able to gain a more intimate perspective of the class environment and the student participants because of my relationship and interactions with them.

Another positive effect of the researcher being a participant is that it may reduce the observer effect in the study. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2003) the observer effect means that the researcher's presence may change the behavior of the people he is trying to study. The more invasive and obvious the research, the more effect that it will have upon participants and, because of this, it is important that the researcher try to blend in as much as possible into the research setting. Since I was already the teacher, the setting did not change by my presence in the classroom and, therefore, the observer effect upon the students' behavior in the classroom was minimized.

The disadvantage to being a participant-observer is that the researcher can become so involved in being a participant that it becomes a detriment to being an attentive and accurate observer. The researcher is not just a participant but is also the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Merriam, 1998). It is hard for one

to participate normally in the research setting and at the same time make observations. One must combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the situation as an insider while describing the situation for outsiders (Patton, 1990).

The researcher must also try to limit the effect of knowing that a study is being conducted may have upon data collection. The researcher must not try to influence the participants or the environment in order to obtain the results that he desires. To try to collect the most accurate data possible, I tried to be as attentive, accurate and objective as possible when making my observations. This was done as a conscious decision on my part to always record the same information from each speech act by using a code sheet that will be explained in Section 3.3.2. However, in qualitative research, since the researcher is involved in subjective relationships and interactions with the participants, it is necessary for the researcher to consider the effects of this on the data gathered (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, even when trying to be as objective as possible in gathering data and making observations I know that it is impossible for me as a participant to be completely objective and I will take this into account in the analysis of the results by questioning any data that is not consistent with other data from the same student.

3.1.3 English Class

The majority of the data collected was obtained in the classroom. It is necessary to describe the classroom environment in which the speech acts took place to give more information about the study so that the study may be able to be replicated in the future. The classes took place two days a week for a fifteen-week semester. The four sections

ranged in size. They had twenty-two, fifteen, eight, and thirteen students respectively. In each section (including the largest section) the groups were very interactive and close-knit. They formed cohesive groups and the participants would often go out after class to restaurants and bars.

Regarding the teaching methods used, I used a communicative-affective approach in the classroom. In other words, oral communication and group work were emphasized and the students' emotions while learning English were acknowledged. I followed basically the same lesson plans for both semesters and I made a conscious decision to act the same way in both the fall and the spring semester with the students. This was to ensure that my behavior did not affect the responses from semester to semester. I do not believe that the exact conditions of the first semester could have been duplicated equally in the second semester because different students, weather, vacation periods, personal life circumstances, etc. cause different classroom environment and situations.

However, wherever possible, considerations were made so that the conditions would be as similar as possible. One such consideration was to use the same lesson plans in the second semester that were used in the first semester. The students studied the same course content, did the same in class activities and were assigned the same homework. One part of the course was weekly language lab reports, known as CAL (Centro de Aprendizaje de Lenguas: Language Learning Center) reports. This is important to mention because in the data collected (shown in Chapter 5) several students refer to their CAL reports and it is important that the reader knows what is meant by this term. The students were assigned departmental tests which differed from the first to the second semester, but this was an uncontrollable variable based on departmental policy. Another

consideration made was that I introduced myself with just my first and last name and in English at the beginning of each semester instead of introducing myself in a more formal or less formal way such as Ms. Heydweiller or just Mary. I did not instruct the students to refer to me as either *tú* or *usted* at any point throughout the semester. The choice of form of address was left completely up to them. The choice of language that they used with me was also their choice. Before, after or outside of class (and sometimes during class) the students may use either English or Spanish when talking with me. For the purposes of this study, only the Spanish results were used as data.

3.2 Procedure

At the beginning of each of the two semesters, the students were asked if they would be willing to agree to participate in a study for a master's thesis project. They were not informed of the purpose or nature of the study. After all of the students had consented, five data collection methods were followed.

3.2.1 Tape-Recorded Conversations

The tape-recorded conversations were done during the class period. I informed the students beforehand that I would be recording some of the classes for the research project that I had discussed with them at the beginning of the semester. I recorded the first ten minutes and the last ten minutes while they are arriving and leaving the room when they would most likely be using Spanish and addressing me personally because they usually do not speak in Spanish during class. I recorded these periods of classes for two weeks starting approximately one month after the semester had begun. I did not

continue with the recordings for more time because they yielded very little information. It is important that the tape recording was not done at the very beginning of the semester because the relationship between the students and me changed from one of complete strangers to one where they knew more about me because of our in-class interactions. This month gave them time to develop their social knowledge about me and decide consciously or unconsciously what kind of relationship they wanted to establish. From these recordings, I transcribed the instances when the students refer to me as *usted* and as *tú*. Transcribed data is often needed because intuitions or introspective data is unreliable (Stubbs, 1983). Another reason is that a transcript allows researchers to see what they otherwise may not notice. Transcribed data provided some concrete examples. The transcriptions were done according to the transcription conventions written and modeled by Tannen (1989). These transcriptions will be shown in the following chapter on results.

3.2.2 Ethnographic Observations

The second method of data collection that I used was ethnographical observations which are my observations as a researcher-participant about different speech acts that were performed by the students in which they used either the formal or informal form of address. “To fully understand the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (Patton, 1990, p. 25). These observations occurred throughout the semester, both in and out of class, starting after the tape-recorded conversations were done and ending when the DCT questionnaires, which are discussed in Section 3.2.4, were distributed. There are many

instances that occurred throughout the semester that I do not have tape recorded of when the students have referred to me in either the informal or formal form. Since there is no “hard-data” on what was said because it was not tape recorded, it is important that the descriptions are factual, accurate, and thorough without being cluttered by irrelevant minutiae and trivia (Patton, 1990). In order to try to make the observations as factual and accurate as possible, I wrote them down as soon as they occurred to minimize the effect of possible memory loss. Since I wrote these based on my own observations, I tried to be as objective as possible so that I did not inadvertently alter the data. In order to be as factual and accurate as possible, I decided ahead of time what data I wanted to record about each observation. Using a code sheet to record specific information has been suggested in order to provide structure to the observations (Merriam, 1998). I made a code sheet so that all of my observations include the same information. This sheet is shown in Appendix A. I wrote who the student was, whether the student used the *tú* or the *usted* form, in what setting we were in (in-class, before or after class, or outside of class), and what the topic of conversation was. I chose to include these four factors in the code sheet based on a list of factors which was compiled by Merriam (1998) who recommends describing the physical setting, the participant(s), the activities and interactions and the conversation. Using a code sheet allowed the information gathered from each observation to consist of the same four elements.

3.2.3 Emails and Instant Messenger Conversations

The internet has given rise to forms of personal interaction through computer-mediated communication (Merriam, 1998). These sources include emails and messenger

conversations, both of which will be used in this study. Before using this data, I obtained oral permission from the participants to use this data in my study. These interactions are of interest in qualitative research because it is through electronic correspondence where further relationships are established and fostered. They provide additional data related to qualitative studies and can be viewed as an “electronic extension of familiar research techniques” such as observations (Merriam, 1998, p. 128).

So, a third type of data which I used was from emails. This data collection process also occurred for the whole semester. Throughout the semester, my students emailed me for various reasons related to the class and not-related to the class. They were not instructed to write to me, except after the DCT questionnaires had been given when I invited some of them to the interviews. I saved these emails and collected both quantitative data about how many of the participants used *tú* with me and how many used *usted* and qualitative data by knowing which student in particular used a particular form of address with me.

Some students also chose to contact me for various reasons by MSN instant messenger. These conversations were saved and data was collected on whether they used *tú* or *usted* to refer to me in these conversations.

When looking at the data collected by these methods, it is important to recognize that there are some differences between the data collected via computer-mediated communication and communication which occurs face-to-face. Emails are asynchronous which means that they do not occur in real time as a person-to-person conversation does (Merriam, 1998). While messenger conversations occur in real time as face-to-face conversations do, the writer always has a chance to go back, edit and delete typed text.

Therefore, it is possible that the participant may think more carefully about what language he uses in the email or messenger conversation because he has more time to think about it due to the asynchronous nature of the communication. Immediate reactions and unguarded expressions are lost to the reader of this type of communication unless the writer consciously makes them available (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, when analyzing the data derived from computer-mediated communication, I will keep in mind the potential effects on language use from this type of communication. To do this I will check each participant's data collected from computer-mediated communication against the data collected from their language use in the other methods of data collection used in this study to see how consistent their computer-mediated language is compared to face-to-face conversational data collected.

3.2.4 Discourse Completion Task (DCT) Questionnaires

Another method which I used was questionnaires. Since it was difficult to teach the class and observe my students linguistically at the same time, I needed to have another way to gather initial research. I waited until the last week of the semester to distribute the questionnaires because I did not want my observations, tape-recordings and emails to be done with the participants having a prior knowledge of what the study was about. I distributed a questionnaire to the students which asked them about their use of informal or formal forms of address with me. This questionnaire is included in Appendix B. It was all written in Spanish. Even though we were in the setting of an English class, the phenomenon being studied was in Spanish and, therefore, I needed

them to be thinking in Spanish while doing the questionnaire and I needed to make sure that they understood the directions and the situations without ambiguity.

Each questionnaire consisted of two pages. The first page consisted of six DCT (Discourse Completion Task) questions. One of the primary means of data collection for studies involving pragmatics is Discourse Analysis (Traynor, 2006) and one of the principal methods of collecting data for discourse analysis is by Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT). DCTs allow for the researcher to control the independent variable of the social situation which is presented to the participants in the study. Since each participant is exposed to the same stimuli, it is easier to make direct comparisons between the participants' responses. DCTs are also an effective way for researchers to collect a large amount of data fairly quickly (Golato, 2003). This study used a DCT to collect data for these reasons.

DCTs or Discourse Completion Tasks have been proven to be a valid form of elicited discourse data collection. The DCT is an open-ended questionnaire which elicits a response from the participants to a certain situation. DCTs are used to provide participants an opportunity to respond to a particular situation (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). However, one concern in using DCTs is that the participants' responses are not the same as in natural discourse because the participants are given more time to plan their responses. A study by Golato (2003) showed that while there are similarities in naturally occurring discourse and DCT responses, there are also slight differences. On the other hand, several studies have shown that the DCT responses are actually very similar to naturally occurring discourse (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Blum-Kulka, House & Kaspar, 1989; Beebe & Takahashi, 1989).

Therefore, while the DCTs provide valuable data which may not be able to be gathered without elicitation, it is also necessary to take into account any noticed differences between the participants' actual discourse that was tape-recorded and their responses on the DCTs. To take this factor into account, the DCTs will be compared to the other data collected for each participant. If there is a difference, the participants will be asked about this during the interview part of data collection.

The DCT part of the questionnaire consisted of one page with six situations. The participants were instructed to write what they would say to me given a certain situation. Three situations took place in the classroom and three outside of the school. This was important because in the in-class settings they would be more likely to associate me with the professor speech community and use the formal form of address because I am actively filling the role of professor inside of the classroom. Outside of the classroom is where they would be more likely to associate me as a co-member of their speech community and use the informal form of address because I am not actively filling the role of professor but I am still a member of their age speech community. By changing the setting, I hoped to see whether that factor affected which speech community the participants associated me with and in turn the form of address that they used with me. Therefore, it was necessary to use both types of settings.

The second page consisted of four questions which asked the students to share their opinions on their use of forms of address with me. I decided on these questions in order to gather data on the attitudes and awareness of the students regarding forms of address. These questions were pre-tested with some of my classmates from my graduate classes in Applied Linguistics. The first question was a multiple choice question asking

if the participant would address me using *tú*, *usted* or both. The second question was an open-ended question asking what factors influenced their choice of which form to use. A third question was a yes or no question and asked if the participant had ever felt unsure of which form of address to use with me. The fourth question was an open-ended question and asked why they had felt this way. After the students had completed the questionnaire, they were instructed to turn it in to me

3.2.5 Interviews

The last way in which I collected data was through personal interviews. I conducted these interviews last because, first of all, I did not want the purpose of my study to become apparent to the students until after I had done the observations and secondly, I wanted to collect the data from the questionnaires first so that I could have background knowledge of each participant's choices on the DCT questionnaire. I chose to conduct personal interviews with a targeted sample of the students whose opinions in the questionnaires about form of address use elicited further interest on my part, the ones who had differed in form of address use in the different data collection forms, or the ones who I had noticed in the observations to have always used either the informal form or the formal form. I did not interview all of the participants. I chose to do this for time restrictions. I used an open interview where the questions were not written down for me to read but rather I asked specific questions depending on the participant's responses in the questionnaire. I did the interviews in Spanish so that the participants could understand the questions better and express their opinions fully, and so that they would not struggle to express themselves in a foreign language. I asked a few questions to all

participants. I asked them where they had grown up in Mexico and who taught them to use the formal form of address with people. These questions were important because, as previously mentioned, the use of forms of address may depend on the upbringing of the students instead of their perceptions of speech communities. The other questions were based upon the observations or the questionnaire data specific to that participant. For example, one student said that the form of address that he used depended on the setting, so I asked in what type of setting he would use the formal and informal forms of address. I chose to conduct the interviews this way to get specific feedback as to why the participant chose to use a particular form of address with me as opposed to the other and to get more explicit information about their feelings as to whether I belong to their speech community and if this has an impact upon their decision to use the informal or formal form of address.

3.3 Data Analysis

I analyzed the data depending on the type of data. The transcribed tape recordings, ethnographical observations, MSN messenger data, email data and DCT data were coded. A fellow graduate student (Coder G), who had already graduated from the linguistics program, and I coded the ethnographical observations, tape-recorded conversations, messenger conversations and emails. One current undergraduate linguistics student (Coder V) and I coded the DCT questionnaires. Coder G was not available to travel to the university to code the questionnaires, which were on paper and not able to be sent by email to him to be coded; so Coder V assisted in this part. Two people, who were both trained to code in the same way, did the coding for all types of

collected data in order to provide multi-coder reliability. I checked their coding after they had done a few to see that they were coding in the way that I had instructed them. If there was a difference in the coding done by one of the other coders and me, a different graduate of the master's linguistics program (Coder J) was asked to provide the tie-breaking decision.

The coders were instructed by me as to how to code the data. The coding was based on when the participants use *tú*, *usted*, and any verb conjugations which indicate the use of the second person informal tense or the second person formal tense which are indicative of a formal or informal form of address. For example, the coder was given the participant's initials in the first column and the speech utterance in the second column of the coding sheet. Then he was asked to write *tú* or *usted* in the third column depending on which form he determined to be used in the utterance in the second column. For an example please see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Example of Coding

Participant	Utterance	Coder
6	"¿Ud. fue a algun lado?"	UD.

With this data and also the interviews and open-ended questions from the questionnaire, I cross-checked for the consistency of each participant's responses because some may use the informal form with me for the whole semester but report in the interview that they used the formal form. The participants were also separated into two groups, of male and female students, and the data from each respective group was

compared to see any prevalent tendencies about form of address use in order to answer the third research question. Finally, the data collected in this study is compared to other form of address studies, namely those reviewed in Chapter 2 in order to find similarities and differences.

3.4 Methodological Limitations and Questions

With any type of research, there are always limitations. One limitation was that it was difficult to gather tape-recorded conversation data. This is due to the fact that the students mainly speak English in the class and it was difficult to have the tape recorder ready if they did speak to me in Spanish using a particular form of address that was not during the first or last ten minutes of the class. For this reason, there is little tape-recorded data. I tried to offset this limitation by collecting data in other forms, such as the ethnographical observations, MSN messenger conversations and emails.

Another possible limitation is that even though I tried to be as objective as possible during the observation process, it is not possible for me to be completely objective while being a participant. The observations may also be limited because as a participant, I was not solely focused on observing and may have missed some data. To make myself as objective as possible as a researcher, I made the coding sheet shown in Appendix A and had it at hand during all of the classes and outside of class. This made the data collecting process for this type of data more objective and effective.

Another possible limitation, as discussed above, was that the Discourse Completion Tasks might not be as authentic as the language used in “real” speech acts. Even though the students were instructed to respond in the exact words that they would

use if they were actually speaking with me, it is not one hundred percent guaranteed that they did so. In authentic speech, the speaker does not have time to think about what he or she would say beforehand and therefore it may be that the DCTs are not as natural as authentic speech. However, based on the studies cited in Section 3.2.4, it has been shown that DCTs are a valid way to collect data, and since all of the data collected through this method is compared with the data from other methods, the results can be shown to be consistent for each participant.

These were the ways that the data was collected in this study. In the next section, I will show the results from these methods.