5   Conclusion

This chapter draws conclusions about the study. Section 5.1 summarizes the findings of the study. Section 5.2 discusses implications that this study may have on language learning and applied linguistics. Section 5.3 contains suggestions for further research. Section 5.4 has a few concluding remarks.

5.1   Summary of the Study

This study was aimed at answering the three research questions formulated in Chapter One. The data collected through tape-recorded classes, ethnographical observations, emails, MSN conversations, DCT questionnaires and interviews which was presented and discussed in Chapter Four were used to provide answers to these questions. These questions and their answers will be briefly summarized below.

Question one was: What form of address do the participants use with their professor (me) 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? As seen in the previous chapter, the participants were divided between the formal form of address (14 participants) and the informal form (14 participants) with the majority (27) using both forms during the course of the semester. It seems that there was no predominant form of address for me by the students and even most of them changed between the two forms.

The second question asked: 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? According to the free responses in the questionnaire and the interviews, my age and my teacher status (both of which were

speech communities) were factors which helped the participants to determine which form of address to use with me. There were also other factors which were not related to speech communities such as settings, topics of conversations, the functions of the speech acts and relationships between the students and me. The students never answered that they placed me into a community or a group of people with similar characteristics (such as a speech community) when deciding which form of address to use; however, their answers indicated that they seemed to decide the form of address based on the characteristics of individuals which placed them into groups. For example, some students said that since I was a teacher, they automatically used the formal form of address just as they did with all teachers. Even though they did not explicitly state that I was part of a speech community, they still aligned me with that group and it was one of the principal factors that they cited. The students were also able to state other reasons why they chose one form of address over the other such as the setting and relationship. This shows that they are conscious of the factors that influence their choice.

The third research question was: 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 only share the age speech community with me? As seen in Chapter Four, the numbers of males and females who used the formal form, informal form and both forms were almost equal. This indicates that the sex speech community did not have a noticeable effect on which form of address the participants used with me.

5.2   Implications

5.2.1   Language Learning Implications

This study was aimed at Spanish learners who interact with native Spanish-speakers in order to illustrate the complexity of form of address use. It is my hope that this study can provide students with an example that shows them that form of address use is not as simple as they are taught in many Spanish classes. Spanish students are often taught that the formal form of address is used for strangers and elderly people. This explanation is far too general for Mexico. As seen first in Chapter 2 (Literature Review) and then in Chapter 4 (Results and Discussion), factors that influence the form of address used are settings, conversation topics, solidarity or social distance, politeness strategies, speech communities, functions of speech acts, upbringing, social relationships and medium. By reading this study, the language learner should at least be able to expand his knowledge on this topic which will hopefully be carried over to real-life interactions.

I also hope that even though, as stated throughout this study, there are numerous factors as to why a speaker uses one form of language over the other, the principal factors as stated by the students in my study can provide a more complete criteria for choosing which form of address they will use in real-life situations. The four principal factors found in this study were: (1) speech community membership, (2) setting, (3) the type of relationship, and (4) upbringing.

These four factors have also been cited as reasons for choosing one form of address over the other in the studies mentioned in Section 2.3.5. Kretzenbacher, Clyne and Schüpbach (2006) said that network preferences, or with which speech community the interlocutor associates the individual, are a factor. Williams-van Klinken and Hajek

(2006), Norrby (2006) and Warren (2006) all cite age and professional status to be factors. Weissenböck (2006) cites age and Little and Gelles (1975) cite professional status as factors. These are all characteristics which make up speech communities. This shows that speech communities are an important factor in determining form of address use.

The setting is mentioned by Kretzenbacher, Clyne and Schüpbach (2006) as being a factor in their participants' form of address choice.

Yanagiya (1999), Kretzenbacher, Clyne and Schüpbach (2006), Williams-van Klinken and Hajek (2006), Norrby (2006) and Warren (2006) all found that the type of relationship that the participants wanted to define or maintain was a factor responsible for their form of address choice. Lambert and Tucker (1976) specifically examined the student-teacher relationship in two Spanish-speaking countries. They found that this relationship also played a role in determining which form of address to use.

Upbringing was also claimed to be a factor in form of address use by Weissenböck (2006) and Lambert and Tucker (1976). How parents raise their children determines with whom the children will use the formal and informal forms of address. Even though this was not mentioned by the participants until the interviews, it is still important because it is one factor that they all mentioned in the interviews. They may not have mentioned it before because they did not consciously think about it as a reason for form of address use because they were taught many years ago.

The results of the studies listed above are supported by my study. Now, I will discuss how these results can be applied by language learners, specifically Mexican Spanish learners.

Speech communities can be used by Mexican Spanish language learners to help negotiate their interlocutor's social identity. If the language learner identifies the speech communities to which his interlocutor belongs, he can determine whether he wants to form solidarity or social distance between himself and his interlocutor based on how many and what speech communities they have in common. For example, in this study, some students based their decisions on whether they identified me as being a member of a community to which they did not belong (professor speech community) or a co-member of one of their speech communities (age or student speech community).

The setting in which the language learner finds himself can also help him to decide which form of address to use. If the setting is more formal, such as in an educational or business setting, then the formal form of address might be more appropriate. If the setting is less formal, such as in a bar or at a sporting event, then the informal form of address may be more appropriate. Some students in this study said that when they were in class they preferred to use the formal form because it lent itself more to a formal setting. They also said that once outside of school, they felt it was appropriate to use the informal form of address with the same person (me). The language learner can also take this factor into account when trying to decide which form to use.

The type of relationship that the speaker wishes to create or maintain is also a factor for Mexican Spanish learners to consider. If a speaker wishes to have a relationship of solidarity, friendship or ease he can use the informal form of address to communicate this. For example, some of the students in this study decided to use the informal form of address with me once they felt that the type of relationship made them feel at ease. However, if the speaker wishes to keep the relationship restricted to a

professional or service-based relationship, he should use the formal form of address. This may be with business colleagues, clients, a landlord or the clerk at the corner store. Even though a person might see these people daily or may have known them for years, he can choose to keep the relationship more formal by using the formal form of address.

The fourth principal factor is the upbringing of a person. Although the students did not mention this much, it is an important factor to consider because throughout their lives, people are implicitly and explicitly instructed by family members, teachers and friends as to what the proper pragmatics are in their culture. The implicit nature of this learning process may be why the participants did not mention this as a factor influencing form of address use initially. However, when asked in the interviews in this study, the students reported that they were taught by their parents, and sometimes teachers, when to use the formal form of address. While native Mexican Spanish-speakers are usually brought up learning this information, Spanish language learners do not have the advantage of receiving this knowledge over years of explicit instruction by their family or teachers or implicit instruction through the pragmatics of the environment. Language learners often have to live in a foreign language environment without being previously exposed to the pragmatics of the language. If possible, the Spanish learner may want to ask a native-speaker from the country where he wants to go about forms of address used in that place before he goes there. If the learner wants to go to Mexico, he should try to find a Mexican with whom he can talk to about form of address use, or if he wants to go to Spain, a Spaniard. The native speakers should preferably be from the city or state where the learner wants to go because pragmatics may change from region to region within the same country. Although the language learner may never be able to achieve the

same communicative competence as a native speaker, discussing this topic with a native speaker can help the learner to gain insight into form of address use.

5.2.2   Theoretical Implications

This study suggested the idea of an individual as a web in Section 2.2.4. In this study, it is possible that the students could not agree on just one form of address to use with me because of the contradictory spindles of age and professional status. As I stated before, contradictory spindles pull an individual's web in different directions and will ultimately cause a break in one of the spindles. I believe that the students who chose the formal form of address based on my status as their teacher or because they wanted a student-teacher relationship decided that the professional status spindle was stronger or other factors such as the classroom setting or a school-related topic of conversation made this spindle stronger at the time of the speech act. The students who chose to use the informal form of address with me based on my age or based on them wanting a closer or solidarity relationship with me chose to do so because they thought that my age spindle was stronger or factors such as an outside of the classroom setting or non-school-related conversation topic made it stronger.

I do not believe that speakers are consciously aware of the web, especially since I have just suggested this idea in this study. However, it may be a possible theory to explain the decision-making process that occurs inside of their minds, which is why more research is needed.

5.3   Suggestions for Further Research

Further research is definitely needed in this area of linguistics. There are so many factors to consider when looking at forms of address that it is impossible to include them all in just one study. Several future studies can be suggested based on the current study.

First, theoretical linguists could investigate the idea of the individual as a web to see if it is an appropriate theory for showing how speech community membership defines an individual's identity. This idea could be elaborated and presented using evidence found by other linguists.

One possible study would be to recreate this study myself using the formal form of address at all times with my students. This would investigate the effect that my choice of form of address has on their choice. In the current study, I just used the informal address. However, this proposed study would the participants use the reciprocal form regardless of whether I choose the formal or the informal form, or whether they would use the non-reciprocal form.

A possible study would be to recreate this study but with a male professor instead of the female professor (me). Looking at the differences between the study with a male professor and a female professor might shed more light onto whether sex has any effect on the form of address choice.

Another study could recreate my study but using a professor who is Mexican instead of an American like me. This would show if the professor's nationality and first language have any effect on the form of address use. One would think that the professor and students would share even more solidarity if the professor shares the same nationality and native language.

Another possible study could analyze whether the fact that this university was private had an effect on the students attitudes on form of address use. If the students are able to pay a large amount of money for the professor's services in a private university, they may feel that they have a power relationship over the professor, therefore, choosing to use the informal form of address with the professor. On the other hand, in a public university, they are not paying as much money and it is possible that they would be more likely to use the formal form of address with professors.

This study could also be carried out in different universities throughout Mexico. Since this study did not examine possible differences with form of address customs taught and used in different geographical regions, we cannot analyze whether this variable would have an effect on the form of addresses used in this same situation. The study could be carried out in cities in northern and southern Mexico and also in rural and urban settings to see if there are any differences.

A third and broader suggestion is that similar studies could be conducted in other languages. Languages with formal and informal pronoun systems, such as French or Italian, could be studied in the same way in order to collect more information on these languages.

5.4   Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this study has found that my students chose to use a particular form of address for several reasons. Among these, the four most-mentioned factors by the students are setting, relationship between interlocutors, characteristics of the interlocutor (speech communities) and upbringing. The formal and informal form of address were

used almost equally by the students with me which shows that there is not always just one appropriate form of address to use with an individual and that this choice depends on the factors listed above and other factors not listed. The form of address choice does not just depend on the interlocutor's characteristics as often taught in language classes, but also depends on the speaker's perceptions of his interlocutor and other variables which have nothing to do with either the speaker or the interlocutor such as the setting. This study was done in the hope that it will raise awareness among language learners that the choice of which form of address to use is not simple and that they should consider as many of the mentioned factors as possible when making that choice.